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Notes and Documents

Robert Burns's Epigram on Edmund Burke published in *Politics for the People*, October 1794

Robert Burns's epigram on Edmund Burke is published as item number 478 in James Kinsley's edition of Burns,¹ and was thought to have been unpublished until 1932 in the work of Frederic Kent alluded to below. Commenting on the series of epigrams with which the text is found, Kinsley notes. "These pieces survive in the transcript of John Syme of Ryedale, distributor of stamps in Dumfries and Burns's crouy" (Burns, III, 1464). Kinsley suggests that the text on Burke probably belongs to 1794. It has now been found published in an issue of the London radical periodical, *Politics for the People*, edited by one of the most dangerously outspoken of political publishers of the 1790s, Daniel Isaac Eaton. The periodical number in question is not precisely dated but appeared sometime after October 9th and before October 15th 1794, as correspondence to the editor for this issue and the one succeeding it shows. The periodical version of the Burke epigram, however, has a number of differences and is given below followed by the Kent/Kinsley version taken from the Syme transcript:

¹*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968). Henceforth Burns. This discovery was made while I was doing work on the Roy Collection in the Thomas Cooper Library as W. Ormiston Roy Memorial Visiting Research Fellow at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, during the summer of 2002. I acknowledge the award of the fellowship with gratitude.

EPIGRAM.

I'VE often wonder'd that on Irish ground
 No poisonous reptile yet was ever found;
 But nature soon or late completes her work.
 She sav'd her venom to create a Burke!²

On Mr. Burke by an opponent and a friend to Mr. Hastings.

Oft I have wonder'd that on Irish ground
 No poisonous Reptile ever has been found:
 Revealed the secret stands of great Nature's work:
 She preserved her poison to create a Burke! (Burns, II, 757)

The appearance of the epigram in *Politics for the People* is curious in that, as Frederic Kent reported in 1932, one of the two Syme transcripts containing Burns's epigrams is prefaced with the words:

ORIGINALS
 Not in print and probably never wi[ll be]
 And other select pieces—³

As Frederic Kent wrote in response to these words, "the inference is that Burns never intended them to be printed, and that Syme knew it" (Kent, p. 11). Possibly, then, Burns secretly, or someone (presumably this could not have been Syme, his colleague in the sensitive employ of the Crown) acting on Burns's behalf, either with or without the poet's knowledge, placed the epigram on Burke in Daniel Isaac Eaton's hands. Alternatively, of course, Burns did not write the piece. We do not have a manuscript in Burns's hand and John Syme compiles material that, to use Kent's word, he "garners" from Burns, which is not always certainly by Burns. Such would seem to be the case among the Syme manuscripts of "Extempore on Miss E. I——, A Lady of a Figure Indicating Amazonian Strength." Syme's note to the text explains, "R. B. says the above was made by a young lady of spirit" (Kent, p. 17). As Kent tells us, "According to the postscript this epigram was not written by Burns. The note purports to chronicle an appreciation of a witticism he might have conceived himself."⁴ Kent speculates, however, that the lady referred to in this epigram

²*Politics for the People*, II, No. XVIII (1794), 286.

³Frederic Kent, "Burns Epigrams Garnered by John Syme," in *Burns Chronicle*, 2nd Series, VII (1932), 11. Henceforth Kent.

⁴Kent p. 17. See also pp. 20-21 for Kent's conjecture that there might be spurious material among the Syme manuscripts.

is “Eliza J—n,” to whom Burns had penned another epigram a considerable number of years previously, in 1788, and so concludes that the piece is actually by Burns. Kinsley seems to accept Kent’s rather casually argued case as he publishes “Extempore on Miss E. I——” as by Burns with the scant note that this is “probably Burns’s work, despite his disclaimer” and the admission that he, like previous and subsequent Burns scholars, “cannot identify” “E. I.” (Burns, III, 1464). Is it actually the case, however that Syme rightly records that Burns has simply “chronicled” a piece he has admired? Might there be a very similar instance in the epigram on Burke? Its appearance in *Politics for the People* leads to this pertinent query, although, unfortunately, it is a question that is unlikely ever to be answered definitively one way or the other. There is no other verse in *Politics for the People* of which Burns might appear to be the author.⁵ Did Burns read this periodical and copy out (slightly improving) a piece that, with its eloquent wit, was certainly worthy of the poet?

