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*Christopher Whyte*

## Bakhtin at Christ's Kirk: Carnival and the Scottish Renaissance

*Both body and meaning can do a cartwheel*

When the effects of Stalin's purges reached the Pedagogical Institute at Saransk, the capital of the Mordovian Autonomous Republic some 400 miles east of Moscow, Mikhail Bakhtin, who had been teaching there since September 1936, decided that things were getting too hot, and that his chances of survival might be improved if he were to seek employment elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> He accordingly resigned his post in July 1937 and settled with his wife in Savelovo, just beyond the 100 kilometer circle round Moscow inside which individuals with a political record like his were forbidden to reside. Savelovo was to prove a safe refuge, and the years up to the beginning of the war were an extremely productive period for the Russian theorist of literature. It was there that he wrote "Rabelais in the History of Realism" as a doctoral thesis for the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow. However, when the time came for the thesis to be publicly debated, in November 1946, the relative intellectual freedom of the years immediately preceding and during the Second World War was already a thing of the past. Zhdanov's proclamations had ushered in a new dark age for cultural life in the Soviet Union. The public discussion of the thesis was "an epic event." The official examiners had to speak a second time in favor of the candidate, after which "a stormy discussion continued for seven hours."<sup>2</sup> A second de-

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<sup>1</sup>All information in this paragraph from Katerina Clark & Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA, 1984). See especially pp. 260-63, 322-5.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 323, 324.

fense took place in May 1947, and Bakhtin was not awarded the degree until June 1952. The thesis languished for more than a decade in the archives of the Institute, remaining unpublished until 1965, when it appeared in a recast version under the title *The Work of François Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*.<sup>3</sup>

Bakhtin claimed that the work of Rabelais could not be fully understood unless it was interpreted in the light of exceptional social customs and behaviors permitted during festive periods in the Middle Ages, which he grouped under the name of the longest and most famous of these celebrations as "carnival." He stressed the importance of the ideological content of the festivities. Carnival was much more than a time of unbridled tomfoolery and recreation from more serious concerns.

The feast had always an essential, meaningful philosophical content. No rest period or breathing spell can be rendered festive per se; something must be added from the spiritual and ideological dimension. They must be sanctioned not by the world of practical conditions but by the highest aims of human existence, that is, by the world of ideals (pp. 8-9).

Carnival was associated with a specific time or times of the year and with a specific location in public space, most frequently the market place, given that trade meetings and fairs were regularly accompanied by diversions of a carnival nature. There the relations between different social and commercial groups and castes, normally mediated conceptually, through ideology and language, were replaced by a free bodily contact:

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, profession, property and age (p. 10).

Such bodily contact emphasized the collective rather than the individual nature of human experience, through jostling, colliding, squeezing and rubbing against one another. Indeed, in the marketplace during carnival, the populace as a whole became actively aware of its immortality in time, its ability constantly to renew itself and thus achieve an uninterrupted continuity across the centuries. Given Bakhtin's particular affection for Goethe, it was natural that he should make use of Goethe's description of the Roman carnival. According to Bakhtin

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<sup>3</sup>The text quoted here is Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA, 1968). Page references follow in the text.

Goethe correctly stressed that carnival is the only feast the people offer to themselves; they do not receive anything and have no sanctimonious regard for anyone. They are the hosts and are only hosts, for there are no guests, no spectators, only participants (p. 249).

Yet another barrier, the conventional theatrical barrier between those who perform and those who watch, is broken down. If carnival is theater, it is a theater in which everyone is involved. The very fact of physical presence in the carnival space means that one must perforce become a participant.

Bakhtin's interest in the ideological structure of carnival meant that, for him, the iconography of individual carnival acts (and the actions in much of Rabelais's texts) could only take on full meaning when seen within this semantic matrix. Carnival was itself a system, a language where signs had a specific meaning attributed to them:

. . . all such gesticulations and verbal images are part of the carnival as a whole, infused with one single logic of imagery. This is the drama of laughter presenting at the same time the death of the old and the birth of the new world. Each image is subject to the meaning of the whole; each reflects a single concept of a contradictory world of becoming, even though the image may be separately presented. Through its participation in the whole, each of these images is deeply ambivalent, being intimately related to life-death-birth (p. 149).

The two crucial traits of the carnival image are this ambivalence, and the simultaneous presence of birth and death, since carnival focuses on a body that is in transition, in the process of becoming, and is inimical to fixity or stasis of any kind.

All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (*a l'envers*), of the "turnabout", of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, comic crownings and uncrownings (p. 11).

The typical movements of carnival are those of a clown: standing on his head, turning a somersault, performing cartwheels. And the range of carnival practices goes much further, as Bakhtin points out, to embrace wearing one's clothes inside out, or one's underwear on top of the outer garments, dressing up as the opposite sex, riding a horse while facing its tail, showing one's backside.

Iswolsky chooses the unfortunate translation "degradation" for the topographical adjustment carnival operates. A preferable term would be "lowering," which is more neutral, and indicates in a non-judgmental fashion

how emphasis shifts from the head to the genitals and the rear end, to that area of the body which defecates, urinates and farts, yet also generates and nurtures new life. We denominate these functions as base, and reference to them is still an important aspect of our vocabulary of personal abuse. Bakhtin would argue that such a negative perception is only possible because we have lost touch with the fundamental ambivalence of carnival language, where abuse and praise are so intimately linked that one cannot subsist without the other. At the heart of carnival imagery lies the grotesque body:

a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body . . . the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus . . . Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome . . . (p. 317)

Given this topographical emphasis, the insistence on constant change and renewal, it is clear that the relationship of carnival to dominant, stabilizing and rigid ideologies must be one of parody, of, as it were, standing them on their heads. At the same time, the semantic content of carnival imagery is so powerful that it cannot be reduced to a mere contestation or mirroring in negative of the ideology of a social or ecclesiastical hierarchy. Bakhtin insists that negation, in its modern sense, is utterly alien to the spirit of carnival:

Negation in popular-festive imagery never has an abstract logical character. It is always something obvious, tangible. That which stands behind negation is by no means nothingness but the "other side" of that which is denied, the carnivalesque upside down . . . The old world that has been destroyed is offered together with the new world and is represented with it as the dying part of the dual body (p. 410).

