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Edward J. Cowan

Chapman Billies and Their Books

Ross Roy contributed an important and much cited article on Scottish Chapbooks to the first issue of *Scottish Literary Journal*¹ wherein he rightly argued that such ephemera deserve far wider attention than they had so far received since they preserved and provided information on the nation's reading habits and thus on the social and cultural history of the period in which they were produced. He thus echoed an earlier commentator, John Fraser, who wrote in 1874 that it was impossible to understand the history of Scotland or the character of her people during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, without studying these "vulgar, but graphic and intensely Scottish productions," which, in his opinion, could be ranked with such masterpieces as the humorous narratives in *The Canterbury Tales*.² Although not all chapbooks are necessarily humorous they permit us to listen to the voices of the past, not often heard, which yet should be screaming for attention. Ross endorsed the estimate of Robert Chambers and William Harvey that at their peak between 1750 and 1850 a staggering 200,000 chapbooks were sold annually in Scotland, the equivalent today of some 600,000, and of over 25 million in the

¹ G. Ross Roy, "Some Notes on Scottish Chapbooks," *Scottish Literary Journal*, 1, No. 1 (July 1974), 50-60. Henceforth Roy.

² John Fraser, *The Humorous Chapbooks of Scotland*, 2 vols. (New York, 1874), 1, 12.

US.³ The comparable estimate for best-selling chaps in England ranges from a half, to over one and a half, million.⁴ It is truly remarkable that despite Ross's recommendations, and although interest in chapbooks is undoubtedly growing, they are still not widely studied. In 1999 a consortium of scholars from the universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde was successful in obtaining a British Academy grant to investigate, as a first step, the extensive chapbook collections in the Special Collections of Glasgow University Library. Since most specimens, with some notable exceptions, had not even been properly catalogued the group responded to and adopted Roy's suggestion that a start could be made by compiling a computer index of the first lines of all Scottish chapbooks, as well as, we might add, their titles, which are not always an exact indicator of content.⁵ A beginning has thus been made by these and other scholars in a number of locations toiling at the chalk-face of chapbook scholarship, most of whom are understandably concerned with content. Equally interesting, it may be hoped, is some consideration of the chapmen billies themselves who have also been somewhat ignored along with the literary commodities which they peddled.

Chapbooks of this period were typically of eight pages—made from one sheet of paper, printed on both sides and folded twice—but a good many larger chapbooks were produced too, most often of twenty-four pages; lengthier specimens have also been so designated. One helpful observation offers some clarification: “the obvious characteristic of the Chapbook is that it is contained in the sheet. It belongs to the same tradition as the broadsheet, not with the signed sections of a book. It may appear in twos, fours, sixes, eights, tens, twelves, but it should not exceed one sheet.”⁶ While presumably any book sold by a chapman was a chap, the ultimate arbiter was obviously the weight and size of the chapman's pack, and what he could reasonably expect to sell, so it is not difficult to imagine that he happily settled for the more compact and lower priced items. It is difficult to believe that he sold very many copies of

³ Roy, p. 50; William Harvey, *Scottish Chapbook Literature* (Paisley, 1903), p. 137. Henceforth Harvey.

⁴ C. M. Preston and M. J. Preston, eds., *The Other Print Tradition: Essays on Chapbooks, Broad-sides, and Related Ephemera* (New York, 1995), p. xiv.

⁵ This article derives in part from the introduction to the forthcoming *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage* by Edward J. Cowan and Mike Paterson allegedly soon to be published by Birlinn, Edinburgh.

⁶ F. W. Ratcliffe, “Chapbooks with Scottish Imprints in the Robert White Collection, The University Library, Newcastle on Tyne,” *The Bibliothek*, 4 (1966), 92; William Chambers, *Memoir of Robert Chambers* (Edinburgh, 1872), p. 60. Henceforth Chambers.

Dougal Graham's *Impartial History* of the 1745 Rebellion which, at 189 pages, rather stretches the term, but which is often described as a chapbook.⁷

The marketers of chapbooks in city streets and in the countryside were, in general, a despised breed of hawkers, tricksters and freeloaders, of suspect morality, supposedly as promiscuous as they were impecunious, who were credited with many of the same attributes as beggars, romanticized with a frisson of adventure and romance perhaps, but in the main greeted with resentment, which is how folk often respond to those they regard as essential to the community. The popular appeal of many of the books reposed in their equivalence to the modern i-pod; chapbooks were sought for many purposes but a majority of them provided songs. Ross Roy rather misleadingly refers to these items as poetry—which admittedly is a label they often deserved without doubt—but these poems were usually meant to be sung. As Ross admits himself song-books, if such we may designate them, outnumbered other chapbooks by a factor of two to one (Roy, p. 51). The wonderful new songs offered, often turned out to be nothing of the kind; much cauld kail was het up, to coin a phrase. *Robert Burns Songbook* might contain only two of his pieces out of a selection of eight. One version of *Bonnie Prince Charlie's Songbook* contains not a single Jacobite song.

Few literate, or for that matter literary, persons were untouched by the chapbook phenomenon and many wrote fondly of their acquaintance with the medium. William Chambers, the publisher, and founder, with his brother Robert, of the Cheap Literature Movement, recalled that on the first Monday of New Year, ballads and penny chapbooks were scattered to eagerly receptive children. Sandy Elder's bookshop in his home-town of Peebles barely concealed a milk cow behind the bookshelves, which contained catechisms, Bibles and Testaments, as well as some of the publications of James Lumsden of Glasgow, and "penny chapbooks of an extraordinary coarseness of language." Their vulgarity clearly did not put him off, for he wrote eloquently, and even enthusiastically, of the genre, readily admitting that "objectionable and pitiable