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⁵The promising attribution of “R. B.” to a song entitled, “A Political Litany” is not borne out by writing which is highly unlikely to be by Burns. It begins:

Spare us, good Lord!
From all monopolisers, forestallers, regrators, and from
All want of the necessary of life,
Good Lord deliver us!
From the wicked craftiness of avaricious men, and from
All false weights and measures.
God Lord. &c.

Robert Burns and Francis Grose

To the literary world Francis Grose (1731-91) is best remembered as having presented the occasion for Burns to write "Tam o' Shanter." But the fame of Grose the antiquarian had preceded him to Scotland, where he was known for his six-volume *Antiquities of England and Wales* which had been published between 1773 and 1787. Decided upon adding Scotland to the collection, he traveled there, where Burns must have met him in 1789. In mid-July of that year the poet wrote to Mrs. Dunlop about him:

As he has made his headquarters with Captn Riddel, my nearest neighbour, for these two months, I am intimately acquainted with him; & I have never seen a man of more original observation, anecdote & remark.... His delight is to steal thro' the country almost unknown, both as most favorable to his humour & his business [Burns says that he wished Mrs. Dunlop's son Major Andrew could meet Grose, and the poet goes on to say that Grose can easily be recognized]...if you discover a cheerful-looking grig of an old fat fellow, the precise figure of Dr Slop, wheeling about your avenue in his own carriage with a pencil & paper in his hand, you may conclude, "Thou art the man!"¹

Grose agreed to include an engraving of Alloway Kirk in his collection if Burns would supply a story about it being haunted. The poet complied, sending Grose a long letter which contained prose versions of three "Witch Stories" as he called them. But the idea set his mind to work and about six months later (Dec. 1, 1790) he sent him "Tam o' Shanter." On January 3, 1791, Grose answered, sending proofs of "The pleasant tale of the Grey Mare's tail."

Burns wrote three poems about Grose. One purports to have been written extempore by Burns when the two were reveling, "Epigram on Capt. Francis Grose, The Celebrated Antiquary"; the second begins, "Ken ye ought o' Captain Grose?" and continues, suggesting places where he may be: "Is he slain by Highland bodies?...And eaten like a wether haggis?...Is he to Abram's bosom gane?...Or haudin Sarah by the wame?"² Both of these poems are dated at the end of 1790. The other, and best-known poem about Grose, is a year older. On the "Late Captain Grose's Peregrinations thro' Scotland, collecting the Antiquities of that Kingdom" begins:

¹*The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn., ed. G. Ross Roy. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, 423. The quotation is from 2 Samuel 12:7.

²*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 566, 565. Henceforth Burns.

Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,
 Frae Maidenkirk to Johny Groats!—
 If there's a hole in a' your coats,
 I rede you tent it:
 A chield's amang you, taking notes,
 And, faith, he'll prent it (Burns, I, 494).

Burns proceeds to enumerate things which Grose has collected or knows: "Of Eve's first fire he has a cinder... That which distinguished the gender / O' Balaam's ass; / a broom-stick o' the witch of Endor" (Burns, I, 495). The poem ends with a thumbnail portrait of Grose as Burns must frequently have seen him on a convivial evening:

But wad ye see him in his glee,
 For meikle glee and fun has he,
 Then set him down, and twa or three
 Gude fellows wi' him;
 And *port*, O *port*! Shine thou a wee,
 And THEN ye'll see him! (Burns, I, 495).

This aspect of the relationship between the two men is well enough known. There is more to it than that, however. By 1789 Burns was deeply immersed in gathering traditional songs for James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*. In so doing Burns became what we might call a "folk antiquarian" and he must have passed on to his English friend much more than the stories about Alloway Kirk and "Tam o' Shanter." There is evidence which suggests that Burns corrected the text of Grose's write-up for Kilwinning Abbey which accompanied the illustration of it (see *Letters*, II, 63).

