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*Jep C. Jonson*

### Out of Ellisland, Into *The World*

Professor Ross Roy has placed yet another item of interest into the hands of Burns scholars. In this case, he has obtained at auction Burns's own copy of the second volume of *The World* for inclusion in the Roy Collection at the University of South Carolina. The volume is substantially—but not lavishly—annotated in Burns's hand. As is typical of Burns's annotations, he has expressed his approval with economy. He seems to need an element of disapproval, if not scorn, to fuel expansive comment (a trait that contributed, no doubt, to his success as a satirist), and his comments in this volume are all in praise. In addition to the annotations by Burns, the volume has an interesting history in its own right, having passed through the libraries of actor Edmund Kean and noted Burns collector John Gribbel, the Philadelphia manufacturer who gave the Glenriddell Manuscript to Scotland in 1914.

The breaking up of Burns's library after his death, without precise records of its contents, makes it difficult to ascertain what became of the first and third volumes of this edition of *The World*, but it seems likely that he did own all three volumes. He commissioned his friend, the Edinburgh bookseller Peter Hill, to buy him a cheap copy in February 1790,<sup>1</sup> and it is unlikely that Hill would have provided Burns with an incomplete edition. Furthermore, at the end of each number Burns has written the author's last name, presumably from the list appearing at the end of volume three. However, the annotations on the

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Peter Hill, 2 February 1790. *The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), II, 9-10. Henceforth *Letters*.

flyleaf of this volume indicate that the set had probably been broken up by 1834, when it was auctioned as part of Edmund Keane's estate. Otherwise, the annotation on the flyleaf that it was "The property of the Late Edmund Kean Bt. at the Sale 17 June 1834 at Robin's Rooms" would most likely appear in the first volume, as would the signatures of various owners. That the edition is not listed in the catalogue of the auction complicates piecing together the history of the other volumes, but it may also indicate that Burns's reputation was not then firmly established since the catalogue does describe other volumes autographed and annotated by Keane.<sup>2</sup> By July 1907, when the *Book Auction Record* indicates this volume was sold alone as part of the estate of Stuart M. Samuel, M. P., the set was no longer together.

Gribbel bought the volume some time after the 1907 auction. Whether it was then auctioned with the rest of his collection in 1940, 1941, and 1945 is also difficult to ascertain. It does not appear specifically in the auction catalogues, although it may have been part of a larger lot of books. It does not reappear in the *Book Auction Record* until 1993, when it was bought at Roy's direction.

*The World* was published weekly in 209 issues from 4 January 1753 until 30 December 1756. Begun by London publisher Robert Dodsley, possibly as an employment scheme for his friend Edward Moore,<sup>3</sup> it appeared under the pseudonymous editorship of "Adam Fitz-Adam." Although Moore wrote the first five issues himself, thereafter he sought out other contributors among influential friends and, as George Winship puts it, "other members and hangers-on of the world of wit and fashion."<sup>4</sup> Among more than thirty contributors were Horace Walpole and Lord Chesterton, and it was in *The World* (Nos. 100 and 101, 28 November and 5 December 1754) that Chesterton published his two essays praising Samuel Johnson's dictionary, thus provoking Johnson's famous squib about the encumbrance of patrons.<sup>5</sup>

Like other periodicals of the day, *The World* was serialized with the intention of later publication in book form. Dodsley published the collected numbers in multi-volume editions as early as 1755, and by the time Burns commissioned Hill to purchase a copy in 1790, at least three editions had been published in Edinburgh. Burns's is the 1774 Edinburgh edition, published in

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<sup>2</sup>Facsimile of catalogue in James Fullerton Arnot, ed., *Actors*, vol. 12 of *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, gen. ed., A. N. L. Munby (London, 1975), pp. 367-78.

<sup>3</sup>John Homer Caskey, *The Life and Works of Edward Moore* (New Haven, 1927), pp. 89, 135.

