Robert Burns, John Moore, and the Limits of Writing Letters

Henry L. Fulton
Central Michigan University
The epistolary relationship between Robert Burns and the Scottish surgeon-turned-author, John Moore (1729-1802), began with another epistolary connection initiated with the poetry by Moore's friend of many years, Frances Dunlop (1730-1815). At the time Mrs. Dunlop began to correspond with Burns, she was living only fifteen miles away. Moore was living in London.

It is well known that after the death of her elderly husband in 1785, Frances Dunlop fell ill with grief and depression, augmented by other family problems. One of her visitors the following year, bringing welcome comfort, was Moore's son Graham, a commander in the Royal Navy, posted in the Irish Sea. Late in 1786 someone placed in her hands the Kilmarnock edition of Burns's poems, published that summer. As she read these poems over, especially "The Cotter's Saturday Night," her spirits improved, and in her initial enthusiasm she obtained more copies of this locally published volume for close friends and resolved to make herself known to the author. One of the copies was sent to Moore in London. (Moore seldom visited the country of his birth but remained in faithful correspondence with his friend.¹) He too was excited by the poems and shared them with friends in the city, reading aloud to his young protégée Helen Maria Williams, Mrs. Barbauld, William Lock and his circle at Norbury Park (Surrey), and the Earl and Countess of Eglintoun, glossing the dialect words for those unfamiliar with vernacular Scots. When her London friend conveyed his strong interest to Mrs. Dunlop, she took the initiative and urged

¹No manuscripts of this correspondence have survived.
the poet to write Moore, assuring him it would be no imposition. The epistolary connection began in January 1787 and at the outset was a mutually sympathetic and fruitful exchange, climaxing on Burns's side in the famous "autobiographical letter" he sent to Moore that August. Each author read and commented on the other's work. But the initial energy of this exchange diminished through time and distance before they could come to appreciate what each figure could contribute to further the relationship. For all intents and purposes, just as in the case with Mrs. Dunlop, the connection between the gifted poet and John Moore had begun to fail before Burns's death in 1796. We may regret what might have been, especially because despite the reservations Moore expressed about Burns's use of the Scots vernacular and his creative direction, the two men had much in common in their views of politics.

Who was John Moore that he could have meant so much to Burns—and Burns to him—had these men only met and gotten to know one another better?

Though born in Stirling in 1729, Moore grew up in his mother's "tenement of land" in Glasgow, a "son (in Scots law an orphan) of the manse." Bred to "physick" and surgery, Moore pursued the typical path of Scottish-trained medical apprentices with study on the continent and London. Elsewhere I have made the case that his professional preparation included many aspects that have come to be associated with the Scottish Enlightenment. His practice in the city was fairly prosperous if not intellectually satisfying; the more affluent the city became through the Atlantic tobacco trade, the less congenial Moore seemed to find it. Although he had no formal tie to the university, one of his closest and most influential friends in the city was the Professor of Civil Law, John Millar (1735-1803), whose treatise, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1772), Moore helped get published in London. After a lengthy tour in Europe with the Duke of Hamilton, Moore formally left off practice in 1777 and moved his family to London, the better to advance the careers of his sons—and to write. At the time Mrs. Dunlop sent him Burns's volume Moore was a successful author, having already published two books about his experiences on the continent, *View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany* (1779) and *A View of Society and Manners in Italy* (1781). Both

---


3 His father, the Rev. Charles Moore of Stirling, was an early Moderate of the kirk; his mother, by contrast, was evangelical, a friend of the Rev. James Robe of Kilsyth, who was involved in the Chambuslang revival of 1740-41. See my article, "The Managed Career of the Reverend Charles Moore of Stirling," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 20 (1980), 231-48.

works went into several editions in Great Britain and elsewhere.\(^5\) When he initially heard from the poet up north, he was at work on his first work of fiction, *Zeluco*, which would make him famous.

His connection with Frances Dunlop dates from his establishment in Glasgow in the 1750s, or earlier. Frances Dunlop’s husband, John Dunlop of Dunlop, a merchant in Glasgow, was a cousin of Moore’s mother, Marian Anderson. When Moore began practice in Glasgow in 1750, Dunlop had recently married Frances Anna Wallace, a woman twenty-three years his junior. Moore and she were just five months apart in age. Mrs. Dunlop told Burns that

The doctor and I... were friends half a dozen years before you saw the light—I do not mean of the Muses, but of Apollo himself. It was even some years before that period he brought me his bride that I might join their hands before the priest.\(^6\) When they lost their children ‘twas me shared and dryed their mutual tears. I esteem her [Jean Simson] above all the women I ever knew, and like her almost as much as I do her husband. While they were in Scotland we lived in the happiest intercourse. It sweetens the very hope of heaven to think we shall there renew it. (Wallace, I, 49-50).

Moore’s fourth-born son, Francis (1767-1854), was named after her.

Liam McIlvanney’s recent study of Burns’s religious and political beliefs and their cultural provenance provides us with sufficient material with which to show how much intellectually the two men, Burns and Moore, had in common. McIlvanney argues that Burns’s satires express “a principled and coherent critique of the British political system” that has its roots in “Real Whig” principles extending back to statements about Natural Law found first in the Scottish historian George Buchanan and echoed in radical Scottish Presbyterian polity as well as various Enlightenment figures, notably Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) and John Millar, both of whom taught at Glasgow. Ingmar Westermann has termed Millar a “patriot Whig”; Duncan Forbes a “scientific Whig” or “skeptical Whig,” all names describing the same political principle, one “wedded to the view of parliament as the people’s last resort.”\(^7\)

---


\(^6\)Not literally a priest but a Presbyterian minister, probably George Bannantyne. The ceremony took place at Dunlop House, Stewarton, 17 June 1754 but was registered in the parochial registers for the County of Lanark.