⁷ There were at least three editions of this work, which is in verse, during Dougal Graham's lifetime (c. 1724-1779). The title of the first edition is *A Full Particular and True Account of the Rebellion in the Years 1745-6* (Glasgow, 1746). The second edition title-page reads *A Full and Particular Account of the Rebellion in the Years 1745 and 1746. Giving a Full Account of all the Battles, Sieges, Skirmishes, and Secret Conspiracies, both in Scotland and England* (Glasgow, 1752). Interestingly the word "true" has been dropped. By the third edition the title has become *An Impartial History of the Rise, Progress and Extinction of the Late Rebellion in Britain...from the Time of the Pretender's Coming out of France, until he Landed in France Again...* (Glasgow, 1774). The second edition is described as "greatly enlarg'd and corrected by the Author," and the third edition is noted as "with Amendments." Graham's bibliographer, John A. Fairley, said, "the third edition is practically a new book." Despite assertions to the contrary (Graham, I, 31), we now know, thanks to the efforts of Adam McNaughtan and Molly Rorke, that copies of the first and second editions do, in fact, exist.

in character...miserable as they were in appearance and aim," they were nonetheless indicative of popular intelligence and taste over a long period of time. Chapbooks thus sprang up "in the mental infancy of the common people," flourishing until displaced by superior education and literature. However, he warned that "a country may be renowned for its scholarship, its science, its exquisite proficiency in the fine arts, and yet not be beyond its chapbook era." He cited the example of Italy, though he may have had his native land uncomfortably in mind. In a letter to Robert Chambers, Allan Cunningham, poet, song-writer, fabricator and suspect antiquarian, wrote that William Chambers' "poetic, ballad-scrap, auld-world, new-world, Scottish tastes and feelings" seemed to chime perfectly with his own (Chambers, pp. 217, 236). The same could be said of the appeal of the chapbooks for several generations of Scots, irrespective of social status.

Walter Scott put together a famous collection of 114 chapbooks in 1810, "formed by me when a boy from the baskets of the travelling pedlars," describing how they held such appeal for the servants that he had to keep rescuing them from their clutches. Although he claimed that most of the pieces were thirty years old and extremely scarce, several were actually of more recent vintage.⁸ However, members of the Abbotsford Library Project team, led by Douglas Gifford, have now found several thousand more in the collection; these will be analyzed in the near future for clues as to whether the great man actually read them, and for indications of what influence they might have had on his work.

The novelist S. R. Crockett had fond memories of finding, as a boy, a cache of chapbooks in a cupboard while seeking refuge from certain punishment, "old chapman's ballads and folk-lore tales—*Geordie Buchanan's Jest*s and other edifying matter among them."⁹ He regarded Scott as the literary harvester, *par excellence*; "hardly a chap-book but he has been through, hardly a generation of our national history that he has not touched and adorned." Crockett was a minister, so not surprisingly, he winced at some of the less genteel chaps; reading them, he thought, was like walking down a South Italian lane thickly littered with offensive material. Yet he rejoiced that they conveyed something of the "rough give-and-take of life" at country weddings, holy fairs, kirns [harvest homes] and christenings, "of an older time." He ruefully noted that Robert Burns had to have his feet wiped before entering the refined parlors of Victorian Scotland but he thought a useful corrective to such prissiness was to be detected in the dialect chapbooks of the later eighteenth-

⁸ James C. Corson, "Scott's Boyhood Collection of Chapbooks," *The Bibliothek*, 3 (1962), 202-17.

⁹ S. R. Crockett, *Raiderland All About Grey Galloway Its Stories, Traditions, Characters, Humours* (London, 1904), p. 38. Henceforth Crockett.

century (Crockett, p. 80). Occasionally memory played tricks. J. M. Barrie remembered a chapbook entitled *The Brownie of Badenoch*, confusing it with William Nicholson's poem, *The Brownie of Bladnoch*.

A search should be launched for the first agreed example of a Scottish chapbook. Ross Roy has asserted that the productions of Scotland's earliest printers, Chapman and Miller, in 1508 could be considered chapbooks, as could Allan Ramsay's *Poems* of 1721, but not all would agree (Roy, p. 50; Harvey, p. 17). Broad-sides, which have appeared since the sixteenth-century, further complicate the issue. Ramsay, for example, issued some of his poems as broadsides but generally speaking while broadside material may have ended up in chapbooks, it was usually only chap-songs that found their way into broadsides. Chapmen would happily retail both types of publication. John Ashton was hopelessly off-target when he observed that there were no English examples of chapbooks before 1700,¹⁰ but equally deluded were those Scottish authorities who pretended that Old Caledonia had a flourishing tradition in such media considerably before England (Harvey, pp. 22-3), a claim rather difficult to sustain given the less advanced development of printing in the north. Some of the religious tracts and pamphlets of the later seventeenth century, particularly, though not exclusively, those associated with the Covenanters, may be regarded as chapbooks in all but name.

Zachary Boyd, Glasgow minister and litterateur, sometime principal of the university, complained in 1644 about the circulation of "idle books,...fables, love-songs, bawdry ballads, heathen husks, youth's poison."¹¹ Also many almanacs were issued as eight-page chapbooks and, indeed, publishers sometimes addressed the chapmen, upon whom they were so dependant for sales, in a sort of valedictory preface. An example of 1625 bade farewell to chapmen with the greeting "full merrie may ye make"; a specimen of 1686 urged:

Rouz up your selves, brave Chap-men all,
and go about your Trade,
By your laboriousness ye shall
exceeding rich be made.

One of the famous "Aberdeen Almanacs" of 1694 advised that all "Honest, Virtuous, and Laborious Chapmen and Merchants, who travels with these our labours, throughout the kingdom for the good of the Country," would be well supplied with prognostications, books and ballads, while expressing the hope that all persons, "Noble and Ignoble," would encourage and patronize those

¹⁰ John Ashton, *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century with Facsimiles, Notes and Introduction* (London, 1882), p. vii.