<sup>4</sup>George P. Winship, Jr., "The Printing History of *The World*," *Studies in the Early English Periodical* (Chapel Hill, 1957), p. 187.

<sup>5</sup>Letter to Peter Hill, 18 July 1788. *Letters*, I, 296.

three volumes by Alexander Donaldson. This second volume contains numbers 69-140. Other than listing the names of the authors, Burns made no annotations after number 84, which might imply that he read only the first fifteen numbers with any care. But if he did own the full set, that he is still making detailed annotations well into the second volume indicates more than casual reading.

When Burns commissioned *The World* from Hill in February 1790, he had been ordering books through Hill for some months, both for himself and for the Monkland Friendly Society, a circulating library he and Robert Riddell had organized among local farmers. Burns had stipulated to Hill that for his own library he only wanted the least expensive copies to be found, saying, "I want only, Books; the cheapest way, the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening Auctions...the veriest ordinary copies will serve me.—I am nice only in the appearance of my Poets." On 2 February 1790 he asks Hill to find him "a cheap Copy of, THE WORLD" (*Letters*, II, 9-10), and within a month he requisitions copies of Mackenzie's periodicals and novels for the Monkland Friendly Society, characteristically steering the Society's acquisitions towards areas of his own interest. Thus he asks Hill for "the following books which you are to send us [the Society] as soon as possible—The Mirror—The Lounger—Man of Feeling—Man of the world (these for my own sake I wish to have by the first Carrier)."<sup>6</sup> Hill seems to have been quick in satisfying these requests; Burns received the copy of *The World* by 6 March,<sup>7</sup> and by April he was writing Mrs. Dunlop:

[I] have just now...enjoyed a very high luxury in reading a paper of the Lounger.— You know my National Prejudices.—I had often read & admired the Spectator, Adventurer, Rambler, & World, but still with a certain regret that they were so thoroughly & entirely English.—Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my Country reaps from a certain Union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her Independance, & even her very Name!<sup>8</sup>

Clearly Burns's interest in *The World* fits within the larger patterns of his admiration for the English periodical tradition, his determination that Scotland should have a parallel but separate tradition, and Mackenzie's ongoing influence in Burns's literary judgments.

Burns's interest in *The World*, and his annotations in this copy, reflect his alliance to Mackenzie's "sensibility" faction of the Scottish Enlightenment.

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<sup>6</sup>Letter to Peter Hill, 2 March 1790. *Letters*, II, 19.

<sup>7</sup>*The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ed. Robert Chambers; rev. William Wallace. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896), III, 230.

<sup>8</sup>10 April 1790, *Letters*, II, 23-24.

Although modeled on Johnson's eminently sensible *Rambler*, *The World* appealed to a broader audience and proved more popular, selling between two and three thousand copies weekly, compared to the *Rambler's* five hundred.<sup>9</sup> Although the predominant tone in *The World* is ironic and satirical, it is an irony with a soft core of sentimentality. In satirizing the foibles of the fashionable, *The World* upheld a simpler, less sophisticated native morality as Mackenzie was wont to do in *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*. *The World* may have followed *The Rambler* in format, but in subject matter and sentiment, it was, like Mackenzie, much closer to Addison than Johnson.

Judging by his annotations, it was this sentiment, and the style in which it was expressed, that seems to have attracted Burns's attention. His annotations betray no interest in the London fashions being lampooned, but concentrate on the "beauty" of expression and the presence of "native" poetic genius. As such, they indicate that however much Burns was "careful to foster" the "'unlettered plowboy' tradition" started by Sibbald's and Mackenzie's reviews of the Kilmarnock edition, he was not entirely disingenuous or calculating in doing so. Undoubtedly, as Ferguson and Snyder have pointed out, Burns was shrewd enough to exploit for his own advantage Mackenzie's portraying him as a "heaven-taught ploughman."<sup>10</sup> But however much Burns knew and acknowledged the role of wide reading in refining the poetic sensibility, his annotations indicate how much it was part of his credo that poetic genius itself was, in fact, native.