Carnival, then, existed during the Middle Ages and after alongside the ideologies of church and state and in constant interaction with them. According to Bakhtin, carnival as the incarnation of laughter in its most radical, universal and joyous form burst into high art at the time of the Renaissance, over a period of some fifty or sixty years, at different times in different countries, producing masterpieces of the stature of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and the plays of Shakespeare, not to mention Rabelais' work itself. Indeed, at the time of the Renaissance, laughter briefly regained its place at the core of high art:

Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man . . . the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint . . . laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter (p. 66).

We know of three poems from the Renaissance period in Scotland describing carnival practice. One of them, "Falkland on the Green," does not survive. "Peblis to the Play" was known to John Major in 1521. It appears in a manuscript anthology by Sir Richard Maitland compiled from 1555 to 1586, but seems then to have been forgotten until the rediscovery of the manuscript in the eighteenth century. It was published for the first time by John Pinkerton in 1783. "Christis Kirk on the Green" appears in both the Maitland and the Bannatyne manuscripts (circa 1568). Broadside versions appeared throughout the seventeenth century, and Allan MacLaine comments that

Its survival during these dark years is perhaps the most dramatic illustration of its enduring and inextinguishable popularity among the Scottish people. Rigid Calvinist censorship during this century permitted the printing of only five major works of the old national poetry, four of them being of a didactic or moralistic nature.<sup>4</sup>

In 1706 "Christis Kirk" took pride of place at the head of James Watson's seminal *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*. His attribution to James V was altered to read James I in the 1713 reprint, and the dispute over the probable authorship of both poems continues to this day. Both MacLaine and Harvey Wood prefer the earlier attribution, the latter comforted by the evident discrepancy, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, between the Maitland and Bannatyne texts of "Christis Kirk".<sup>5</sup> This would date the poems to some time in the first half of the fifteenth century.

The royal authorship may even be apocryphal. Nevertheless, it chimes in with prevalent critical approaches. MacLaine sees "Peblis to the Play" as

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<sup>4</sup>Allan H. MacLaine "The 'Christis Kirk' Tradition: Its Evolution in Scots Poetry to Burns," *SSL*, 2 (1964-65), 117.

<sup>5</sup>MacLaine, pp. 5-7; *James Watson's Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*, ed. Harriet Harvey Wood, STS, 4th Series, 10, 20 (1977-91), II, 1-2.

a burlesque, gently satiric in tone, written not from the point of view of the rustics portrayed, but from the point of view of an amused and superior onlooker who makes good-natured fun of their antics.<sup>6</sup>

"Christis Kirk" is also

an aristocratic work, a good-natured burlesque of peasant customs and peasant character, written by a conscious and intellectual artist, and addressed to an upper class audience. The tone of its satire is very similar to that of *Peblis*, though here the humor is slightly broader and less restrained.<sup>7</sup>

Harvey Wood substantially agrees, without entering on the attitudes embodied in "Christis Kirk" itself:

The complexity of the metrical form and the skill with which it is handled alone preclude the possibility that the poem was the work of an uneducated writer of that peasant class whose activities are being described.<sup>8</sup>

While MacLaine has provided an authoritative outline of the "Christis Kirk" tradition, the only sustained treatment of either of the poems (for the critical literature is remarkably thin) was published by George Fenwick Jones in 1953.<sup>9</sup> His reading exhibits some surprising inaccuracies. He writes that the "survivors" in "Peblis" "dance violently until their bagpiper quits in disgust at their niggardly pay" (p. 1103). This accords with his overall interpretation of the poem but not with the text. There are no references to the manner of dancing, but only to the movements of the bagpiper, who "hevelie . . . hochit about," and played "wounder teuche" (*ll.* 198, 204)<sup>10</sup> (presumably, music that tested the dancers to their limits). The stanza concerning the piper's payment (*ll.* 221-230) is mainly direct speech. Will expresses his discontent that he has so far received nothing, and insists that three ha'pennies for half a day's work will ruin no-one. Nowhere are we told that

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<sup>6</sup>MacLaine, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup>Harvey Wood, II, 3.

<sup>9</sup>George Fenwick Jones "'Christ's Kirk,' 'Peblis to the Play' and the German Peasant-Brawl," *PMLA*, 67 (1953), 1101-25.

<sup>10</sup>"Peblis to the Play" is quoted from *The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, ed. W. Craigie, STS, 2nd Series, 7 (1919), 176-83. I have modernized spelling and punctuation in accordance with MacLaine's practice.

the dancers refused to pay. Indeed, Will's words read rather like a bad-tempered and slightly hectoring prelude to passing round the hat.

Jones interprets "Christis Kirk" and "Peblis" in the light of a late medieval German genre, the peasant brawl, since the two poems

include most of the conventional motifs of the peasant-brawl tradition. Whatever is lacking in the one is usually present in the other.<sup>11</sup>

Again, there is a clear inaccuracy. Jones' summary of the peasant-brawl poems has them conclude

with an altercation, which then develops into a bloody and generally fatal fight. The alarm bell is sounded, the riot subsides or is quelled, and the women weep for their dead and wounded menfolk.<sup>12</sup>

A crucial and striking characteristic of both the Scottish poems is that, however protracted and dramatic the violence, no one gets seriously injured. It is by no means certain that a stray arrow kills a priest a mile on the other side of a bog ("Christis Kirk," ll. 125-6); the tone of the remark and the words "Ane cryit" suggest a spoof, an exaggerated and enjoyably anti-clerical joke.<sup>13</sup> The women in "Christis Kirk," rather than lamenting their dead, become protagonists of the battle.

Jones writes that the Scottish poems, like the German, retain important traces of pre-Christian ritual in dancing, dress and fighting. The latter may be a symbolic representation of the conflict between summer and winter, fertility and sterility; the play at Peebles may have been a descendent of the ancient leading in of May; the leaping dancers, the birchen hat ("Peblis," l. 53), Heich Hucheon's hazel stick ("Christis Kirk," l. 151), the wearing of Lincoln green, the interchange of abuse ("Christis Kirk," ll. 21-30) and the pairing off of men and women ("Peblis," ll. 55-72) are all actions of a broader significance which hint at a deeper semantic matrix underpinning and even moulding the action.

Yet Jones decides against a carnivalistic interpretation. He argues that the poems do not reflect actual social events, that the author reproduced the traces of pagan ritual without understanding them, and that his purpose throughout was to produce an aristocratic satire of boorish peasant manners.

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<sup>11</sup>Jones, p. 1103.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1101.