¹¹ Dougal Graham, *The Collected Writings of Dougal Graham 'Skellat' Bellman of Glasgow*, ed. George MacGregor, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1883), I, 71. Henceforth Graham.

who worked so hard to provide such “necessaries.” Almanacs make a fascinating study in their own right, neatly described as annual calendars of events astronomical and terrestrial, providing information about the sun and the moon, memorable events, festivals, tide-tables, the weather, fairs, and prophecies for the coming year. Books of Prophecy, which are rather different, survive from Edinburgh in 1619 and 1626. They had clearly long been popular, but they received a great boost when James VI ordered the publication of *The Whole Prophecies of Scotland, England, Some Part of France and Denmark etc* (Edinburgh, 1603) to prove that his succession to the English throne had long been foretold. Such books were still in print, in cheap versions, well into the nineteenth-century, containing prognostications that first appear in medieval manuscripts, thus giving them a remarkable lifespan of half a millennium. The earliest known surviving Scottish almanac dates from 1632. They were designed to reach the largest-possible cross-section of society, including farmers, horticulturalists, mariners, merchants and dealers. Some contained medical advice; many had advertisements for other publications, for tuition in maths, a translation service—“papers written in High German, Low Dutch, Flemish, Danish and Swedish,” for combs, playing cards and drugs. There is good evidence that the technical information in such prints was provided by teachers of mathematics at both school and university level.¹²

A veteran of the battle of Bothwell Bridge at the age of 16, Patrick Walker was imprisoned and tortured for his Covenanting activities in the 1680s, narrowly escaping transportation to America. He later devoted himself to the collection of material about the “Killing Times,” as the “good ill years of persecution” were dubbed, producing books about Alexander Peden, Richard Cameron and other luminaries of the later Covenant. His publications between 1724 and 1732 were dated “at Bristo Port in Edinburgh” or “within Bristo Port at the Upper Gate of the Grayfriars Church.” A contemporary publisher listed his premises at his house, “in the Grass-Market, opposite to the Corn-Market, South-Side of the Street, the second Door up the Timber-ravel’d Fore-Stair,” giving remarkable precision in the absence of a proper address. There is a long-standing, but not wholly unconvincing, tradition that Patrick was a pedlar or packman, who hawked his wares around the country, a kind of chapman for Christ, which may be true in part. Certainly his publications lent themselves to furnishing material for chapbooks, though the originals were much more substantial. Crockett most likely read the condensed versions of Walker’s biographies which, as chapbooks, remained hugely popular throughout the era of

¹²William R. McDonald, “Scottish Seventeenth-Century Almanacs,” *The Bibliothek*, 4 (1966), 257-64.

Disruption and beyond, as did much other Covenanting literature.¹³ One famous packman who entered the ranks of the suffering bleeding martyrs was John Brown of Priesthill, infamously shot in cold blood by John Graham of Claverhouse on 1 May 1685.¹⁴

An interesting insight into the authorship and circulation of chapbooks is afforded by an incident concerning *Levellers Lines or The Lamentation of the People of Galloway by the Parking Lairds*. The Levellers were Scotland's only true agrarian rebels who drew up a covenant to resist enclosures—dykes or fences—which resulted in a reduction of the work-force since fewer hands were required to tend the livestock. Protest took the form of levelling, or casting down, the offending dykes. In August 1726 Daniel Murdoch was arrested and imprisoned in Kirkcudbright, accused of distributing *Levellers Lines*. He declared that he bought a ream of ballads from James Duncan, printer in Glasgow, selling about fourteen of them in Kirkcudbrightshire. He claimed that another individual had written the ballad and that earlier in the year Samuel Gordon and George Park, merchants, had circulated printed copies in the south west. Murdoch was discharged from dispersing any more prints, as “the same tended to stir up and foment ryots and disturbances of the peace and were of a calumnious and defamatory tenor.”¹⁵

It has long been recognized that Dougal Graham's compositions are magnificent illustrations of eighteenth century Scottish manners, customs, beliefs and culture. Indeed some admirers come close to crediting him with the invention of the chapbook, especially that of the prose variety,—erroneously, it should be stressed (Harvey, p. 10). Scott, who advocated a history of Scotland's vulgar literature accepted that Graham was the author of “much of our *Bibliothèque Bleue* (Graham, I, 63)¹⁶ embracing several unquestionably coarse, but excessively meritorious, pieces of popular humour.” William Motherwell

¹³ Edward J. Cowan, “The Covenanting Tradition in Scottish History” in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, ed. E. J. Cowan and Richard Finlay (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 127-45.

¹⁴ Patrick Walker, *Six Saints of the Covenant*, ed. D. Hay Fleming, with a foreword by S. R. Crockett, 2 vols. (London, 1901), I, 37, 84-7; II, 135-8.

¹⁵ Hornel Library, Broughton House, Kirkcudbright, MS 5/25. *Levellers Lines* is known to me only through this MS reference. I have not so far managed to trace the actual chapbook.

¹⁶ On *Bibliothèque Bleue*, chapbooks or popular literature, so called because they had blue paper covers see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), pp. 71-4, 253-9; and Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 129-55 and notes. See also R. Mandrou, *De la Culture Populaire aux 17e et 18e Siècles* (Paris, 1964) and G. Bolleme, *La Bibliothèque Bleue* (Paris, 1971).

considered Graham's work a part of growing up, when, following on from toys and fairy tales, young people dipped into a grosser and coarser world:

His indelicacy is notorious—his coarseness an abomination—but they are characteristic of the class for whom he wrote. He is thoroughly imbued with the national humours and peculiarities of his countrymen of the humblest classes, and his pictures of their manners, modes of thinking and conversation, are always sketched with a strong and faithful pencil. [His chapbooks] are essentially the Library of Entertaining Knowledge to our peasantry, and have maintained their ground in the affections of the people

despite every attempt to suppress them (Graham, I, 64). Most critics have concurred in applauding Dougal's ability to "enter the huts of the poor." While most made the requisite noises about deploring his vulgarity, some placed him in the company of Boswell and Smollett. "In his writings there is a native manliness not often discovered in works having greater pretensions," an absence of mawkish sentimentality or sickly prudishness; his social portraits "have no artificial draperies more suggestive than nature itself" (Graham, I, 66). Chapbooks were obviously nurtured at a time, preponderantly in the eighteenth century, when people were less concerned with distinguishing the seemly and the polite. Mrs. Keith of Ravelstone perfectly captured this awareness in 1821, when she mused, "is it not a very odd thing that I, an old woman of eighty and upwards, sitting alone, feel ashamed to read a book which, sixty years ago, I have heard read aloud for the amusement of large circles, consisting of the first and most creditable society in London!"¹⁷ She was not referring to chapbooks but the point is still valid. On the other hand, it is easy to gain the impression that some middle class Scots, well-intentioned though they were, in a sense, interviewed the disadvantaged classes of their day, through the medium of the chapbooks, that they perhaps knew little more of them than they did of native North Americans or the inhabitants of Africa. The distance, cultural as well as spatial, between an authority such as F. J. Child and his sources was positively alarming, but when he wrote despairingly of the essential vulgarity, the absolute meanness and stupidity, of some of his beloved ballads, reposing in "veritable dunghills, in which, only after a great deal of sickening grubbing, one finds a very moderate jewel," it was the chapbooks that he had in mind.¹⁸

Although Graham's works impacted upon hundreds of thousands of readers, the man himself remains something of a phantom. He is thought to have

¹⁷ Dean [Edward Banner] Ramsay, *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* (Glasgow, 1912), p. 328.

¹⁸ Edward J. Cowan, "The Hunting of the Ballad" in *The Ballad in Scottish History*, ed. Edward J. Cowan (East Linton, 2000), p. 3.

been born in the village of Raploch, now a suburb of Stirling, about 1724. As a young man he became a chapman. He followed the Jacobite army from the point at which BPC traditionally plunged into the Forth at Ford of Frew, all the way south to Derby, and on the retreat north to the disaster at Drumossie Moor, in April 1746. In September of that year the *Glasgow Courant* carried a notice advertising that James Duncan, printer in Glasgow, “in the Saltmercat, the 2nd shop below Gibson’s Wynd,” (the same we may think who printed *Levellers Lines*, above mentioned) was selling copies of *A Full Particular and True Account of the late Rebellion*. As an added attraction the book also contained several addresses and epistles to the Pope, Pagans, Poets and the Pretender, all in meter. The price was fourpence, but booksellers and packmen could have them more easily from James Duncan or the author D. Grahame. The notice ended with the flourish: “The like has not been done in Scotland since the Days of Sir David Lindsay.” The latter allusion perhaps gives some indication as to how Graham approached his subject, because Lindsay was, of course, best known for his consummately irreverent, humorous and savagely deflationary play, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (1540). As Allan Ramsay put it:

Sir David’s satyres, help’d our nation
To carry on the Reformation,
And gave the scarlet whore a box
Mair snell than all the pelts of Knox.¹⁹

It also demonstrates, as is very evident from his other work, that Graham was far from the literary ignoramus that some would wish to distinguish. This man was acquainted with the works of Voltaire and Smollett, and was well-read in his country’s history; like many chapbook authors he was a highly talented writer, an accomplished stylist, and a master manipulator of language. Later editions appeared in 1752 and 1774. He asserted that he “impartially related all that seemed to me worthwhile in that confused fray,” that is, the struggle between Jacobites and Hanoverians, “By both the Sakeless suffered”:

I have wrote it in Vulgar Rhyme, being what not only pleased my own Fancy, but what I have found acceptable to the most part of my Countrymen, especially those of common Education like myself. If I have done well, ‘tis what I should like: and if I have fail’d, tis what Mankind are liable to (Graham, I, 84).

Graham then moved to Glasgow, where he became a printer, “spinning thoughts into typography.” He was subsequently appointed “skellat bellman” of Glasgow, though there is no trace of his appointment in the city records. A “skellet” was a hand bell used to herald public announcements, so the “skellyman,” as he was sometimes known, was essentially the town crier, whose task

¹⁹ *The Poems of Allan Ramsay*, 2 vols. (Paisley, 1877), II, 310.

it was to accompany the city magistrates, to announce municipal edicts of one kind or another, to give notice of cargoes which had recently arrived in the Clyde, such as fresh fish, or to intimate other items available for sale in the market. His was a responsible, and well-paid, job which could not have been held by an incompetent buffoon.

Famously, Dougal was described as “a wee bit gash body.” Of two surviving portraits of the bellman, one accentuates, while the other conceals his deformities and it is quite easy to believe, though it need not be true, that the description of the eponym at the start of *John Cheap the Chapman* is autobiographical. John Strang left a pen-picture which incorporates what is mainly on record from people who claimed to have met him:

Only fancy a little man scarcely five feet in height, with a Punch-like nose, with a hump on his back, a protuberance on his breast, and a halt in his gait, donned in a long scarlet coat nearly reaching the ground, blue breeches, white stockings, shoes with large buckles, and a cocked hat perched on his head, and you have before you the comic author, the witty bellman, the Rabelais of Scottish ploughmen, herds and handicraftsmen...among all who ever wrote for the chapman and flying-stationer, there was never one who equalled Dougal Graham.. In the opinion of Mr [George] Caldwell of Paisley, the celebrated bibliophile of bawbee ballads and penny histories, and for whom he wrote much, ‘Dougal was an unco glib body at the pen, and could screed aff a bit penny history in less than nae time. A’ his warks took weel—they were level to the meanest capacity, and had plenty of coarse jokes to season them.’²⁰

Caldwell added that he never knew a Graham history that failed to sell and he was always very keen to secure a new piece from him. Graham was supposedly always quick on the retort. One day he was processing along the Gallowgate past the Saracen’s Head Inn wherein several officers of the Black Watch were dining, having just returned from revolutionary America, where they had experienced a serious defeat. One shouted to the “humphie backit” Dougal, “What’s that you’ve got on your back,” to receive the response, “It’s Bunkers’s Hill; do you choose to mount?” He died in 1779.