Another area in which Burns undoubtedly influenced the work of Francis Grose is not so well known. In 1787 Grose published *A Provincial Glossary; With A Collection of Local Proverbs and Popular Superstitions*, a work of some importance in the history of lexicography. In 1790 the work was reissued, with the additional words "The Second Edition, Corrected, and Greatly Enlarged." The first two parts are not paged, the third is ([1]-57). In the Preface Grose wrote:

In this Second Edition, the Reader will find the whole Glossary more regularly arranged, and in many places corrected, with the addition of near two thousand words.... The Topographical Proverbs and Vulgar Superstitions have also been corrected, and have received several additions, particularly the latter, from the well-known Poems of my ingenious friend Mr. Burns, the Airshire poet.³

³Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary; With A Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions*. 2nd edn. (London, 1790), p. viii.

A year later Grose still held Burns in high esteem, calling him in his introduction to "Tam o' Shanter" in *The Antiquities of Scotland* his "worthy friend Mr. Burns."⁴ In that poem Burns informs the reader in a footnote that:

It is a well known fact that witches, or any evil spirits, have no power to follow a poor wight any farther than the middle of the next running stream.—It may be proper likewise to mention to the benighted traveller, that when he falls in with *bogles*, whatever danger may be in his going forward, there is much more hazard in turning back (Burns, II, 563).

Grose is much more succinct: "A witch cannot pursue any one beyond the middle of a running stream, so as to have any power over them beyond that limit" (Grose, p. 23). It is quite possible that Burns supplied this detail to Grose before making it crucial to his own poem.

As noted, Grose admitted his debt to Burns in the Preface to the second edition of his *Provincial Glossary*. An entire page in it is devoted to Halloween, which Grose heads "From *Burns' Poems*." Burns's poem, it will be recalled, was first published in his Kilmarnock edition (1786) and reprinted in the Edinburgh editions of 1787, 1793 and 1794 to name only the editions published during the poet's lifetime. The poem consists of twenty-eight stanzas, and Burns, uncertain of exactly the audience for his edition (as he was also when he added the Glossary) included a prefatory note to it which reads in part:

The following POEM will, by many Readers, be well enough understood; but, for the sake of those who are unacquainted with the manners and traditions of the country where the scene is cast, Notes are added, to give some account of the principal Charms and Spells of that Night, so big with Prophecy to the Peasantry in the West of Scotland (Burns, I, 152).

Throughout the poem there appear sixteen notes, varying from two to thirteen lines. These notes could not, of course, all fit onto the single page Grose devoted to the subject, and so we are not surprised that he ignored those having to do with the topography of the region such as Burns's gloss for Cove: "A noted cavern near Colean-house, called the Cove of Colean; which, as well as Cassilis Downans, is famed, in country story, for being a favourite haunt of Fairies" (Burns, I, 153).

The entry in Grose is here reproduced in full and the pertinent passages from "Halloween" are placed beside them.

⁴Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland*, 2 vols. (London, 1789-91), II, 199.

Burns's *Poems* 1786

[Halloween] is thought to be a night when Witches, Devils, and other mischief making beings, are all abroad on their baneful, midnight errands: particularly, those aerial people, the Fairies, are said, on that night, to hold a grand Anniversary.

The first ceremony of Halloween, is, pulling each a *Stock*, or plant of kail. They [the lasses] must go out, hand in hand, with eyes shut, and pull the first they meet with: its being big or little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their Spells—the husband or wife. If any *yird*, or earth, stick to the root, that is *tocher*, or fortune; and the taste of the *custoc*, that is, the heart of the stem, is indicative of the natural temper and disposition. Lastly, the stems, or to give them their ordinary appellation, the *runts*, are placed somewhere above the head of the door; and the christian names of the people whom chance brings into the house, are, according to the priority of placing the *runts*, the names in question.

They [lasses] go to the barn-yard, and pull each, at three several times, a stalk of Oats. If the third stalk wants the *top pickle*, that is, the grain at the top of the stalk, the party in question will want the Maidenhead.