<sup>13</sup>"Christis Kirk on the Green" is also quoted from the Craigie edition of *The Maitland Folio Manuscript*, pp. 149-55.



Although his detailing of individual satiric touches is convincing, these are not sufficient to motivate such an overall reading of the poems. If "Christis Kirk" enacts contempt for the actions represented, how are we to account for its popularity in the two centuries following its composition? Was this the result of misreading on a massive scale? Who bought the broadside versions of what was clearly a commercial success? Was contempt for the peasantry really such a money-spinner? It is generally accepted that both poems are composed to dance tunes, perhaps to a single one. The texts may even contain reference to specific bodily movements associated with this tune. So what we have is a kind of modest *Gesamtkunstwerk* combining music, dance and words. Are we to imagine an aristocratic audience singing and dancing in a mode they were being encourage to scoff at? At the close of "Christis Kirk," the exhausted fighters as they collapse "for fantnes" are compared, in a masterly simile, to "flaucher falis" (l. 216), that is, to large thin pieces of turf being cut off with a spade. What meaning could such a touch have for a detached aristocratic audience? What access could a satiric, anti-peasant narrator have to this kind of splendid realism? Although individual satirical touches are undoubtedly present, the text of the poem as a whole does not bear out Jones' interpretation.

As the villagers enter the town of Peebles, dressed "full gay" (l. 6), they provoke the liveliest mirth in everyone they meet:

He befoir and scho befoir  
To se quha wes maist gay.  
All that luikit thame upon  
Leuche fast at thair array:  
Sum said that they were merkat folk,  
Sum said the Quene of May  
Wes cumit  
Of Peblis to the play. (ll. 83-90)

According to Jones, the townsfolk are laughing at the way the country girls are dressed (p. 1107). But the laughter is directed at both men and girls, and the mention of the Queen of May implies that there is nothing ludicrous or crude about the spectacle. Could not this be, rather than a laughter-at which divides those present into audience and actors, victims and perpetrators, a laughter-with, an all-embracing, carnival laughter which is both planned and spontaneous, ritualistic and sincere, which does not deride or distance, but blends subject and object? Jones tells us that

The nobility laughed at the lewdness of the lower classes because it confirmed their own cultural superiority; yet their laughter probably betrayed subconscious

fear of the vigor and fertility of the lower orders, who ever threatened to engulf and overwhelm them.<sup>14</sup>

The difficulties of detecting Jones' kind of laughter in "Peblis to the Play" and "Christis Kirk on the Green," a laughter motivated by fear, using scorn and mockery as weapons against vital energy, joyous aggression and sexual delight are insurmountable. So what light can a carnivalistic interpretation, on the basis of Bakhtin's researches and the semantic matrix he proposes, shed on the two poems?

They have plenty of topsy-turvy. When the guests stream from the Peebles tavern to continue their "bargane" (*l.* 144) out of doors, Gilbert finds himself in the gutter ("He gat na better beddin," *l.* 134) and more than thirty others tussle their way through a midden of brewer's draff (*ll.* 137-8). Next comes a comic vignette of a pedlar and his wife, spread across four stanzas. He leaps onto his grey mare but the girth snaps. He flies off and "upstert bayth his heilis" (*l.* 159). The theme of besmirchment returns, for his wife "All be dirtin drew him out," then reproaches him because "Ye fylit me! Fy for shame!" (*ll.* 163, 171). At the end of the fighting, seven men are punished by being publicly exposed in the stocks. They are "grufflingis" (*l.* 184), or prostrate.

Turning upside down can expose not just the heels but more crucial parts of the anatomy. As girls and men are pairing off, one of the former falls over "and hir taill up" (*l.* 73). A companion evidently feels this is unfair competition:

'Quhat neidis yow to maik it sua?  
Yon man will nocht ourryd yow!' (*ll.* 75-6)

The suspicion that "taill" here means the genitals, rather than merely the rear end, is strengthened by an episode towards the poem's close. Thisbe leads Will Young off by the hand, lamenting that her front door has no sneck. Nevertheless, "scho to ga as hir taill brynt" (*l.* 217). She is clearly very sexually excited, and that use of "to ga" reflects back on a line earlier in the poem, "he to ga and scho to ga" (*l.* 71), which may have a more or less explicit sexual meaning.

Falling down, falling over, being knocked to the ground are all forms of "lowering" which shift the emphasis from the head to other parts of the body. Stevin is the first male dancer mentioned in "Christis Kirk." He is a very energetic performer, but very soon "lap quhill he lay on his lendis" (*l.*

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<sup>14</sup>Jones, p. 1122.

45, with emphasis on the loins, again close to the genital area). He is quick to get up

Quhill he hostit at bayth the endis  
In honour of the feist (*ll.* 47-8)

Stevin coughs and farts at the same time. The mouth and the anus are placed on the same level, orifices highlighted in a way typical of the tradition of grotesque realism posited by Bakhtin. The second line can be read in at least two ways. A modern reader might understand it satirically, as "Quite the wrong thing to do at the feast." Read in a carnival context it can mean the opposite, "This was absolutely the right thing to do at the feast." Bakhtin insists that it is anachronistic for us to interpret these and other, even stronger images as vulgar or degrading:

such images are devoid of cynicism and coarseness in our sense of the words . . . these images, such as the tossing of excrement and drenching in urine, become coarse and cynical if they are seen from the point of view of another ideology (pp. 149-50).

Both the girl exposing her genitals and the man drawing attention to his anal aperture by farting are "lowering" the focus of the body to the level where coupling, conception and birth happen. Here the body sorts out and expels its refuse, the dead matter for which no further use can be found, but also prepares and stores seed, or receives it and nourishes the fetus. The body places that which is most dispensable and that which is most precious side by side. While not exactly a "tossing of excrement," the besmirching of the pedlar and his wife, and the combatants rolling in the midden, pertain to the same class of images.