MacGregor sensibly noted that it was strange that so many of Graham’s chapbooks should be issued by others, but is it possible that, if he was indeed a printer, he was one who produced print for other publishers? It is still an open question as to which chapbooks Graham wrote, though two of his finest attributions are *John Cheap the Chapman* and *The History of the Haverel Wives*, as well as *Janet Clinker’s Oration* and *The Ancient and Modern History of Buckhaven*. Some of his other compositions do not translate so well to the twenty-

²⁰ John Strang, *Glasgow and Its Clubs; or Glimpses of the Condition, Manners, Characters, & Oddities of the City During the Past & Present Century* (London and Glasgow, 1856), p. 97.

first century though they amply repay scrutiny, such as the often witless *Comical and Witty Jokes of John Falkirk* and *The Comical Sayings of Pady From Cork*, the latter virulently anti-Irish. There is a certain fascination about the scatological *Witty and Entertaining Exploits of George Buchanan*, if only to ponder the process by which one the greatest thinkers produced by sixteenth-century Scotland, tutor of James VI, humanist, historian and political theorist, metamorphosed into the crudest of buffoons, but we may suspect that some of the material actually dates from controversies and flytings during Buchanan's own lifetime. Also, although Graham does indeed display a Rabelaisian relish for the functions of the lower bodily stratum, there were plenty of precedents in a tradition stretching back well before the revered David Lindsay, who was no slouch in these matters. Dougal was also the author of several poems or songs.

His much-loved chap, *John Cheap the Chapman* is often supposed to be partly autobiographical, "taken from his own mouth." The description of John in the preface can certainly be matched without difficulty to two extant woodcuts purporting to depict Dougal Graham, and the narrative presents a lively representation of what may be assumed to have been the chapman's experience. His peregrination takes him to Old Kilpatrick on the Clyde, now overshadowed by Erskine Bridge. He is next found near Carluke, between Hamilton and Lanark. Moving up the Clyde towards Tinto Hill he falls in with his old crony, Drowthy Tam. At an ale-house on an unnamed moor, "far distant from any other," they encounter three Highland drovers. Later they emerge near Soutra Hill, south-east of Edinburgh which is quite a step from Tinto, but suggests a route through the Biggar Gap to Tweeddale, following the Tweed south towards the Border, and then doubling back up Lauderdale to arrive north of the Lammermuirs.

Chapmen apparently believed that they had a better chance of trade and shelter in the more remote areas distant from markets, though the itinerary is perhaps intended to be as sketchy and patchy as John Cheap's periods of consciousness between bouts of binge drinking. He next takes himself to Haddington in East Lothian whence he strikes back westwards to south of Dalkeith, passing to the north of the Pentland Hills and on beyond Falkirk. He then makes for Slamannan, rich in coal seams, some six miles south-south-west of Falkirk, continuing to the farm of Todsbughts which is still on the map, one and a half miles west of Slamannan. There he encounters the "boul-horn'd good wife" who withholds sustenance in the shape of sowens, or porridge, and on whom he takes his revenge two weeks later. The next identified destination is Linlithgow, by way of the Avon valley, and thereafter Torryburn and Culross across the Forth in Fife.

John and Drowthy Tam are on the "hair order," that is, they buy hair from women en route as from the washer-women in the final paragraph. The hair is introduced in an unremarkable no-nonsense fashion at the beginning of Part II. The hair was used for wig-making, to which trade was apprenticed Allan

Ramsay. The story of the pig-owning farmer who requests a shave from John suggests that barbering was another of the chapman's functions. The indication in the title that Drowthy Tam is a "sticked shaver", on the analogy that he was unqualified, like a "stickit minister," who progressed some way in his training but no further, is not developed. However, as dealers in hair, both men could be expected to have some expertise in cutting and shaving. Mansie Wauch was intent upon apprenticing his son as a barber because practitioners enjoyed a comfortable living. Not only were they paid for hair- and beard-cuts, but they could also sell the cuttings, "for they sit, in white aprons, plaiting hair into wigs for auld folks that have bell-pows [bald heads], or making false curls for ladies that would fain like to look smart in the course of nature."²¹

John Cheap's story is rich in social detail. Chapmen, like modern postmen, hate dogs whose response is mutual. The reasons are threefold. After the dog won a lawsuit against the cat, he was returning home with his decree beneath his tail when the chapman threw his measuring stick (*ellwand*: an ell was about a yard) at him causing him to drop the parchment and so lose his privileges. Second, in older times chapmen used to kill dogs for their skins. Finally chapmen quartered for the night always cleaned out the dog's bowl. John, however, probably gives a pretty accurate picture of the chapman's existence, as, a figure of some contempt, he begs around the countryside.

There is much-relished reference to the lower bodily functions from the goodwife making water at Old Kilpatrick, to the quack's purgatives at Soutra, the three women relieving themselves in the hearth near Haddington, and the women at Culross talking about their sexual encounters with chapmen. The latter are clearly regarded by the labor-weary as lazy wastrels; they are also patter-men and fast talkers, the ancestors of the marketeers at the Glasgow Barras, and markets everywhere. John contrives to believe that he is refused hospitality at Old Kilpatrick in favor of the "foul thief," the Devil himself, while protesting that he cannot be refused on such a night of wind and water as he had encountered when the old wife was "doing her business." When Nature called, folk were expected to use the "midden dubs" or "mugs," holes in the ground, but just as frequently they relieved themselves wherever was handy. Throughout, the country folk are treated as ignorant yokels, easily outwitted and prone to superstition as when John passes himself off as the Deil at Carluke, yet this is a world where people were in no position to completely dismiss such possibilities and Tam o' Shanter had not yet had his encounter at Alloway Kirk. The dairy-wife has a poor view of folk from "away," such as Londoners who co-exist, in her mind, with witches, demons and fairies, an

²¹ D. M. Moir, *The Life of Mansie Wauch, Tailor in Dalkeith, Written by Himself* (London and Edinburgh, 1913), p. 328. See also John Woodforde, *The Strange Story of False Hair* (London, 1971), *passim*.

observation also made about Rome in *Haverel Wives*. When she refuses charity John exploits her innate beliefs by charming her cows, house and provender. She, who would “have people to starve or provoke them to steal,” thus learns a hard lesson, promising “never to deny a hungry traveller meat nor drink, whether they had money to pay for’t or not”; nor would she ever again tell the poor to return to their native parishes for charity, as, within the law, she was perfectly entitled to do, without affording any relief to the destitute (Graham, II, 94). Thus through fraudulent means John imparts a little morality tale for the readers as well as the reformed goodwife.