\(^7\)Ingmar Westermann, *Authority and Utility: John Millar, James Mill and the Politics of History, c. 1770-1836* (Amsterdam, 1999), p. 22. Alexander Carlyle remembered that by 1768 Millar had become notorious in his lectures “by his democratical principles.” In a letter to
His politics,” McIlvanney states, “are shaped by the two contemporary strands of Presbyterian thought: on the one hand, the New Light, with the subjection of all forms of authority to the tribunal of individual reason; on the other, the traditional contractarian political theory long associated with Presbyterianism.” This “traditional contractarianism,” the right to political determination and a “contract” to “confirm” as embodied in the citizenry, McIlvanney sees as part of the “theory of government in which sovereignty is viewed as vested in the people as a whole” (McIlvanney, p. 18) and is part of the political agenda of early Calvinism, manifesting itself in Burns’s century as an aspect of the theory of civic humanism, an ideal in which every citizen is informed and participatory in the political process. This ideal informed the thinking of many political liberals of the eighteenth century; in Scotland this meant Glasgow figures like the notorious professor of divinity, John Simson (1667-1740), his student Francis Hutcheson and, of course, John Millar. As Burns did not attend university, where did he imbibe these ideas? From his reading, the debating societies and Masonic lodges he joined, and other New Light relationships he formed in this area. But he also learned them in his schoolroom texts, particularly Arthur Masson’s *Collection of English Verse and Prose, For the Use of Schools* (4th edition Edinburgh, 1764). McIlvanney claims that “much of the material in Masson [selections from Addison, Thomson, and others] promotes a political agenda that might be termed Real Whig. The true end of government, the nature of kingship, the propriety of resisting tyranny, and the nature of Liberty: these are the issues repeatedly raised in the *Collection*” (McIlvanney, p. 48). Burns took them all very seriously. In addition, McIlvanney cites the small but significant library Burns’s father possessed and the “Manual of Religious Belief” his father composed for his children’s use (with possible assistance of their tutor John Murdoch, a man of similar broad-mindedness)—which “emphasized practical morality and doctrinal orthodoxy in class New Light fashion.”

In summary, McIlvanney convincingly presents Burns as a traditional supporter of the principles of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, rather than the prerogatives of monarchy, and a Christian moderate more concerned with ethics and good conduct than predestination and other aspects of post-Calvinist orthodoxy. This can be seen in Burns’s infamous clarification of his political views in his letter to the Commission of the Excise, Graham of Fintry:

Edmund Burke in 1784 Millar said, “I know that I have been accused of inculcating republican doctrines but I am not conscious of having given ever just ground for such an imputation. It has always been my endeavour to recommend that system of limited monarchy which was introduced at the [Glorious] Revolution” (Westermann, pp. 26, 28).

As to REFORM PRINCIPLES, I look upon the British Constitution, as settled at the Revolution, to be the most glorious Constitution on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame; at the same time, I think, & you know what High and distinguished Characters have for some time thought so, that we have a good deal deviated from the original principles of that Constitution; particularly, that an alarming System of Corruption has pervaded the connection between the Executive Power and the House of Commons.9

This body of opinions also accounts for Burns’s support of the French Revolution in its initial stages. McIlvanney cites the revolution in France as a “defining moment” in Burns’s life, although the poet was equally supportive of the political experiment in the American colonies. When in late 1792 William Johnson was elected President of the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People, Burns asked “leave to insert my name as a Subscriber.” “Go on, Sir!” he added, “Lay bare, with undaunted heart & steady hand, that horrid mass of corruption called Politics & State-Craft!”—this after the September Massacres in Paris two months before. However, two months later he declared to Graham, “As to France, I was her enthusiastic votary in the beginning of the business.—When she came to shew her old avidity for conquest, in annexing Savoy, &c., to her dominions, & invading the rights of Holland, I altered my sentiments.” In 1794, after reading Moore’s memoir of events in Paris in 1792,10 he continued to show something of his former enthusiasm when he confessed to Mrs. Dunlop, “Entre nous, you know my Politics; & I cannot approve of the honest Doctor’s whining over the deserved fate of a certain pair of Personages.—What is there in the delivering over a perjured Blockhead & an unprincipled Prostitute into the hands of the hangman.... [However], our friend...at bottom I am sure...is a staunch friend to liberty” (Letters, II, 131, 144, and 281).

Burns’s letter to Graham of Fintry makes it difficult to determine just how consistent his feelings about the people’s cause in France were, but he was right about Moore. Burns and Moore shared similar views on religion and politics to an extent neither was fully aware. It has been generally assumed that Burns was far more politically radical, particularly about the revolution in France, than anyone he befriended or corresponded with. Yet the more we look at Moore’s views in the early 1790s, the more he seems like an exception to this. About the older man’s religious views we have, regrettably, little firsthand evidence. His mother would have raised Moore in strict conformity with conservative Glasgow Presbyterianism; we can safely assume that as a practicing surgeon

---


and burgess in the city he attended church fairly regularly—probably Blackfriars, the "College Church," where the faculty of the university worshipped—though he did not likely find much to sympathize with in the sermons of its minister, the Reverend John Gillies, a well-known defender of orthodoxy. Of his father-in-law, the Reverend John Simson, who was prosecuted twice and eventually suspended by the Church for "unsound teaching" at the university, Moore stated that he was "a virtuous and learned Man who was persecuted by the Fanatics of that County because he was more enlightened & liberal in his Mind & Sentiments than them," a view modern scholars are likely to agree with. This opinion says more about the surgeon's religious views than any other statement we have. His travel books are full of sarcastic comments about the culture of Roman Catholicism in France and Italy that we have come to associate with Enlightenment discourse. He numbered many Dissenters among his London friends, notably the MP William Smith, the poet Samuel Rogers, the Barbaulds, and Richard Price; but one of the witnesses to the will he drew up before his death was the Reverend Thomas Wakefield, the vicar at the Anglican parish in Richmond, where Moore moved with his family in 1799, and the parish where Moore and others in his family were buried. Moore's religious life was not as contumacious as Burns's, but he certainly would have responded sympathetically to Burns's New Light sentiments.