He comments specifically on only three numbers of the magazine, annotating two poems and an allegorical parable. His first comment appears above a Mr. Parrat's "Ode to Night" in number 74 (30 May 1754), where Burns writes: "A most beautiful Poem: the work of native genius.—" The exact identity of Mr. Parrat is not known, possibly William Parratt, author of *Carmen Seculare* (London, 1735) and *An Ode to the Rt. Honorable Robert Walpole* (London, 1739). Since this poem is not readily available, I include the full text:

#### Ode to Night

The busy cares of day are done;  
In yonder western cloud the sun  
Now sets, in other worlds to rise,  
And glad with light the nether skies.  
With ling'ring pace the parting day retires,  
And slowly leaves the mountain tops, and gilded spires.

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<sup>9</sup>Winship, pp. 186-90; Caskey, pp. 135-6.

<sup>10</sup>Franklyn Bliss Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (New York, 1932), p. 155. Introduction to *Letters*, I, xlviii.

Yon azure cloud, enrob'd with white,  
Still shoots a gleam of fainter light:  
At length descends a browner shade;  
At length the glimm'ring objects fade;  
Till all submit to NIGHT's impartial reign,  
And undistinguish'd darkness covers all the plain.

No more the ivy-crowned oak  
Resounds beneath the woodman's stroke.  
Now silence holds her solemn sway;  
Mute is each bush, and ev'ry spray:  
Nought but the sound of murm'ring rills is heard,  
Or from the mould'ring tow'r, NIGHT's solitary bird.

Hail sacred hour of peaceful rest !  
Of pow'r to charm the troubled breast !  
By thee the captive slave obtains  
Short respite from his galling pains;  
Nor sighs for liberty, nor native soil;  
But for a while forgets his chains, and sultry toil.

No horrors hast thou in thy train,  
No scorpion lash, no clanking chain.  
When the pale murd'rer round him spies  
A thousand grisly forms arise,  
When shrieks and groans arouse his palsy'd fear,  
'Tis guilt alarms his soul, and conscience wounds his ear.

The village-swain whom Phillis charms,  
Whose breast the tender passion warms,  
Wishes for thy all-shadowing veil,  
To tell the fair his lovesick tale;  
Nor less impatient of the tedious day,  
She longs to hear his tale, and sigh her soul away.

Oft by the covert of thy shade  
LEANDER woo'd the THRACIAN maid;  
Through foaming seas his passion bore,  
Nor fear'd the ocean's thund'ring roar.  
The conscious virgin from the sea-girt tow'r  
Hung out the faithful torch to guide him to her bow'r.

Oft at thy silent hour the sage  
Pores on the fair instructive page;  
Or, wrapt in musings deep, his soul  
Mounts active to the starry pole:  
There pleas'd to range the realms of endless night,  
Numbers the stars, or marks the comet's devious light.

Thine is the hour of converse sweet,  
 When sprightly wit and reason meet:  
 Wit, the fair blossom of the mind,  
 But fairer still with reason join'd.  
 Such is the feast thy social hours afford  
 When eloquence and GRANVILLE join the friendly board.

GRANVILLE, whose polish'd mind is fraught  
 With all that ROME or GREECE e'er taught;  
 Who pleases and instructs the ear,  
 When he assumes the critic's chair,  
 Or from the STAGYRITE or PLATO draws  
 The arts of civil life, the spirit of the laws.

O let me often thus employ  
 The hour of myrth and social joy !  
 And glean from GRANVILLE's learned store  
 Fair science and true wisdom's lore.  
 Then will I still implore thy longer stay,  
 Nor change thy festive hours for sunshine and the day.  
 (*The World*, II, pp. 29-31).

It seems safe to conclude that Burns was more interested in the descriptive passages in the poem than in the formulaic praise of the concluding stanzas.