The boiling of the brogues episode is also intended to teach a lesson, in this case to the Highland drovers who were homeward bound having taken a herd of cattle, most probably to Smithfield. Historically the drovers were a colorful bunch, driving the beasts, in some cases, all the way from the Western Isles and the Highlands; there were also droves through Galloway from Ireland. The account of over-nighting near Haddington is interesting for the light it sheds on household arrangements on a prosperous farm. The goodwife takes a spoonful from each servant’s cog, or bowl, to feed the chapman, but when she invites him to bed down in the barn her husband objects, because he has valuable equipment therein which might prove too tempting for a light-fingered guest. He is forbidden the house because the female servants might provide an alternative temptation. The farm lads, who sleep (it is implied) in the bothy, do not trust him either. He has no option but to sleep with the pigs, for two nights no less, in order to avoid infringing the sabbath. It is on account of such observance that he refuses to give the farmer a shave, leading the latter to accuse him of being an extreme covenanter, a “Westland Whig” and a strict sabbatarian, at a time when sabbath observance, in general, was in decline apart from the practices of certain evangelical groups. John’s riposte is well judged:

You may suppose me to be what you think proper to day, but yesternight you used me like a Tory, when you sent me into a sty to ly in your sow’s oxters, who is fitter companion for a devil, than any human creature, the abominablest brute upon the earth, who was forbidden to be eaten under the law, and cursed under the gospel (Graham, II, 98).

John’s attitude towards animals may also be thought fairly representative of his times. His amusing description of the sow and her piglets includes notice of the fierce blow he gives her on the snout, causing her to “roar out murder in her own language.” He is overcome by the farmer’s dog in the pot-licking contest. He bashes a completely innocent cat, “badrons,” on the nose, causing her to take off, burning her feet in a plate of hot soup, “crying fire and murder in her own language.” He gives Mr. Youffer, a vicious mastiff, a crack on the head and a mouthful of prickles. A tailor’s cat is thrown to a pack of

dogs. Animals are thus the object of little sentiment and considerable cruelty even though the idea that they had their own languages is appealing.

The chapman's encounters, although often dressed up as humor and slapstick, are almost always illuminating. He seeks lodging with a birley-man, an official appointed to assess the value of crops and to settle petty disputes between farm tenants. This one is so tight-fisted that he over-waters his sowens to such a degree that the chapman, considering "what sort of a pish-the-bed supper I was to get if I staid there," quits the house, though not before the birley-man and his mother have an interesting exchange about the evil eye and witchery. We find John refusing dog food, trying to ingratiate himself by telling funny stories, and sent to bed hungry by a stingy wife who seems obsessed with thievery. His revenge is to "bewitch" her sowens, by adding soap. He has a run-in with a woman who accuses him of encouraging her son to burn a comb, so that she will purchase a replacement, but he succeeds in selling her another because the heids of her menfolk are hotching with lice, which are in danger of growing as big as gooseberries. As his tale concludes the encounters become more bizarre and picaresque—a crazy tailor, a daft woman in an alehouse, a lunatic fisherman, and a battling old crabbed fellow to whom, after fisticuffs, he makes a sale. Reunited with Drowthy Tam the chap fizzles out with a haircut, a kiss and a con (Graham, II, 87-108).

By way of contrast, Robert Heron, a native of New Galloway, in his *Observations* (1799),²² included a highly favorable disquisition on chapmen whom he distinguished as "the great civiliziers of countries and nations," whether in the Roman Empire or contemporary North America where he opined that travelling merchants continued to advance the civilization of the natives "more than all the missionaries, Papist or Protestant, who have ever been sent among them." He anticipated that such pedlars would have similar beneficent effects in Australia. Through their refinement, quickness of wit, acuteness of judgement and personal manners the chapmen had a positive influence upon those whom they encountered while at the same time they acquired a sophisticated knowledge of the world. "As they wander, each alone, through thinly inhabited districts, they form habits of reflexion, and of sublime contemplation." Within the past generation young Scotsmen moving to England to "carry the pack" were confident of acquiring the fortune and status of a gentleman. Similarly positive was another Gallovidian, John MacTaggart:

²² Robert Heron, *Observations Made in A Journey Through the Western Counties of Scotland in the Autumn of MDCCXCII Relating to the Scenery, Antiquities, Customs, Manners, Population, Agriculture, Manufactures, Commerce, Political Condition, and Literature of These Parts*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Perth, 1799), I, 89-95.

Scotland, famous for many things, is also famous for her pedlers...Scotsmen are naturally fond of this business; for why, they detest slavery. A young Scotsman of spirit, before he will be bowed down with his nose in the earth, and become a labourer to his superiors, will be a pedler. He is then soon his own master, and the business being of a wandering nature, leads him to see curiosities, a thing the sons of the north are fond of; and, after acquiring some money at the trade, he leaves it for something of a more honourable name. Thus then, it is no discredit to Scotsmen, the *pedling* trade. I know not of any other which can match it, as a stepping stone for young men of common talents, that they may leap on to from a humble situation, and from thence to something better.²³

Alexander Wilson of Paisley (1766-1813) who was to become famous as “The Father of American Ornithology” wrote a poem *Watty and Meg; or, the Wife Reformed, Owre True a Tale*, which appeared as a chapbook, allegedly selling 100,000 copies. Wilson worked as chapman in both Scotland and America; from Paisley to the Potomac and Neilston to New Jersey; few ever carried a pack so far!²⁴ He was resolved to make “one bold push for the united interests of Pack and Poems” in 1789 when he traveled through East Lothian, later publishing a *Journal* largely chronicling his failure on both counts.²⁵

Hard Fate has this ordain't, that I
 Maun dauner thro' the warl,
 The wants o thousands to supply,
 An heavy lades to harl:
 Sae aft, when E'ening brings the Night.
 In lanely desolation,
 I seek a corner, out o sight
 To mourn my condemnation (Wilson, p. 56).