Politically we are on even surer ground as we compare the two figures. We have observed that Burns's politics were those of the traditional Whigs who favored representational parliamentary prerogatives as embodied in the Glorious Revolution. The political justification for this formed part of the lecture on moral philosophy that Hutcheson taught when he joined the faculty at Glasgow in 1729. Moore's earliest biographer states that Moore studied "philosophy" and "morality" at Glasgow, which means that he studied either natural philosophy or logic under one of the other professors and moral philosophy with Hutcheson, most likely in the fall of 1744. Hutcheson's lectures were more than a course in moral philosophy; they were lectures on ethical

11 For more on Gillies see Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation A.D. 1560 to the Present Time, ed. Hew Scott, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1868), II, i, 19.


13 I am indebted to Anthony Heath of Putney for this information.

conduct as well. His remarks covered three general subjects: ethics, the law of nature, and political economy. At the outset he taught his young students that virtue was its own reward, that virtuous men were self-evidently happier than vicious ones. This conviction rose out of an "innate moral sense" or conscience. Moore's introduction to the main tenets of natural law theory and its implications for existing nations came from these lectures.

As a mature writer Moore occasionally expressed approval of revolution as a remedy for political tyranny, especially with regard to the situation in France during the earliest years of the revolution, just as Burns did. The origin of this opinion can be found in Hutcheson's remarks on the state of war and the rights of citizens. "The just causes of beginning war in natural liberty are any violation of a perfect right. There could be no security in life, none of our rights could be safe were we prohibited all violent efforts against the injurious, and they are allowed to pass with impunity." People naturally, Hutcheson was telling these young, impressionable minds, had the right to defend themselves against any abuse of governmental power; they had the right not only to express their objections, but to resist. "These people's right of resistance is unquestionable" (Hutcheson, p. 255). Even in the instance of absolute government citizens still have that prerogative, since the object of any government is the common good of all. But in any dispute between government and its subjects, who shall judge? Hutcheson made this absolutely clear: the people, because they originally contracted their right to rule themselves against any abuse of governmental power; they had the right not only to express their objections, but to resist. "These people's right of resistance is unquestionable" (Hutcheson, p. 255). Even in the instance of absolute government citizens still have that prerogative, since the object of any government is the common good of all. But in any dispute between government and its subjects, who shall judge? Hutcheson made this absolutely clear: the people, because they originally contracted their right to rule themselves against any abuse of governmental power; they had the right not only to express their objections, but to resist. "These people's right of resistance is unquestionable" (Hutcheson, p. 255). Even in the instance of absolute government citizens still have that prerogative, since the object of any government is the common good of all. But in any dispute between government and its subjects, who shall judge? Hutcheson made this absolutely clear: the people, because they originally contracted their right to rule themselves against any abuse of governmental power; they had the right not only to express their objections, but to resist. "These people's right of resistance is unquestionable" (Hutcheson, p. 255).

As in all classes, to a great number of the audience Hutcheson's remarks were merely theoretical, noted down in detail, but of little lasting interest. To young John Moore, however, they were to prove a life-long conviction and eventual application, especially as seen in Moore's opinions about developments in France. One can see strong similarities between Hutcheson's statements about natural law and right and the contractarian theory of governance Burns seems to have absorbed in liberal Presbyterian church polity. To what extent Moore embraced Hutcheson's benign view of human nature, one may have doubts, but a perusal of a journal Moore kept during the early years of

---

15Quotations are taken from a posthumous work, Hutcheson's _Introduction to Moral Philosophy_ (Glasgow, 1747), p. 195. It is thought to be a handbook for student use. Many students heard these points during the period of the Jacobite uprising as Moore may have. Henceforth Hutcheson.

16But note the beginning to Moore's first novel, _Zeluco_, "Religion teaches, that Vice leads to endless misery in a future state; and experience proves, that in spite of the gayest and
the French Revolution shows how strongly he espoused his political teachings. After the fall of the Bastille, Moore became almost obsessed with the deliberations of Parliament, attending sessions almost nightly and absenting himself from the London theatres, which was perhaps his major recreation for the past ten years. Like Burns and John Millar, Moore numbered himself among the Whigs in Opposition to Pitt in Parliament, the faction that adhered to Charles James Fox and the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan. We can measure the strength of his obsession with developments in France and the deliberations of the Foxite Whigs by his entries in this journal, which he started in November 1790.