The first arrow to hit a target draws attention to the nipples (a protuberance, connected with nurturing) and to the belly. Because the violence here is comic, the victim turns out to be wearing a leather doublet, which bursts open like a bladder (again an organ in the lower bodily stratum):

He hecht to pers him at the pape.  
Thairon to wed ane wedder;  
He hit him on the wambe ane wap  
And it bust lyk ane bledder (*ll.* 103-106)

These four lines exemplify the "anatomizing enumeration of injured [or potentially injured—CW] organs" Bakhtin had noted in the episode of the Catchpoles in Rabelais' Fourth Book (p. 203). The bursting of the doublet is immediately followed by a graphic lowering, to the ground:

The baff so boustousle abasit him,  
 To the erd he duschit doun (*ll.* 111-12)

The analysis of passages of this kind is problematic because it sounds so straight-faced. When the fighting first starts, Robene Roy "begouth to revell" (*l.* 61). The word has at least two meanings, and its ambivalence is exciting and instructive. The *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* gives "to rebel, raise tumult, make noise etc.," also "to make merry; to move about vigorously as in dancing or sport." Jamieson glosses the noun "revell" as "a severe blow; often applied to a back stroke."<sup>15</sup> As modern readers we want to choose between these two meanings. How can a severe blow, the first instance of physical violence, also be an act of merriment, in its way a kind of dance? Yet the coexistence, the lack of conflict between the two meanings is a fulcrum of the carnival spirit in "Christis Kirk on the Green." The influence of nineteenth-century realism makes it very hard for us to deal with ritual in verbal texts. Realism cannot cater in any adequate way for the resonances of ritual or accommodate the belief that consequences irradiate from it like ripples traversing a pool into which a large stone has just been thrown. We have all the more difficulty when confronted with comic ritual, with a liturgy of laughter, for our culture teaches us that such phenomena must be uniformly serious. Seriousness has a premium on significance. Laughter, in our conception, dissolves and undermines meaning, but cannot constitute it. Can we conceive of a public lecture on a literary text which would have its listeners rolling in the aisles, helpless with tears? Yet if we are to achieve a sympathetic reading of these two poems we must at least become aware of the cultural distance separating us from them, if we cannot overcome it.

The violence in "Christis Kirk" is both programmed and spontaneous. Everyone knows it is going to happen, although no one can predict exactly what form it will take. In its programmed, yet spontaneous nature it resembles a football match, combining predictability and surprise, rule-governed and absolutely free behavior. It is significant that it takes place in a context of "wowaris," where men and women seek sexual and possibly even marriage partners. Bakhtin discovered that in Touraine

there existed the custom of the so-called *nopces à mitaines* ("gauntlet weddings"). During the wedding feast the guests cuffed each other jokingly (p. 200).

The phallus was known as the "baston de mariage" or "baston à un bout," and

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<sup>15</sup>John Jamieson, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (Paisley, 1882).

the bridal cuffing also had the meaning of the sexual act . . . The blows have here a broadened, symbolic, ambivalent meaning; they at once kill and regenerate, put an end to the old life and start the new. The entire episode is filled with a bacchic atmosphere (p. 205).

Such symbolism may not have been consciously present to the author of "Christis Kirk," or even in the minds of the participants in the festivities on which it may be based. But it is significant that no later than 1640 (and quite possibly earlier) the poem had acquired two stanzas, printed by Watson as 22 and 23, the second of which effectively turns the whole scene into a bridal feast:

The Bridegroom brought a Pint of Ale,  
and bade the Piper drink it,  
Drink it quoth he, and it so stale,  
ashrew me if I think it.  
The Bride her Maidens stood near by,  
and said it was not blinked,  
And *Bartagesie* the Bride so gay,  
upon him fast she winked.  
*Full soon that day.*<sup>16</sup>

The wide range of implements used as weapons in "Christis Kirk" includes several of a phallic nature, such as "bougaris of barnis" (cross-spars in the roof of a barn, *l.* 133), "rungis" or cudgels (*l.* 136) and "stingis" or poles, wielded by women (*l.* 143), while a spiked club ("ane broggit stauf," *l.* 123) is brandished at the start of the turmoil in "Pebelis."

Jones accounts convincingly for the special role of archery in the poem through "the fact that the kings of England and Scotland used their yeomen soldiers mainly as archers." An act of the Scottish Parliament dating from 1457 stipulated that on Sundays "all subjects should shoot their bows or else pay a fine."<sup>17</sup> But the loosing of an arrow has a potential sexual symbolism which should not be overlooked, particularly if the violence in both poems is part of a ritual of mating. The only mention of arrows being used in "Pebelis" is at the end of the fighting, when the bow strings pop out of their grooves ("stringis stert out of thair nokkis," *l.* 183), presumably through over-use. The perfunctoriness of the reference suggests that archery was such an integral part of these scenes that the audience could be left to take its presence for granted. At the same time, before the villagers reach Peebles,

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<sup>16</sup>Harvey Wood, I, 7, and II, 8.

<sup>17</sup>Jones, p. 1115.

and at a point where it seems the men and girls are still grouped separately, a powerfully evocative figure suddenly confronts the latter:

Ane young man stert in to that steid  
 Als cant as ony colt,  
 Ane birkin hat upon his heid,  
 With ane bow and ane bolt,  
 Said: 'Mirrie madinis, think nocht lang!  
 The wedder is fair and smolt.' (ll. 51-6)

"Think nocht lang!" would seem to mean "Don't delay in choosing (or accepting) a partner!" A male figure associated with vegetation—his song is "Thair fure ane man to the holt" or wood (*l.* 59)—urges on the girls just before pairing off begins, and one suspects that his bow and arrow are not for conventional use, but relate to his possible function as master of the mating.

Towards the end of "Christis Kirk," two herds beat one another with barrow shafts, in a powerful stanza twice assimilating them to animals associated with their calling:

Two that was herdsmen of the herde  
 Ran upone uther lyk rammis;  
 Thai forsy freikis richt uneffeird  
 Bet on with barow trammis;  
 Bit quhair thair gobbis war bayth ungird,  
 Thai gat upon the gammis,  
 Quhill bludie barkit was thair berd,  
 As they had worreit lambs . . . (ll. 191-8)

Harvey Wood glosses "gam" as "tooth, especially a large squint one; jaw." The blows the shepherds receive set their gums bleeding, and the blood, running into their beards, makes them look like dogs that have been worrying sheep. Bakhtin suggested that the Catchpole's "red snout is the clown's rouged mask" (p. 200), and the red ring round the fighters' mouths here may have a similar carnival symbolism, referred to a clown's brilliantly red lips.