As already noted chapmen were not greatly admired. They peddled whatever they thought would appeal to their clients, especially women, hence they favored haberdashery, needles, thimbles, pins, buttons, tapes, ribbons, and materials of different types, as well as combs, knives, scissors and various knick-knacks. Alexander Wilson whose radicalism would drive him across the Atlantic in 1794 worked as a chapman to fund the publication of his poetry. He

²³ John MacTaggart, *The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia* (London, 1824), p. 131.

²⁴ Tom Leonard, (ed.) *Radical Renfrew Poetry from The French Revolution to The First World War by Poets Born, or Sometime Resident in, the County of Renfrewshire* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 8-11; Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 32-4, 640. Henceforth Leonard and Hunter.

²⁵ Alexander Wilson, *Poems and Songs* (Paisley, 1791), pp. 275-324. Henceforth Wilson.

wrote of Old Ralph who, “benighted trod, a pedlar he of honest fame,” toiling under a huge unwieldy pack on his wide shoulders which:

Stoop'd him half to earth. A Goat's rough skin
Inwrapt the costly stores. Scissors and combs,
And knives, and laces long; sharp-pointed awls,
And pins, arrang'd in many a glittering row,
Strong Shetland hose, and woollen night-caps warm,
Clasps, bonnets, razors, spectacles and rings (Wilson, p. 56).

His poem, *The Pack*, corroborates some of the material in *John Cheap the Chapman*, if it is not actually inspired by it, which is a possibility:

It fires, it boils my vera blude,
And sweets me at ilk pore,
To think how aft I'm putten wud,
When drawing near a door:
Out springs the mastiff, through the mud,
Wi' fell Cerberian roar,
And growling, as he really would
Me instantly devour,
Alive that day (Wilson, p. 262).

The hound which “guards the door and bears his master's hospitality in his countenance,” was the bane of the pedlar's existence. Wilson published a *Journal as a Pedlar* which recorded the poetic patter with which he hoped to hook his customers:

Fair Ladies, I pray for one moment to stay,
Until with submission I tell you,
What muslins so curious, for uses so various
A poet has here brought to sell you.

Now, ye Fair, if ye choose any piece to peruse,
With pleasure I'll instantly show it;
If the Pedlar should fail to be favour'd with sale,
Then I hope you'll encourage the Poet (Hunter, pp. 33-4).

He wrote of his adventures in *The Despairing Pedlar* and *Apollo and the Pedlar*—“with echoing, and grim distorted looks,/[the chapman] roars, ‘An Auction here of books.’” In another poem he relates something of his own experience:

Tir'd wi' tramping moors and mosses,
Speeling stairs, an lifting snecks,
Daunerin down through lanes an closses,
Buskin braw the bonny sex.

Wilson made a lousy packman but he was no mean poet.

While rains are blatterin' frae the south,
 An' down the lozens seepin',
 An' Hens, in mony a caul' closs-mouth,
 Wi' hingin tails are dreepin,
 The Muse an' me,
 Wi' friendly glee,
 Hae laid our heads thegither,
 Some rhyme to pen,
 Syn bawldly shaw.
 To you the jinglin, blether (Hunter, p. 100).

He recounted a hilariously scatological episode in *The Insulted Pedlar A Poetical Tale Related by Himself*, which chronicled the insalubrious, but sharp-edged, account of how he was relieving himself behind a dyke when surprised by the bailie who questioned by what authority he was behaving thus.

My order, sir, was Nature's laws,
 That was the reason, and because
 Necessity's demands and ca's
 War very gleg,
 I hunkered down 'mang thir hard wa's
 To lay my egg.

And sir, I'm seeking naething frae ye;
 My offering here I freely lea you,
 Sic presents ilka ane wont gie you,
 Tak' ye my word.
 Ye're richer since I first did see you,
 That reeking turd (Leonard, p. 22).

Poetry and pedlars seemed to "gang thegither." John Lauderdale, an Irishman living in Galloway, whose poetry was as wild as his political views, issued an eight-page chapbook in 1795 containing his composition *An Address to the Deil by Robert Burns with the Answer by J. Lauderdale, near Wigton*.²⁶ That same year Hector MacNeill's temperance poem, *Scotland's Skaith; or, the Sad Effects of Drunkenness, Exemplified in the History of Will and Jean*, was published as a chapbook:

Of a' the ills poor Caledonia
 E'er yet preed, or e'er will taste,

²⁶ John Lauderdale, of Kirkinner, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (1796)*, in Innes Macleod, ed. *Old Galloway Papers*, 3 (Glasgow, 1984), v.

Brew'd in hell's black pandemonia,
Whisky's ill will skaith her maist! (Harvey, pp. 97-8).

According to his own account John Burness, from Bervie, showed his story, *Thrummy Cap and the Ghaist*, to his relative, Robert Burns, in Dumfries in 1796, to be told, supposedly, that it was the best "ghaist story" he had ever seen in Scots dialect; it was long popular as a chapbook (Harvey, p. 66). An elegy for Peter Duthie who died over eighty years old in 1812, laments that he will no longer cry his ballads or chaps

Nae mair shall he again proclaim
The prophecies in *Rhymer's* name

.....

Nor shall he *Jock and Maggie's* tale
Again expose to view or sale;
Nae mair shall he e'er gain a dram
Upon the tricks o' *Louden Tam Buchanan's* wit he cannot praise
As aft he did in former days
Nor tell how *Leper* threw the cat
Into auld Janet's boiling vat (Harvey, pp. 135-6).