The legislative revolution in France, coupled with the tension arising between Pitt’s government and opposition over longexpected reforms, so excited the aging physician and filled him with hope that the main tenets of his liberal philosophy, which he first learned in Hutcheson’s classroom and which were reenforced in his friendship with Millar, might soon be realized on both sides of the Channel. At that exciting time he must have felt compelled to maintain some log of events in London and Paris, if only to keep straight all that seemed to be transpiring so quickly (and so dramatically)—and to relieve some of the personal tension of expectancy while he waited for certain measures to mature. In his journal Moore expressed repeated uneasiness with the growing power of the monarchy after the Regency crisis and contempt for those “placemen” who derived their livelihood from the royal bounty. For him, as for Burns and John Millar, these “hangers-on,” these “courtiers” were the “corruption” the government was most guilty of. Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France, which had appeared late in 1790, he observed pessimistically, “his highly Relished by the Bishops, Lords of the Bedchamber, and the Courtiers in general.... Torryism [sic] is in my opinion the Natural bent of the English Nation—they are attracted by the Splendour of Royalty, & without much Piety they have a kind of blind affection for the Church” (Add. MSS. 9339). Against this mounting power of the crown Fox stood firm, and while Moore did not seem to be more than an acquaintance, he could feel confident that Fox spoke for him on matters of parliamentary reform and religions toleration.

most prosperous appearances, inward misery accompanies her; for, even in this life, her ways are ways of wretchedness, and all her paths are woe” in Zeluco. Various Views of Human Nature, Taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic (London, 1789), p. [1].

17 Add. MSS. 9339, Cambridge University Library, unpaged. Quoted with permission from the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library. Henceforth Add. MSS. 9339.

He also sought eye-witness accounts of developments in Paris to supplement what he learned from his son in the Foreign Office and accounts in the newspapers. Samuel Rogers went over to France in January of 1791. Moore expressed his envy of Rogers being in Paris as "an eye-witness to the most complete triumph over tyranny and debasing prejudices that philosophy and the free spirit of man ever enjoyed." Nowhere in his journal does Moore mention anything in the course of the Revolution that has caused him, like Burke, to regret the turn of events in Paris. On the contrary, despite whatever he heard from various British visitors or read in the dispatches, Moore's confidence in the successful conclusion of the deliberations of the legislative body—the adoption of a constitution under which all citizens of France, a country he loved, would enjoy full and equal rights—remained strong and constant, albeit often naïve. To Rogers he declared:

I have always loved the French as an ingenious and amiable people; I now admire than as real and enlightened Franks, and am not surprised—as many here seem to be—that the National Assembly have made so little progress towards the establishment of a steady free constitution, but I wonder rather than they have made so much.... With a little time I am persuaded ça ira la dernière perfection, and they have my best wishes.

Similarly at a dinner at Thomas Erskine's, when talk naturally turned to the revolution, some of the host's guests inveighed against it "as if the Nation were to lose by it." Moore spoke out boldly. "I express'd my Sentiments Strongly on the other Side, and Said in my opinion it was the greatest blessing that ever happened to France, & I was convinced would render them a Richer, Greater, & happier People than ever" (Add. MSS. 9339). Burns had he heard this, would have shouted, "Hurrah!" This is one of those rare instances when Moore expressed his radical sentiments in company. He was usually more reserved unless with friends of like mind.

As he received updates on the flight of the French royal family to Varennes in the summer of 1791, he was forced to consider that the British government might intervene. His comments in his journal grew increasingly defiant as the rumors increased. "I do not believe it, yet I am Sorry to find So Many of

---

19Francis was private secretary to the Duke of Leeds. Francis Osborne, 5th Duke of Leeds (1751-1799), was Foreign Secretary under Pitt, 1783-1791, resigning in disapproval of Pitt's decision to go to war with Russia.


21Moore to Rogers, 10 Feb. 1791.
Robert Burns and John Moore

Pitt’s friends Enemies to the Revolution” (Add. MSS. 9339). The rightness and justice of general liberty to all mankind was so self-evident that he could not grasp why other British citizens like himself would not earnestly promote it elsewhere. Their resistance baffled him.

Moore’s new friend Thomas Paine was in London that summer, so disgusted with the National Assembly for not summarily moving to dethrone and place on trial their “vagrant” monarch that he could not bear to attend their proceedings any longer. He had been advised not to return to England lest he be arrested for libelous comments in his recently published Rights of Man. His return prompted Moore to an extremely frank admission of his own political position, as far to the left as he was likely to go.

For my part I suppose that the Republican form [of government] may be the best on the whole which is not quite proved, Still I imagine we ought not to push thro’ bloodshed & a Civil war to attain it, if a Mild limited Monarchy is in our power without bloodshed—The difference between a free government & a Despotic one is so Great that the former can hardly be purchased by Mankind at too high a price (Add. MSS. 9339).

This statement and others I have cited are sufficient evidence that as radical as Burns may have appeared to the literati and his circle of acquaintances in southwest Scotland, his positions were politically no more objectionable than Moore’s, well-established in London. When the second part of Paine’s Rights of Man came out in February 1792 Moore read it through and declared it was “pregnant with truly [good] Manly Sentiments and admirable good Sense—They must produce a great effect on the Minds of thinking Men, and Make despotism, Aristocracy, Priestcraft and Imposture tremble all over Europe” (Add. MSS. 9339). In the summer of 1792 Moore was witness to the outbursts of the Earl of Lauderdale in the House of Lords that led to two challenges—with the Duke of Richmond and Benedict Arnold. This led directly to the trip made to Paris later that season with the earl, the family requesting that Moore whisk the fiery and occasionally intemperate nobleman to the continent in safety. They were in France from the beginning of August to the beginning of December, witnessing the attack on the royal family in the Tuileries, the September massacres, the house arrest of the king and queen in the hall of the Assembly, and the fall of the Girondists, with whom Moore felt the closest agreement of principle. From this time Moore’s enthusiasm for the revolution was much abated, though he still felt a strong sympathy for the fate of the French people and opposed the declaration of war against them.