Given that these borrowings appear on page 49 of the *Popular Superstitions* in Grose, and that the entire section runs to only page 57, with page 58 blank, it is surprising that Grose did not avail himself of further superstitions to be found chronicled in Burns's poem. What we find does indicate that Grose learned a good deal about the superstitions of Ayrshire from Burns, both in the poet's letter to him and the notes to "Halloween."

Grose's *Provincial Glossary* 1790

Hallow-e'en is in Scotland thought to be a night when witches, devils, and other mischievous spirits, or aerial beings, are all abroad on their baneful midnight errands, particularly the fairies, who on that night are said to hold a grand anniversary.

The first ceremony of Hallow-e'en is pulling each a stock or plant of kail. They [the lasses, but not defined by Grose] must go out, hand in hand, with eyes shut, and pull the first they meet with: its being big or little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their spells—the husband or wife. If any *yird*, or earth, stick to the root, that is *tocher*, or fortune; and the taste of the *custoc*, that is, the heart of the stem, is indicative of the natural temper and disposition. Lastly, the stems, or, to give them their ordinary appellation, the *runts*, are placed somewhere above the head of the door; and the Christian names of the people whom chance brings into the house, are, according to the priority of placing the *runts*, the names in question.

The lasses go to the barn-yard, and pull each, at three several times, a stalk of oats. If the third stalk wants the *top-pickle*, that is, the grain at the top of the stalk, the party in question will come to the marriage-bed any thing but a maid.

Edward Dowden on Burns

When Princeton University celebrated its sesquicentennial anniversary in 1896, Edward Dowden, who held a chair of English Literature in the University of Dublin, was invited to give a series of lectures. Subsequently the six lectures were published with the title *The French Revolution and English Literature*.¹

The book received a long and favorable review in *The American* for May 29, 1897. In summing up, the anonymous reviewer writes: "Professor Dowden's lucid and dignified style always gives great pleasure." Almost half of the review is devoted to Chapter 4 entitled "Early Revolutionary Group and Antagonists," occupying 54 of the book's 285 pages. Although Dowden addresses himself to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and others after devoting the first twelve pages of the chapter to Burns, the review concentrated on the Scottish poet.

The reviewer thinks that Dowden "is quite right in saying that Burns was a European rather than a national poet." This is a point, incidentally, which some critics have been making since the inception of the European Union. Dowden is quoted: "It is especially as the poet of Equality...that Burns belongs to the Revolution" (Dowden, p. 147).

The review also paraphrases Dowden's statements without quoting them, as when Dowden says "It is often said that Burns created Scottish song; it would be more true...to say that Scottish song created Burns" (Dowden, p.142).

Tipped in to a copy of *The French Revolution and English Literature* in the G. Ross Roy Collection in the Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina is a letter from Dowden which reads:

Buona Vista
Killiney
Co Dublin.
June 7, 1897

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for so kindly sending me *The American* review of my Princeton lectures. It is very gratifying to me that the reviewer should have thought favourably of the book. His qualifications of what I said on Burns seem to me sound & just. I remember a published letter on Burns by Walt Whitman in which he too did something, in a kindly spirit, to reduce the exaggerated estimates of the

¹New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897. The Preface by Dowden is dated at Trinity College, Dublin, January 7, 1897. Henceforth Dowden.

value of much that Burns wrote. Still, to have inspired his countrymen with such unbounded enthusiasm is an evidence of the electrical power of the poet's genius.

I am, dear Sir,

Very truly yours

Edward Dowden

The Editor of
The American.

GRR

William Creech and the Firm of Cadell and Davies

Tipped into Vol. 3 of the first edition of James Currie's *Works of Robert Burns*¹ is an important letter from the Edinburgh publisher William Creech to the London firm of Cadell and Davies. This firm and Creech were co-publishers of the set, the earliest collection of Burns. Creech had, of course, published the second edition of the poet's *POEMS, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* in April 1787, and co-published with A. Strahan and T. Cadell in London the third edition in November. When Creech issued an enlarged two-volume edition of Burns in 1793 Cadell was on his own, as he was when Creech reissued the set in 1794. By the time a further reissue appeared in 1797 the firm had become T. Cadell, Junior, and W. Davies. The Edinburgh and London firms issued two further editions of the set in 1798 and 1800.