John Milne, bard of the Disruption in Aberdeenshire, had his own verbal signature:

I, Jock Milne of the Glen,
Wrote this poem wi' my ain pen;
And I'm sure I couldna sell it cheaper,
For it'll hardly pay the price o' the paper (Harvey, p. 133).

William McGonagall (1830-1902) of Dundee was a kenspeckle punter of his own poems.

Less poetic patterers would write, or purchase, fictitious speeches to push when executions were in the offing. William Cameron, Auld Hawkie (1781-1851), has several accounts of such episodes as punting a reprieve for a man who was, in fact, executed, of spending the proceeds almost as soon as they were earned, of dodging the police who were intent on arresting him for fraud, and of fights between rival flying stationers that resulted in the destruction of their stock. Cameron was another rarity among a group of noteworthy individualists—a chapman specializing in chapbooks, who wrote his autobiography. There is a connection with Dougal Graham because, as he tells us, when *Janet Clinker's Oration on the Wit of the Old Wives and the Pride of the Young Women* was no longer selling well, he renamed it *Grannie M'Nab's Lecture on the Women*. His first venture was a re-issue of *The Art of Courtship*, also known as *Willie Lawson's Courtship of Bess Gibb*, which he cheer-

fully admitted was “a peck of ill-put-together nonsense,” but nonsense was in demand on the street, and he sold out. He confessed that it was when pattering an eight-page version of the *Haverel Wives* that women first marked him out as an enemy, which implies that they objected to the implicit sexism of the chap. He earned his nickname by penning *The Prophecies of “Hawkie”*: *A Cow*. He also claimed authorship of *The Gauger’s Journey to the Land of Darkness: what he Discovered There and his Journey Back*, an amusing account of how some miners, finding an exciseman in a drunken sleep, conveyed him down a pit, where he awoke in comic confusion.

Cameron traveled throughout Scotland and the north of England, mixing freely and regularly with the criminal classes and the undermass. At Wooller Fair in Northumberland he encountered a man and woman peddling “abominable songs” produced by some of the worst poets that ever wrote, but on the same day he sold seventeen quires of ballads for a profit of £3 and 7 shillings. One of Hawkie’s greatest coups involved selling blank paper, purchased from Caldwell’s of Paisley, by telling a long tale. When later challenged by a young woman, complaining he sold her a newspaper instead of a book for a half-penny, he told her she could never be cheated with a newspaper for a half-penny! One chap that sold well was *The Life and Transactions with the Trial and Burning of Maggie Lang the Cardonald Witch*, promptly followed up by a companion print on Maggie Osborne the Ayrshire Witch. On one occasion he and an illiterate chapman, Jamie Blue, James McIndoe, also known as Blue Thumbs, had a chapbook selling contest. When a moron in Edinburgh terrorized a woman by disguising himself as “Auld Clottie” with the aid of a bullock skin and horns attached to his head, Hawkie produced a chap, *Hairie’s Counterfeit* which allegedly sold six reams in a night and kept a press running for three weeks. He printed *Ancient King Crispin* to punt to the Edinburgh shoemakers who processed on St. Crispin’s day in honor of their patron saint. He was retained by the masons, wrights and plasterers to publish against the wage-reducing masters, organizing a mock trial into the bargain. Arrested once too often for peddling what the authorities considered trash or offensive material, he began selling straws—he dare not cry the book, name the book or sell the book, but he would sell a straw and give a book into the bargain; by this means he unloaded twenty reams of *Gilderoy The Scotch Robber*. When he published the forty-eight page *The Adventures of a Temperance Gentleman from Edinburgh to Lasswade on his Horse “Glanders” being a Coffee-drinking Excursion*, the subject’s friends paid him to suppress it.²⁷

There was a far-fetched tradition, probably of the invented variety, that the chapman guild met beside a fine old cross at Preston Tower, East Lothian. There they supposedly held a general assembly to elect a king and his lords-depute, and conduct their business. The Bannatyne Club, founded by Scott in

²⁷ John Strathesk, ed., *Hawkie: Autobiography of a Gangrel* (Edinburgh, 1888), *passim*.

1823 for the publication of historical documents, “rescued the Cross and its appendages from ruin some years ago, revived the guild, made gentlemen-chapmen (including Scott), chose kings, ate guild-dinners, and otherwise played themselves on the sacred spot after the manner of antiquarian goodfellows.”²⁸ The village of Preston, where the Tower is situated, just half a mile from Prestonpans, annually celebrated St. Jerome’s Fair on the second Thursday of October. It was reported in 1886 that until recently a social fraternity comprising mainly Edinburgh citizens had “been in the way of giving an imaginary report of their extensive transactions” with facetious accompaniments, at the cross, on St. Jerome’s Day.²⁹ Scott recounts in his autobiography that while still a boy, he visited Prestonpans, establishing a friendship with George Constable who had a house there,³⁰ a circumstance which probably explains Scott’s putative connection with the Chapmen’s Guild of the Lothians, though Lockhart’s biography does not mention it.

Space does not permit an exploration of the demise of the chapbook which was eventually overcome by improved communications, the advent of the daily newspaper and the Cheap Literature movement, but above all, by the gentrification and sanitization of popular literature. The cultivation of manners necessitated a retreat from the humbler folk and their literature, resulting in the consequent neglect of a supremely valuable source of social and cultural history. Hopefully it has been demonstrated that all is not lost however and that it is still possible to capture something of the rumbustious lifestyle of the chapmen and the intriguing contents of their books.

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²⁸W. J. Couper, *The Millers of Haddington, Dunbar and Dunfermline A Record of Scottish Bookselling* (London, 1914), pp. 85-6 note.

²⁹Francis H. Groome, (ed.) *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland: A Survey of Scottish Topography, Statistical, Biographical, and Historical*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1886), III, 225-6.

³⁰J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott Bart*, Melrose edn. 2 vols. (London, nd), I, 15 note.