22The duel with Richmond was accommodated with concessions; in the duel with Arnold, no one, fortunately, was hurt. In one of his rare ventures outside Scottish borders, John Millar happened to be visiting Moore and Lauderdale in London during this crisis.
In light of the similarities in political views between Burns and Moore, let us examine briefly their correspondence. This exchange of letters has always been treated from Burns's point of view. Moore's responses have usually been discredited because he attempted to tell the poet how to use his gifts to the best commercial advantage at the expense of his talent. In the process of explaining how the relationship developed and what it showed about each man, we will deal with these judgments.

It is true that Moore attempted to tell Burns how best to employ his poetic talent, but then Moore was always telling someone younger what to do—most eighteenth-century people like him did—and for this he was paid high respect: younger people like Helen Williams sought his advice. This was certainly the motive of Mrs. Dunlop once her correspondence with Burns got under way, and this is the reason she put Burns in touch with Moore. Burns understood this when he corresponded with the physician. He was also listening to others while he developed his craft.

On Dec. 30, 1786, Mrs. Dunlop confessed to Burns that she had sent one of her copies of the Kilmarnock edition to Moore, who had replied with words of high praise, especially for "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "The Vision" in which, Moore later said, "are united fine imagery, natural and pathetic description, with sublimity of language and thought." Mrs. Dunlop wrote to Burns,

I have only this moment yours, and at the same moment the inclosed from Dr. Moore,...to whom I had sent a copy of your Poems as the most acceptable present I could make to that person whose taste I valued most and from whose friendship I have reaped most instruction as well as infinite pleasure. His literary knowledge, his fame as an author, his activity in befriending that merit of which his own mind is formed to feel the full force—all led me to believe I could not do so kind a thing to Mr. Burns as by introducing him to Mr. Moore, whose keen passions must at once admire the poet, esteem the moralist, and wish to be useful to the author (Wallace, I, 4).

Moore had been told about the Edinburgh edition, so Burns was instructed to send him the subscription-list in care of Moore's eldest son who as a Member of Parliament at the time could frank it free. Moreover, Moore had invited the poet to introduce himself to his son, who was visiting the Duke of Hamilton at Hamilton Place, Lanark. He did not.

Mrs. Dunlop continued to nag Burns to initiate correspondence with Moore; she knew how much Moore had done for Helen Williams. Burns did not take up the invitation until January 1787 and probably with mixed feelings. "I wished to have written to Dr. Moore before I wrote to you," he explained to Moore to Burns, 23 May 1787. Robert Chambers, The Life and Work of Robert Burns, rev. William Wallace. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1896), II, 94. Henceforth Chambers-Wallace.
Robert Burns and John Moore 537

her, "but though, every day since I received yours of Dec. 30, the idea, the wish to write to him, has constantly pressed on my thoughts, yet I could not for my soul set about it" (Letters, I, 84). It seemed presumptuous to approach such a well-known figure, but at the same time he was aware that Moore had already interested himself on his behalf. Such a service, however slight, required acknowledgment. Although the poet had written the Earl of Eglintoun a few days before, he felt awkward about this.

I know his fame and character, and I am one of "the sons of little men." To write him a mere matter-of-fact affair, like a merchant's order, would be disgracing the little character I have; and to write the author of The View of Society and Manners, a letter of sentiment—I declare every artery runs cold at the thought. I shall try, however, to write to him to-morrow or next day (Letters, I, 84).

Burns was never a comfortable correspondent. Carol McGuirk states that "Burns's letters, like Goldsmith's and Boswell's manners in company, were products of his vast social unease." His letters "do seem to presuppose a 'coolness' in the recipients that he is all too determined to overcome," mostly by a persona of ingenuousness. Although he had to cultivate the interest and approval of the great, he exhibited a strong need to form and maintain relationships with persons with whom his natural charm and poetic talent could appear to advantage—men of his own social class and values (recipients of the verse epistles) and women of any class, particularly potential sexual partners. At the same time there was in him an imperative to defend his particular genius and to express his opinions and feelings in the ways he chose, regardless to whom they were likely to give offense. These two qualities, the doubtful self-esteem and the confidence at least in his poetic powers, were often in conflict in his letters. So in initiating the correspondence with the physician in London at the insistence of his new, supportive, and well-meaning friend nearby in Ayr, he was conscious that he had to adopt an uncomfortable role, hoping that Moore would be useful to him without imposing himself on the poet too much, as the Edinburgh literati threatened to do. And he probably realized what role Moore would adopt toward him. In this he was not wrong.

He wrote Moore early in January of 1787. After expressing his gratitude for Moore's notice, he said, "Your criticisms, Sir, I receive with reverence; only I am sorry they mostly came too late: a peccant passage or two that I would certainly have altered were gone to the Press" (Letters, I, 87). The remainder of the letter is a modest acknowledgement of his own poetic ability that contrasts with the fame he presently enjoyed.

Moore replied on January 23, 1787, and his letter alludes to a feeling of patriotism that is relatively rare in his writings:

the poetical beauties, however original and brilliant, and lavishly scattered, are not all I admire in your works: the love of your native country, that feeling of sensibility to all the objects of humanity, and the independent spirit which breathes through the whole, give me a most favourable impression of the poet, and have made me often regret that I did not see the poems, the certain effect of which would have been my seeing the author, last summer (Chambers-Wallace, II, 40-41).

His letter concludes with a transcript of Helen Maria Williams's sonnet to Burns on her reading "To a Mountain Daisy" (Chambers-Wallace, II, 41).