The next issue with substantial annotation is number 82 (25 July 1754), containing a poem by Edward Loveybond (also spelled Lovibond, 1724-75) entitled "The Tears of Old May-Day." Again, Burns seems most taken with the well-turned, poetic phrase and shows little concern with the overall (and decidedly unpoetic) subject of the poem: the institution of the new style calendar, bringing Britain into conformity with the calendars used in Europe. In a poem of 31 quatrains, Burns marks with brackets four concluding couplets and five entire quatrains. He notes "Bon" beside two of the couplets and one of the quatrains, and "Pretty" beside another three quatrains. The remaining brackets he leaves to speak for themselves. Since the poem is reprinted in Chalmers's *Works of the English Poets*,<sup>11</sup> I include only the lines annotated by Burns:

*Stanza      Lines*

|   |   |   |     |
|---|---|---|-----|
| 1 | Blushing she rose, and blushing rose the flow'rs, | } | Bon |
|   | That sprung spontaneous in her genial ray.        |   |     |

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<sup>11</sup>Alexander Chalmers, *The Works of the English Poets, From Chaucer to Cowper* (London, 1810), XVI, 286-287.

- 2 With ev'ry shifting gleam of morning light  
The colour shifted of her rainbow vest. } Bon
- 11 SPACE in her empty regions heard the sound,  
And hills, and dales, and rocks, and vallies rung;  
The sun exulted in his glorious round;  
And shouting planets in their courses sung. } Bon
- 22 Do lillies fairer, vi'lets sweeter blow?  
And warbles Philomel a softer strain? } [Marked by  
Burns but without  
comment]
- 23 Do morning suns in rudier [*sic*] glory rise?  
Does ev'ning fan her with serener gales?  
Do clouds drop fatness from the wealthier skies,  
Or wantons plenty in her happier vales? } Pretty
- 24 Ah! no : the blunted beams of dawning light  
Skirt the pale orient with uncertain day;  
And CYNTHIA, riding on the car of night,  
Thro' clouds embattled faintly wins her way. } Pretty
- 25 Pale, immature, the blighted verdure springs,  
Nor mounting juices feed the swelling flow'r;  
Mute all the groves, nor Philomela sings  
When SILENCE listens at the midnight hour. } Pretty
- 26 Is she not sprung of APRIL's wayward race,  
The sickly daughter of th' unripen'd year? } [without  
comment]
- 27 With show'rs and sunshine in her fickle eyes,  
With hollow smiles proclaiming teach'rous peace;  
With blushes harb'ring, in their thin disguise,  
The blast that riots on the SPRING's increase. } [without  
comment]
- (*The World*, II, 69-72)

Burns's final annotations come in Number 84 (8 August 1754), an allegorical parable of Prosperity and Adversity, written by William Duncombe and praised by Burns as "A beautiful Allegory." In the allegory Prosperity and Adversity, daughters of Providence, marry the two sons of Velasco, a merchant of Tyre. Prosperity is married to Felix and proves his undoing; he dies "wretched and in exile." Adversity is married to Velasco's other son, Uranio, and proves to be the proverbial blessing in disguise. Burns marks off with crosses a segment of the speech in which Adversity discloses to her husband that she is "sent...by the gods to those alone whom they love" in order to



train them up by my severe discipline to future glory, but also prepare them to receive with a greater relish all such moderate enjoyments as are not inconsistent with this probationary state. + As the spider, when assailed, seeks shelter in its inmost web, so the mind which I afflict, contracts its wandering thoughts, and flies for happiness to itself. + (*The World*, II, 81-2)