Soon after Burns's death in 1796 it was decided to produce a collected edition of the poet's work, to include his poetry, his correspondence and a substantial biography. Finally Dr. James Currie, a native of Dumfriesshire who was practicing in Liverpool, was settled upon as editor. The first edition

¹*The Works of Robert Burns; With an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings. To which are Prefixed, Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry.* 4 vols. (Liverpool, 1800). The volume and letter are in the G. Ross Roy Collection in the Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina.

appeared in 1800 in a printing of 2,000 copies. They sold well because a second edition was called for the following year. Although the sets between 1793 and 1800 showed the place of publication as being Edinburgh, Creech's name appeared after the London names on the title page. Currie's first edition was published in Liverpool for Cadell and Davies and Creech, and firms in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dumfries, Perth, Ayr, and Liverpool were listed on the title page as selling the set. Evidently Cadell and Davies were the principal handlers, and Creech, as we see from the letter which follows, was obliged to request copies for his customers.

Mess^{rs}. Cadell & Davies
Booksellers
Strand
London

Edin^f June 30th—1800

Gents

I am just now favoured w^t y^{rs} of the 23^d.—The articles Ramsay²—Drake³ and Laing⁴ arrived two days ago. But I am sadly disappointed in not receiving Burns when all the Trade in town and country have received them. I had above 150 bespoke and cannot furnish one. This makes me appear very awkward in the eyes of the public.—I have not heard a word from Liverpool. —I wrote you above a month ago that I should want 300 Burns.—I did not know that the Book was printed at Liverpool.—I suppose there is not a Copy sent me from Liverpool for I have had no advice, and if they are sent, it may be very long before they arrive here the conveyance being uncertain and tedious. Laing's history were all sold the first half hour.—Garnet⁵ is also all sold, and some more will sell to travelers during the summer months.

²Allan Ramsay, *The Poems of Allan Ramsay. A New Edition, Corrected and Enlarged*. 2 vols. (London, 1800).

³Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours; or, Sketches Critical and Narrative*, 2nd ed., *Corrected and Greatly Enlarged* (Sudbury, 1800).

⁴Malcolm Laing, *The History of Scotland; From the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms in the Reign of Queen Anne*, 2 vols. (London, 1800).

⁵Thomas Garnett, *Observations on a Tour Through the Highlands and Part of the Western Isles of Scotland*, 2 vols. (London, 1800).

Mr Fraser Tytler has claimed a Copy of Ramsay's Works for himself and one for a M^r Hopkirk of Glasgow.—⁶ Shall they be delivered as presents?

Be so good as send a copy of the Highland Society's Essays⁷ to Isaac Hawkins Brown Esq^r M. P.⁸ a present from the Society.

Does Jack⁹ Bookseller here owe you any thing? There is to be meeting of his Creditors this day.

I am Gents

Your most obed Servt

William Creech

I hope you received the hundred Copies of D^r Adams Antiquities.¹⁰

ELIZABETH A. SUDDUTH
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⁶*Jones's Directory...[of] the City of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1787) lists two inhabitants named Hopkirk: James Hopkirk, of Dalbeth, and Thomas Hopkirk, of Queen Street.

⁷*Prize Essays and Transactions of the Highland Society of Scotland*, 9 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1799-1832).

⁸Isaac Hawkins Brown (1745-1818) represented the constituency of Bridgnorth, a town NW of Birmingham, from 1784 until 1812.

⁹Robert Jack, bookseller and stationer, whose address from 1798-1802 was "Front of the Royal Exchange." We are grateful to Dr. Anette I. Hagan, of the National Library of Scotland, for this information.

¹⁰Alexander Adam, *Roman Antiquities*, 4th edn. (Edinburgh, 1797).