Burns wrote Moore again on 15 February 1787, not really responding to anything Moore specifically said, but with some concerns. Flattery was coming from all sides—flattery, heartfelt praise, and constant advice. On the one hand he was a little disarmed by the quantity of the former as compared to his own estimate of his talent; on the other hand he was receiving more direction from the well meaning (especially from Edinburgh) than he could possibly absorb and remain true to his muse. As he told Mrs. Dunlop, "I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the Literati here, but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the priviledge [sic] of thinking for myself" (Letters, I, 100).

One can be tempted to read a great deal into Burns's letter to Moore, such as the irony in expressing concern about flattery of others to one who had also flattered him and asking advice of someone concerning comments he had received from others. Perhaps he was trying to warn the physician not to push him too hard. Suffice it to say that Moore's initial response had prompted Burns, ironies aside, to confide a little more openly to one who might be less intrusive in his views than others—and in one who was safely further away. Burns's need for creative space was hardly pacified by Mrs. Dunlop's persistent desire to play Voltaire's old woman to him, to say nothing of future advice from a successful author as part of the proposal. His second letter to Moore of 15 Feb. 1787, is a touch more sensitive and marks out some space between himself and his growing list of patrons:

Mere Greatness never much embarrasses me; I have nothing to ask from their County, and I do not fear their judgement: but Genius, polished by Learning, and at its proper point of elevation in the eye of the World, this of late I frequently meet with, and tremble at the approach.—I scorn the affectation of seeming Modesty, to cover self-conceit.—I have very attentively studied myself; where I stand, both as a Man and a Poet.—That I have some merit I do not deny, is my own opinion; but I see, with frequent wringings of heart, that the novelty of my character, and the honest, national prejudice of Scotchmen (a prejudice which do Thou, O God, ever kindle ardent in their breasts!) have borne me to a height altogether untenable to my abilities.— (Letters, I, 95).

Moore replied later that month that the poet's letter had given him "a great deal of pleasure." One can infer several reasons. First, Moore condescend-
ingly observed to Burns "you improve in correctness and taste, considering where you have been for some time past." Franklyn Bliss Snyder interprets this participial phrase as referring to Burns's residence in Edinburgh among the literati, but perhaps it refers to the fields of Ayrshire. In either event Moore mistakenly accepted the myth of the "Ayrshire ploughman" with all its ramifications, both patronizing and praiseworthy; he knew nothing of Burns's more than adequate schooling at the hands of John Murdoch—nor did anyone else. For this reason Moore's remark may be pardonable. Secondly, Moore was pleased with Burns's pride in his ability.

I am glad to perceive that you disdain the nauseous affectation of decrying your own merit as a poet, an affectation which is displayed with most ostentation by those who have the greatest share of self-conceit, and which only adds undeceiving falsehood to disgusting vanity. For you to deny the merit of your poems would be arraigning the fixed opinion of the public. (Chambers-Wallace, II, 57).

As a token of his esteem Moore was sending him a copy of his View of Society and Manners in Italy along with Medical Sketches (for Mrs. Dunlop). "You are a very great favorite in my family, and this is a higher compliment than perhaps you are aware of," he added proudly; "It includes almost all the professions, and of course is a proof that your writings are adapted to various tastes and situations" (Chambers-Wallace, II, 57).

The Edinburgh edition of Burns was published 21 April. Mrs. Dunlop sent £15 for forty-five copies, five of which were designated for Moore in London (including a copy for Helen Williams; six went to Moore's brother-in-law in Glasgow, George Macintosh (Wallace, I, 27). This was Moore's first extensive critical response to the body of Burns's poetry, and his judgment is gratifying in its range of sympathy. It and subsequent comments show not that Moore disapproved of Burns's work in Scots but that he foresaw its limitations, a defensible assessment. Among the additions to the Edinburgh volume Moore singled out five poems, none of them among the better known. "A Winter's Night" undoubtedly appealed to Moore for its humanitarian sentiments and its sense of social righteousness, consonant with Moore's views. Much of the English diction is personification, a device beloved of the poets of the time, which often gives the impression of saying

---


26The eldest son, Sir John Moore of Corunna fame, was in the army, James was a surgeon in London, Graham and Francis we know little about, and the youngest, Charles, was still in school but would eventually study for the bar.

27George Macintosh (1739-1806), the chemist, was the father of a more famous chemist, Charles (1766-1843).
more than it literally does. But "A Winter's Night" is a flawed poem, pressing home its didactic core in a rigid English and reserving the Scots only for the opening and closing. It may reveal something of the poet's ambivalent attitude to the use of dialect; that Moore singled it out should not surprise us because he was a man who left his native land to write in London. Moore also cited for praise the "Address to Edinburgh," another poem heavy with personification but with little else.

On the other hand Moore admired three songs—"Green Grow the Rashes," "Composed in Spring," and "The Gloomy Night is Gath'ring Fast," which last he termed "exquisite." "I imagine you have a peculiar taste for such composition," Moore prophetically acknowledged, "which you ought to indulge. No kind of poetry demands more delicacy or higher polishing. Horace is more admired on account of his Odes than all his other writings" (Chambers-Wallace, II, 94-5).

One infers, however, that the London author approved of Scots for songs but not for more serious verse, particularly satire. While Moore acknowledged that Burns excelled in the composition of poems "of a satirical and humorous nature," he observed that in the Edinburgh edition "nothing is equal to your 'Vision' and 'Cotter's Saturday Night.'" It appears as though Moore saw no particular merit in "Death and Doctor Hornbook," "The Brigs of Ayr," "The Twa Dogs," "The Ordination," or even the "Address to the Unco Guid." Nor had he anything to say about Burns's verse-epistles, addressed to fellow-poets and friends in his district, which reveal so much of his Real Whig, egalitarian sentiments. As McIlvanney reminds us, "The very inclusion of the verse-epistles in Burns's debut volume is an act fraught with political significance," which Moore seemed to have overlooked (McIlvanney, p. 102).