In carnival terms, then, the blows delivered are "gay, melodious and festive" (Bakhtin, p. 207). While there is no cross-dressing, the women in "Christis Kirk" do not behave in a characteristically feminine way. No sooner have they arrived on the scene than they start fighting each other just like their menfolk ("Ilk gossop uther grevit" *l.* 142), and the placing of the following stanza makes it possible that it is the women who cut a slice off the thumb of the redoubtable Heich Huchoun and thereby frustrate his attempt to restore order. At the close of the poem "Dic with ane ax" (*l.* 221), instead of revenging himself on his brother's attackers, responds to the mockery of his wife and his mother by setting upon them. The choice of female oppo-

nents who are also members of his own family is both comic and carnivalesque.

Bakhtin examines at length the way in which Rabelais drew on the language of the public square and on the particular kind of invective associated with it:

Such elements of familiar speech as profanities, oaths, and curses were fully legalized in the marketplace and were easily adopted by all the festive genres, even by Church drama. The marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology. (pp. 153-4)

"Peblis to the Play" includes a considerable amount of direct speech, as if the poet had simply allowed the language of the festivities to spill over into his poem. Although the dialogue is in general highly stylized, it makes copious use of oaths. The stanza beginning the "bargane" is particularly rich in them:

'Ane dunt?' quod he. 'Quhat dewill is that?  
'Be God, yow dar nocht dud.'  
He stert till ane broggit stauf  
Wincheand as he war woode.  
All that hous wes in an reirde,  
Ane cryit: 'The Halie Rude!  
Help ws, Lord, upon this erde  
That thair be spilt na blude . . .

(ll. 121-8)<sup>18</sup>

The text, as it were, opens itself to language normally associated with oral situations and non-official speech.

Song lyrics break in early on in the poem: "With hay and how rolumbelow" (l. 43), "Thair fure ane man to the holt" (l. 59). The barriers between feast-day chatter and the floating culture of popular song, and between both and the poem, are demolished, as if the text wanted to embrace these huge areas of unofficial discourse. When Wat (Atkin) (?) comforts Fair Alice at parting, rather than using his own words, he quotes a song (perhaps two) to her. These songs are so close to him, so natural, that they can speak for him. They are merely heightened forms of his own speech, made avail-

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<sup>18</sup>Other examples are "Be Goddis saul" l. 19, "In fayth" l. 24, "Marie" l. 36, "wyss me" l. 68, "Wow" l. 74, "Have ye na dreid" l. 105, "Be God" l. 119, "Lord God" l. 164, "Be God" l. 168, "For schame" l. 171, "Quhat meikle devill" l. 174, "Bot Lord" l. 206, "The meikill devill gang with yow" l. 229, "The Dewill a wourde" l. 237, "Be the Halyrud of Peblis" l. 243.

able for general possession. The poet even encourages his listeners to help him supply the words:

He quhissillit and he pypit bayth  
 To mak hir blyth that meiting,  
 'My hony hart' (how sayis the sang?)  
 'Thair salbe mirth at our meting . . .' (ll. 245-8)

Banter and provocation are typical elements of the dialogue in both poems. In "Peblis," a couple quarrels over dress (ll. 21-4); one man demands the best girl, leaving the rest to his friends (ll. 65-6); Malkin, as we have already seen, rebukes another girl's forwardness (ll. 72-9); the hostess at the tavern is treated arrogantly, and responds in the same tone (ll. 94-9, 103-106), and the list could easily be continued. This kind of exaggeration, theatrical swagger and style characterizes the behavior of almost all the participants. "Dirdum dardum" in "Christis Kirk" (l. 74) is a typically defiant response to a threat.

For Bakhtin, abuse in a carnival contest was no less ambivalent, no less "gay, melodious and festive" than violence:

abuse is the "other side" of praise. The popular-festive language of the marketplace abuses while praising and praises while abusing. It is a two-faced Janus. (p. 415)

A tendency to use terms of abuse as a form of praise is still characteristic of certain kinds of direct, intimate discourse, whose extraterritorial, non-official nature becomes explicit when reproduced in the context of an essay such as this: "You wily sod!" "You jammy bastard!" (Bakhtin comments that "All peoples still have enormous spheres of unpublicized speech" (p. 421)). Taken literally, such expressions are extremely abusive, but in a particular context they may convey admiration, envy or even approval. "Christis Kirk" is poor in direct speech, but rich in words for kinds of people. According to Bakhtin

. . . the popular speech of the marketplace . . . is characterized by the absence of neutral words and expressions . . . there are no neutral epithets and forms; there are either polite, laudatory, flattering, cordial words, or contemptuous, debasing, abusive ones . . . the more unofficial and familiar the speech, the more often and substantially are those tones combined, the less distinct is the line dividing praise and abuse. (p. 420)

This carnival ambivalence is embodied in "Christis Kirk," not in dialogue, but in the language the narrator uses to describe the people in his poem. His





ceive of time as a sequence of periods, of discrete segments, blinds us to the way in which neighboring cultures, or even one single culture, can inhabit contemporaneously segments or kinds of time which we perceive as mutually exclusive. It is as if the persistence of carnival in the Middle Ages and later must perforce have constituted a contradiction, a dialectic with ecclesiastical or aristocratic culture. Yet there are many other possible forms of coexistence, or cohabitation.

If a carnival reading of "Peblis to the Play" and "Christis Kirk on the Green" is possible, then Scotland, too, participated in that charmed moment of the Renaissance when, as Bakhtin says:

laughter in its most radical, universal, and at the same time gay form emerged from the depths of folk culture . . . and entered with its popular (vulgar) language the sphere of great literature and high ideology (p. 72).

Such a reading not only offers a remarkably early instance, in Scotland, of one particular phenomenon of Renaissance culture, but can throw valuable light on the second life, the reincarnation of that moment when, in the work of Fergusson and Burns, "Christis Kirk on the Green" formed the basis of a new genre, crucial to the revival of vernacular poetry in lowland Scotland, with no less complex implications for the ideology and culture of the area.

Allan Ramsay brought out two broadsides of "Christis Kirk" on the Green" in 1718, the first containing one, the second two additional cantos of his own. His role in popularizing the poem was crucial: he published it no fewer than six times between 1718 and 1722. While claiming that his edition was "taken from an old Manuscript Collection of *Scots Poems* written 150 Years ago,"<sup>19</sup> it in fact basically reprints the corrupt version used by Watson, the simplified stanza form suggesting that the words had by now become separated from the dance tune they were probably composed to. Ramsay did, however, reproduce the original stanza when he printed the Bannatyne manuscript text in *The Ever Green*.<sup>20</sup>

Allan MacLaine has written that

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<sup>19</sup>B. Martin, J. W. Oliver, A. M. Kinghorn and A. Law eds. *The Works of Allan Ramsay*, STS, 3rd Series, 19, 20, 29; 4th Series, 6, 7, 8 (1954-74), I, 57. Further references will be incorporated in the text. This edition contains all three cantos of "Christis Kirk" as does the 1721 edition of Ramsay's *Poems*.