What events in Burns's life caused such a minor chord to resonate must be a matter of conjecture, since it is impossible to know precisely when Burns read this passage. But, assuming he read it in the spring of 1790, shortly after he received *The World* from Peter Hill, then, at least on the surface, Burns was struck by the passage while he was enjoying a success that had been a long time coming. He was finally established in his farmhouse at Ellisland; his business as an Exciseman was thriving; the intellectual friendship his wife could not provide him was being supplied by friendships with Robert Riddell and Mrs. Dunlop; and his correspondence with "Clarinda" had been renewed after the breach over his marriage to Jean. But it was also the time in which his thoughts returned to Mary Campbell, he began his affair with Anne Park, and, as Snyder comments, he "was constantly being called upon to give aid and counsel to his youngest living brother, William," who died in July of that year.<sup>12</sup> He had also just endured a hard winter plagued with ill health and the efforts of running his farm and riding on "Excise matters at least 200 miles every week."<sup>13</sup> In a letter to his brother Gilbert in January of 1790, he had complained, "My nerves are in a damnable State.—I feel that horrid hypochondria...pervading every atom of both body & Soul.—This Farm has undone my enjoyment of myself.—It is a ruinous affair on all hands.—But let it go to hell! I'll fight it out and be off with it."<sup>14</sup>

Burns had also been contemplating the role of Adversity in both his life and his art; in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, written on 25 January 1790, he quotes eight lines from an unidentified ballad, commenting on the plangent final line. The second quatrain and the comment read:

"O that the Grave it were my bed;  
 "My blankets were, my winding sheet;  
 "The clocks & the worms my bedfellows a';  
 "And O, sae sound as I would sleep!"

I do not remember in all my reading to have met with any thing more truly the language of Misery than the exclamation in the last line.—Misery is like Love; to speak its language truly, the Author must have felt it (*Letters*, II, 7).

<sup>12</sup>Snyder, pp. 272, 305-310, 313.

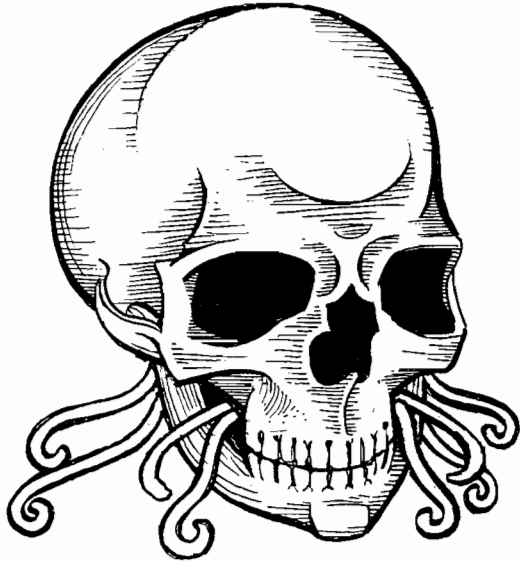
<sup>13</sup>Letter to William Dunbar, 14 January 1790, *Letters*, II, 4.

<sup>14</sup>Letter to Gilbert Burns, 11 January 1790, *Letters*, II, 3.

As a poet of sensibility, Burns relied on this inward response to adversity, the ability to turn inner suffering to poetic use, as a stock in trade. Of course Burns was not merely a poet of sensibility, and his power to transcend the narrow sentimentality to which sensibility is prone has kept his name from dying along with those of other men of feeling. But his annotations in *The World* show that Mackenzie's influence on Burns's aesthetics was both profound and long-lasting. That in otherwise mediocre material Burns does find elements of poetic merit is a vindication of his poetic discernment, sentimental or not.

Although studying Burns's annotations is not likely to revolutionize the way scholars see Burns, it does provide a glimpse of the poet's mind interacting with other poetry, and it does show clearly how Burns was both of his time and beyond his time. Certainly no startling revelations there, but the revelation is not so much in the product as in the process, and seeing Burns's annotations develop over the course of a poem or a volume brings the scholar closer to the poet's process than anything short of seeing the working drafts of poems. It is a pity that, given the attention lavished on Burnsiana, more specific note is not taken of his library and the records of his thought buried in the margins of books he read.

*University of South Carolina*



*Death and any maiden.*

*A Gray 1996*