All of Moore's letters express a kindly recognition of Burns's talent, combined with doubts that he was using it to the best advantage. That Burns never acknowledged that he agreed with Moore's view of the matter is taken as evidence that he thought Moore wrong, especially in light of the achievement of the Kilmarnock volume. In his letter of 23 May 1787, Moore began:

It is evident that you already possess a great variety of expression and command of the English language, you ought, therefore, to deal more sparingly, for the future, in the provincial dialect—why should you, by using that, limit the number of your admirers to those who understand the Scottish, when you can extend it to all persons of taste who understand the English language? In my opinion, you should plan some larger work than any you have yet attempted. I mean, reflect upon some proper subject, and arrange the plan in your mind, without beginning to execute any

---

28 As Edwin Muir wrote in 1936, "When Burns applied thought to his theme he turned to English... And it is clear that Burns felt he could not express it in Scots, which was to him a language of sentiment but not for thought" (Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer [London, 1936], pp. 28-9).
part of it till you have studied most of the best English poets, and read a little more history (Chambers-Wallace Burns, II, 94-5).

These counsels, to write more in English and to plan larger compositions, are similar to those expressed by contemporaries. Cowper wrote to Samuel Rose: "Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country, through our ignorance of his language.... His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern." Later in the year Mrs. Dunlop expressed to Burns her wish that you were engaged in some more extensive work than any you have yet attempted, because I think it would be more interesting to yourself and more pleasing to the world, would give a more permanent stability to your fame, and show that your genius was not a transient flash of bright lightning.... Detached pieces, however remarkable, leave on the mind only a passing impression like "the memory of the stranger that tarrieth but one night," whereas an epic work, as being considered the utmost height of human excellency, is never to be forgotten by the latest ages, but will add luster to Ayrshire, and glorify her Bard to the end of time itself if he succeed (Wallace, I, 48-9).

We may qualify her remarks by supposing that she may have been echoing her old Glasgow friend. Moreover, she had developed a personal, psychological stake in the increase of Burns's fame: she had come during the past year to live almost entirely through him, and any augmentation to his reputation improved her self-esteem. Thus the short-sightedness of Moore's remarks requires some qualification. Moore judged Burns in light of what seem almost dated criteria for poetic achievement: the epic, the long poems of natural observation, and the great themes. At the same time Moore's doubts about the worth of local satire in the vernacular are defensible. It is probably easier in this scholarly age to understand what Burns made of them than it was for an English readership toward the end of the eighteenth century.

And one should also consider the reading tastes of our two men. As Burns admitted to the mentor of his youth, John Murdoch, "My favorite authors are of the sentinel [sic] kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his Elegies, Thomson, [Mackenzie's] Man of feeling, a book I prize next to the Bible, Man of the World [also Mackenzie], Sterne, especially his Sentimental journey, Mcpherson's Ossian, etc." (Letters, I, 17). Ian Ross suggests that Burns had some

---

Selected Letters of William Cowper (London, 1925), pp. 302-3. James Anderson in the Monthly Magazine for December, 1786 was "enthusiastic but concludes with the advice that Burns abandon traditional Scots verse forms—counsel that shows how little the poems can have been appreciated on their own merits" (McGuirk, p. 67). Henry Mackenzie expressed similar reservations about Burns's use of Scots in his essay in The Lounger for December 1786 (Robert Burns, The Critical Heritage, ed. Donald A. Low [London, 1974], p. 69). Similar remarks that Burns's "provincial confines his beauties to one half the island" are expressed by John Logan in The English Review for February 1787 (The Critical Heritage, p. 78).
knowledge of the works of Voltaire and Rousseau.\(^{30}\) His letters provide a broader notion of his literary interests. He tells Agnes M'Lehose that Solomon is his “favourite author” \((Letters, I, 223)\), though this can be discounted as an agreeable exaggeration; he tells Frances Dunlop that Goldsmith is “my favorite poet” \((Letters, II, 24)\), though Thomson may have a stronger claim. He tells her that in his view, “Virgil, in many instances, [is] a servile Copier of Homer.— If I had the Odyssey by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved Homer” \((Letters, I, 279)\), a statement which indicates that Burns had read in translation both ancient poets with care. But his acquaintance with the poems of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, as well as the texts of indigenous folksong, would have set Burns off from virtually every literate person in the south.

Burns also read frequently in the periodical literature of his time—Mackenzie’s \textit{Mirror} and \textit{Lounger} as well as \textit{The Bee}. In his autobiographical letter to Moore \((August 1787)\), which lists many titles that were formative in his education and taste, he cites \textit{The Spectator}; various letters suggest he at least read Johnson’s papers in \textit{The Adventurer}. He read Mary Wollstonecraft’s \textit{Rights of Women} when it came out and recommended it to others. Of the novelists he read the big three—Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett—but by far—and what would set him off from someone like Moore in London—is his fondness for the fiction of Henry Mackenzie, that notoriously sentimental author.