<sup>20</sup>See MacLaine, p. 164; Allan H. MacLaine, *Allan Ramsay* (New York, 1985), p. 16; Harvey Wood, II, 5.

Ramsay's sequels are in more or less contemporary Scots, but sprinkled with proverbial sayings or "quaint" phrases that detract from its naturalness . . . Ramsay drags into the poem descriptions of old-fashioned folk rituals . . . to such an extent that he felt it necessary to add a set of footnotes to his poem to explain these old customs and quaint sayings . . . <sup>21</sup>

To the extent that they suffer from studied antiquarianism of this kind, Ramsay's contributions to "Christis Kirk on the Green" are not, strictly speaking, constitutive of a genre. The antiquarian approach precludes effective interrogation of the model text. Genre is of its nature an intertextual phenomenon. For it to function between texts both constant and variable elements must be present, the former creating expectations in the reader which will be confirmed in part, in part refuted. Individual texts respect and transgress the paradigms of a chosen genre, perpetuating and altering it. Instability is essential to a process which depends upon an interplay of reproduction and innovation.

Ramsay's relationship to "Christis Kirk" excludes the kind of dialectic interplay which would assign the original and his additions to a single genre. Insofar as he aimed to be faithful to his model, significant innovation was excluded. Antiquarianism is a term not primarily applied to literature. It refers to an interest in antiquities, a concern to locate and document material remains which accompanied the rise of chorography, the science of local history and topography. Yet there was an unmistakable connection between the interest in material and in poetical remains. Edmund Gibson, whose 1691 edition of "Christ's Kirk" may well have been the source of Watson's and Ramsay's texts, only four years later brought together a team of some thirty antiquaries to prepare a revised edition of that fundamental work of British chorography, Camden's *Britannia*.<sup>22</sup> Rather than reproducing "Christ's Kirk," Ramsay aimed to complete it. Such a perception of the "remain" as fragmentary and requiring creative intervention, a collaboration between ancient and modern, is quintessentially antiquarian. In an essay with the indicative title "Ruins in a Landscape," Stuart Piggott quotes these lines by Edward Stephens on the folly in Lord Bathurst's park at Cirencester:

A lowly pile with ancient order grac'd  
Stands, half repair'd, and half by Time defac'd<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>MacLaine, 1985, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup>Graham Parry, *The Seventeenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1603-1700* (London, 1989), p. 178.

<sup>23</sup>Stuart Piggott, *Ruins in a Landscape* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 119.

The antique object is a ruin in need of repair, but of a repair that will leave its fragmentary nature intact and clear to the beholder. The result is something old and new at the same time. What is original combines with what has been added to make a significant whole.

The new fascination with material remains derived in part from the fact that history could be read in them, and therefore from an urge to test historical narratives against the available evidence. Yet it was far removed from modern ideas of fake and genuine. Insufficient in themselves, past remains needed a creative contribution from the present if they were to reach the status of complete, self-sufficient objects. Such perceptions facilitated the reception of Macpherson's *Ossian*, and must be recovered if this text, notoriously impervious to modern scrutiny, is to be adequately analyzed. It was the interaction between what had survived the centuries and the additions of modern hands that gave such objects their value.

Ramsay's new cantos incorporate traces of the old. The characters are taken over from the earlier poem, as is the metrical form, which is, Ramsay says:

a Stanza of Verse the most difficult to keep the Sense complete . . . without being forced to bring in Words for Crambo's sake, where they return so frequently (I, 66).

Minor details, suitably footnoted, locate the action prior to the Reformation and the Union of the Crowns. The tailor had worked under the king's own tailor and is therefore "*Falkland bred*" (II, l. 67)." The precentor gets so drunk that "ne'er a Styme/ He cou'd keek on a Bead" (II, ll. 127-8), that is, he was unable to recite his Catholic rosary. Another Ramsay footnote tells us that the food the revellers are so unwilling to leave to the Brownies has not been seen in Scotland since the Reformation (*Works*, I, 72n.1).

Uncertainty as to when the poem had reached completion is symptomatic of Ramsay's antiquarian approach. The first stanza of Canto II is intended to transform the rather inconclusive final stanza of the original into a bridge passage, persuading readers that a continuation is at least plausible. The transition is an overall success, although it contains an overstatement that reveals Ramsay's misunderstanding of carnival violence:

But there had been mair Blood and Skaith,  
Sair Harship and great Spulie,  
And mony a ane had gotten his Death  
By this unsonsie Tooly (II, ll. 1-4).

This induced ambivalence as to what was an ending and what a bridge passage affected Ramsay's additions. The final stanza of Canto II echoes the

opening of the earlier poem as if it were intended to provide a definitive ending:

Was ne'er in *Scotland* heard or seen  
Sic Banqueting and Drinkin,  
Sic Revelling and Battles keen,  
Sic Dancing, and sic Jinkin (II, ll. 185-8).

The final stanza of "Peblis" quotes the beginning of that poem in the same way:

Had thair bein mair made of this sang  
Mair suld I to yow say:  
At Beltane ilka bodie bound  
To Peiblis to the play (ll. 255-8).

The identity of the first and last stanzas aimed to preclude further additions by another hand. Ramsay, having apparently completed his addition, changed his mind and went on to provide a third canto, as if the fragmentary status of his "Christ's Kirk" could never be entirely rectified, or the possibility of further sequels discounted. Each conclusion threatened to turn into another transition, inviting further intervention from a modern author.

His antiquarian approach goes hand in hand with a dilution or disintegration of carnival elements. Ramsay's opening stanzas show an urge to restore order and clean things up which is profoundly opposed to carnival: Hutchon "took his Bonnet to the Bent" and "daddit aff the Glar" while "Some red their Hair, some set their Bands,/ Some did their Sark Tails wring" (II, ll. 23-4; 35-6).

Bakhtin locates the "flowering of grotesque realism" firmly in the literature of the Renaissance (p. 31), noting that with the adoption of a classical canon in the seventeenth century folk humor was once more shut out from great literature, and relegated to the lower genres:

During this period . . . we observe a process of gradual narrowing down of the ritual, spectacle, and carnival forms of folk culture, which became small and trivial . . . these festivities were brought into the home and became part of the family's private life. The privileges which were formerly allowed the market place were more and more restricted. (p. 33)

It is characteristic of Ramsay's cantos that an action that had originated in the open air, involving all present and embracing a steady flow of new participants, retreats into private, intimate space. If a dance, or a fight is taking place out of doors, then, in theory at least, anyone arriving over the horizon is able to join in. Once action moves indoors, it is hidden from the general

gaze, and a threshold has to be crossed, with the implicit permission of the householder, before new participants can be admitted.

The only character in the original to enter a domestic space is the minstrel Thome Lutar. His withdrawal from the conflict may simply be the subterfuge of a coward (*ll.* 145-50). The typical movement of "Christ's Kirk on the Green" is out of the domestic space and into the carnival arena: both the womenfolk and Dick "come furth" to join in the tussle (*ll.* 137, 222). In "Peblis" as soon as the fighting starts, the company abandons the tavern (*l.* 131). After only ten stanzas twilight brings Ramsay's dancers indoors ("Glowming hous'd them," *II, l.* 82). The action subsequently retreats to the even more intimate space of the bridal bedchamber (*II, ll.* 161ff), which is also the setting of the first part of Canto III. Energetic activities like the cutting of the creel and the riding of the stang may be located out of doors (although this is not stated), and the latter provokes a pandemonium which spreads out beyond the village itself:

The Wives and Gytlings a' span'd out  
 O'er Middings, and o'er Dykes,<sup>`</sup>  
 Wi' mony an unco Skirl and Shout,  
 Like Bumbees frae their Bykes;  
 Thro thick and thin they scour'd about,  
 Plashin thro Dubs and Sykes,  
 And sic a Reird ran thro the Rout,  
 Gart a' the hale Town Tykes

Yamph loud that Day.  
 (*III, ll.* 145-52)

Ramsay, however, at once moves the action back indoors, and concludes it in that most intimate of all spaces, the marriage bed.

The treatment of the characters also shows a shift from the public to the private. Jones suggests wider implications for names such as Robin, Jock and Harry<sup>24</sup>: the protagonists of "Christ's Kirk" and "Peblis" stand for broader types and may even carry cultic associations (like the unnamed "young man . . . / With ane bow and ane bolt" in "Peblis," *ll.* 51, 54). For Ramsay they are merely local worthies. The richness of vocabulary for different kinds of people in the original poem, which had enacted a carnival relation between the narrator and the characters, has vanished. Instead we find surnames and a complex network of kinship relations: Maggie Forsyth dances with her brother-in-law while her son watches and comments (*II, ll.* 105-112), and Auld Maggy can take it for granted that everyone present will know, or have heard of, her husband and the father of her illegitimate child

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<sup>24</sup>Jones, pp. 1107, 1118.

(III, ll. 65-72). The implication is of a relatively closed social group, with a sharp distinction between known and related people and strangers coming from outside. Ramsay's use of the adjective "auld" also tends to weaken the carnival vitality of his characters. Maggie's energy surprises her adult son, and her partner, the vigorous dancer of the original, has now become "Auld Steen" (II, l. 105). The limp virile member marking the end of Ramsay's two cantos is emblematic of how the energy of his original has been weakened and depleted.

A striking aspect of this shift to the private is the theme of marital conflict, to which Ramsay dedicates considerable space. Marriage as a public institution promotes a unitary view of the partners involved. The dynamics of their relationship are, however, enacted in an intimate emotional and physical space. Moreover, the emphasis on heterosexual partnership thematizes gender roles in a manner alien to the carnival blending of male and female in the earlier poem. The "bauld Good-wife of *Braith*" who restores order and tames Tam Taylor (II, ll. 5, 25-32) is a last echo of the warlike "gossop(s)" who "straikit stingis" and "gadderit stanis" in the original (ll. 142-143). We meet her, significantly, in the bridge passage with which the additions start. Traditional gender relations dominate the remainder of Ramsay's cantos. The precentor's wife rampages "in her Choler" when he reaches home drunk, and he smashes her spinning-wheel (II, ll. 133-136); the smith and his wife indulge in lively invective when she comes to haul him away (III, ll. 113-36), and the rare good-humor of Maggy Murdy, who "her Man like a Lammy led/ Hame, wi' a well wail'd Wordy" (III, ll. 155-6) is merely the obverse of the theme of marital conflict. A suggestion that the sexual pleasure a woman longs for may in fact prove to be displeasure has a prurience, and an anti-feminine spleen, that are alien to the carnival spirit:

*Meg* *Wallet* wi' her pinky Een,  
Gart *Lawrie's* Heart-strings dirle,  
And Fouk wad threep, that she did green  
For what wad gar her skirle

And skriegh some Day.  
(II, ll. 53-6)

References to functions such as urinating, defecating and vomiting, lose their richly ambivalent character. The superstition mentioned by Bakhtin (p. 149), according to which those places where Christ had relieved his bodily needs were blessed with a special fertility, indicates the link these functions retained with birth, fruitfulness, renewal and prosperity in carnival culture. They are merely vulgar in "Christ's Kirk" Cantos II and III. Seen from a different ideological viewpoint and torn from their original context in the

iconography of popular humor, they are no longer agents of "lowering," but constitute a veritable "degradation."

MacLaine laments that "Ramsay slightly overemphasised the coarseness inherent in his material,"<sup>25</sup> and it is possible that Ramsay was sensitive to the presence of these functions in his model, yet misunderstood their significance, so that by repeatedly introducing them in his additions he in fact distanced himself from the earlier poem. Bakhtin notes how, in the work of his immediate successors,

the Rabelaisian images become petty; they are mitigated and begin to acquire the character of genre and manners. Their universalism is considerably watered down. (p. 62)

### Images connected with excrement and urine

become coarse and cynical if they are seen from the point of view of another ideology . . . they lose their direct relation to the whole and are deprived of their ambivalence. (pp. 149-50)

And so, Ramsay has Tam Lutter pee in his own shoes (II, ll. 117-120), while others pee copiously in gutters (III, l. 109), Robin vomits into his own wife's lap (III, ll. 163-4—"He said it ga'e him Ease"), and we witness "bauld *Hutchon* bockin/ Rainbows" (III, l. 112). Physical accidents, as when the dancing tailor comes a cropper on a small stone (II, l. 79) or Jock strips the skin from his shins (III, ll. 103-4) lack symbolic connotations. Here, and when the tailor passes on his inherited "yuke" to those he shakes hands with (II, ll. 70-72), the effect is of a joke at the characters' expense for the benefit of writer and readers.

Further echoes of the earlier poem merely highlight the different approach. The herdsmen with bloodied beards of the original are richly symbolic in their assimilation to animals, and the clown-like red circle around their lips (ll. 191-200). The beards of Ramsay's peasants drip with gravy, and are "kempit with their Teeth" (II, ll. 157-8), while the smith's beard is bloodied by his angry wife's nails (III, ll. 135-6). Stevin of the earlier poem had both farted and coughed "In honour of the feist" (ll. 47-48). Masie Aird, asked to dance by the local aristocrat, "loot a fearfu' Raird" while curtseying, which "gart her think great Shame" (II, ll. 97-104). The equivalence of mouth and anus has vanished, as has any ambivalence about the appropriateness of this action. Her embarrassment at the fart is increased because she is in the present of her social superior. This underlining of class barriers is a further indication of how far we have travelled from carnival.

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<sup>25</sup>MacLaine (1964-65), p. 166.



The treatment of the precentor, for all his drunkenness still a representative of ecclesiastical authority, and therefore a target for carnival lowering, is also indicative. Two hefty companions resolutely keep him the right way up. On no account will he be allowed to turn head over heels:

When he was strute, twa sturdy Chiels,  
Be's Oxter and be's Coller,  
Held up frae cowping o' the Creels  
The liquid Logic Scholar. (II, ll. 129-32)

Topsy-turvy is noticeable for its absence from Ramsay's cantos. The only instance of real carnival anarchy occurs just before the end. The violence, however terrifying it may look, is harmless, its main target being the rear end:

Syne ilka Thing gae'd Arse o'er Head,  
Chanlers, Boord, Stools and Stowps,  
Flew thro' the House wi' muckle speed,  
And there was little Hopes,  
But there had been some ill done Deed,  
They gat sic thrawart Cowps;  
But a' the Skaith that chanc'd indeed,  
Was only on their Dowps,  
Wi' Faws that Day.  
(III, ll. 169-176)

Discussion of these references, which lose meaning when divorced from their context in the overall language of carnival action, leads naturally to the superstitions or folk practices cited in Ramsay's sequels: the brownies and throwing the bride's stocking in Canto II, the bridal gifts, the suspected witch, cutting the creel and riding the stang in Canto III. If much of the action of the original "Christis Kirk" was ritualistic, this fact was never foregrounded. Insofar as poet, audience and characters subscribed to the ideological basis of the action, it need never be brought to consciousness. In a world of ritual, actions are never isolated, but reverberate and intersect in patterns which individual rituals attempt to guide and control. Just as with the overall language of folk humor and carnival, when the context is lost, these rituals become relicts, single acts washed up on the shores of a vanished belief. What was ritual for the poet of "Christ's Kirk" is superstition for Ramsay, part of a belief system to which his characters may subscribe, but which excludes poet and audience. The folk practices are reduced to the level of decoration, excrescences on the surface of a text which has a very different purpose. This is why they seem extraneous to the action rather than being organically built into it.

My reading of Ramsay's cantos has so far relied on analysis of the text. An incontrovertible proof of Ramsay's distance from carnival comes in his own words of introduction to the second 1718 edition, where Canto III first appeared:

My second Part having stood its Ground, has engaged me to keep a little more Company with these comical *Characters*, having Gentlemens Health and Pleasure, and the good Manners of the Vulgar in View: The main Design of Comedy being to represent the *Folies and Mistakes of Low Life in a just Light*, making them appear as Ridiculous as they really are; that each who is a Spectator, may evite his being the Object of Laughter.<sup>26</sup>

The laughter *with* of carnival has given way to a laughter *at* which establishes a reassuring boundary between spectacle and spectators. Ramsay implies that his text can both entertain gentlemen, who contemplate its scenes across a gulf in social status, and educate lower class readers who find a familiar social milieu portrayed therein. The laughter it provokes reassures the gentlemen that there is no point of contact between themselves and the world of the poem, and induces a resolve in other readers to suppress any features they may recognize in themselves.

Cantos II and III of "Christ's Kirk" constitute a fascinating text, rich in the complexities which characterize so much of Ramsay's cultural activity. If, as argued in the first part of this essay, his fifteenth-century original was pervaded with carnival iconography, and can only be fully understood in that context, then Ramsay's additions come from a radically different ideological world. The interpretation of the poem as a satire on boorish peasant customs, unsatisfactory as an account of the original, suits Cantos II and III much better. Yet it is instructive that Ramsay's satire moves from a bourgeois rather than an aristocratic viewpoint. Pope is quoted in the 'Advertisement' to the second 1718 edition and, according to Peter Zenzinger, Ramsay was guided in his additions by the concept of the wit and by classical poetic ideals.<sup>27</sup> Bakhtin wrote that, with the Renaissance, 'low' material briefly became feasible as the subject of a "high" art which abolished the frontiers between the two by the use of carnival laughter. Ramsay has a very different project, satirical, educational and nationalistic at the same time. The different strands are so entwined with one another that it is

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<sup>26</sup>Works, VI, 31.

<sup>27</sup>Peter Zenzinger, *'My Muse is British': Allan Ramsay und die Neubelebung der schottischen Dichtkunst im 18. Jahrhundert* (Grossen-Linden, 1977), p. 90.

hard to isolate any single direction in these cantos, but his overall praxis bears out Bakhtin's thesis:

The attitude towards laughter of the seventeenth century and of the years that followed can be characterised thus. Laughter is not a universal, philosophical form. It can refer only to individual and individually typical phenomena of social life. . . . The sphere of the comic is narrow and specific (private and social vices); the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter. Therefore, the place of laughter in literature belongs only to the low genres, showing the life of private individuals and the inferior social levels [p. 67].

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*The conclusion of this study, dealing with the work of Skinner, Ferguson and Burns, will appear in the next volume of Studies in Scottish Literature. Though not a Renaissance author, Allan Ramsay has been included in this first part for reasons of space.*