Moore’s tastes, by contrast, were more literally classical and cosmopolitan. He read Horace and Juvenal in the original as an adult and besides Shakespeare admired the poetry of Pope, Thomson, and Beattie—poets whom Burns also knew and quoted. His reading in prose varied widely. Besides his professional reading which, after leaving off practice, he continued to keep up with, his tastes and interests were broad and various. His contemporary interests in fiction and non-fiction consisted of English and Scottish authors. Of the novelists he read Richardson, Fielding and, of course, Smollett, whom he had known. Of Johnson we know he read the \textit{Rambler} essays and \textit{Lives of the Poets}.\(^{31}\) Moore’s essay, “A View of the Commencement and Progress of Romance” \((1797)\) suggests that he had some acquaintance with medieval romance and Percy’s \textit{Reliques} as well as the critical writings of Thomas Warton and Bishop Richard Hurd. He apparently read William Warburton’s \textit{Divine Legislation of Moses Demonstrated} \((1737-1741)\). Among contemporary historians he read Hume, Smollett, Robertson, and Gibbon. But perhaps the main difference between Moore’s reading and Burns’s was the older man’s familiarity with the literature of France, which he read in the original, having been fluent in that


\(^{31}\)He thought Boswell’s \textit{Life of Johnson} was too intimate and revealing.
language since his years of medical training on the continent. Besides the works of Voltaire, in which he read widely, he also was familiar with the essays of Montaigne and the works of La Bruyère, Rousseau, Amelot de la Husseye, the poet J. B. L. Gresset, and even Laclos’s Liaisons Dangereuses. But his favorite authors were La Rochefoucauld and Montesquieu.

There are similarities in the reading habits of the two men, but Moore’s familiarity with the Latin poets, contemporary historians, and modern French authors contrasts with the poet’s interest in indigenous song and the works of sentiment we associate with Sterne and Henry Mackenzie.

Thus Moore suggests that just so much poetic range can be recorded in the artificial dialect Burns chose. When Burns came to devote more of his creativity to the composition and revision of songs, his diction gradually became more English. Moreover, Burns’s greatest satires often arose out of specific occasions or responded to particular situations; he could not continue indefinitely writing lively poems about kirk affairs in small Ayrshire towns.

The next item in the correspondence with Moore is Burns’s famous autobiographical letter of 2 August 1787, which Miss Williams may have enjoyed reading aloud to her friend. It was sent first to Mrs. Dunlop and then went south. Snyder noted how curious it is that Burns felt “moved thus to take Moore into his confidence,” (Snyder, p. 218), but the ostensible impulse seems less obvious: never having met Moore, he seems to have held him in greater respect than persons he had met in Edinburgh, and he believed that Moore’s interest in his behalf deserved “a faithful account of, what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character.... I will give you an honest narrative, though I know it will be at the expense of frequently being laughed at” (Letters, I, 133).

Moore was just one of a great number of new admirers of Burns’s poetry who really had no idea of his background—who thought him both a genius and the rude, untaught ploughman-versifier they viewed him. Partly to justify the poet’s cautious estimate of his own achievement and partly to lay to rest the legend of his primitive ignorance, he must have conceived at this time the notion to write this “education of a poet.” Unusual in the letter is his discussion of his relationships with women in his younger days. No doubt Burns realized he was laying himself open to scorn about his character, if not downright censure; however, he wished above all to be frank about the sources of his inspiration, to justify them. Perhaps when he sat down to compose this letter, he planned to say less than he did! Why did he choose to confide in Moore rather

---

than, say, the Earl of Glencairn? Because Moore was a writer and might better understand? Why, then, did he not write all this to the Reverend Hugh Blair? Perhaps, having met them, he felt some reserve about them; Moore in London must have seemed safer.

Moore did not reply immediately, yet he was moved and flattered by the narrative. This is evident not so much in what he said, but in the manner in which he said it: Burns's account of his life, like the poetry of Helen Williams, moved the older man to reply in some rather terrible verse.

If the biographer of Moore takes exception to any part of this correspondence, it is not where he gives inappropriate advice about Scots or the epic or fails to rhapsodize over the exquisite irony of "Holy Willie's Prayer." It is that Burns opened his heart in confidence and friendship to Moore, and the older man, while assuring Burns how much he is his friend and "servant," does not reciprocate in kind but lapsed back into his mentor's role and devoted his reply to the old advice. He could have shared with the poet his own early attempts at writing while in Glasgow but used the remainder of his letter for questions and conclusions about Burns's work.

Moore's greatest inadequacy as a critic lies not in his conclusions about the limitations of Scots as a legitimate dialect for poetry nor even in his inappropriate recommendations that Burns turn toward a traditional and more ambitious poetic form; it is in his failure to appreciate the unique power of Burns's satires in Scots, the flying poems. These pieces show great talent, to be sure, but talent so strong that Moore felt it was being wasted and could be better applied elsewhere. "Some of your humorous poems," as he termed "The Holy Fair" and others "have gained by [the use of dialect] and it gives a fresh charm to the beautiful simplicity of some of your songs" (Wallace, I, 53). But that was all. Such poems were not admired by Moore for themselves.

In this letter Moore again raises the question of the epic—

Some work of importance and suitable to your genius, which you will polish at leisure and in the returns of fancy, and do not waste your fire on incidental subjects or the effusions of gratitude in receiving small marks of attention from the great or small vulgar (Wallace, I, 53).

On the other hand, Moore conceded, "You have greatly distinguished yourself from common rhymers by drawing your imagery directly from Nature, and avoiding hackneyed phrases and borrowed allusions. This you will always have pride and good sense to continue" (Wallace, I, 54).

Toward the promotion of a new edition Moore announced himself ready "to afford you my best assistance & advice on that or any other occasion in

which I may have it in my power to be of Use to you.” By this is meant not only counsel regarding which poems were worth inclusion but economic assistance as well. The responsibility of guiding the poet in his career and the use of his talent is frequently touched on throughout the letter to the degree of potential intrusiveness—“If you think of any Particular Subject I wish you would let me know—Ill freely give you My opinion which you will afterwards follow or Not as you Please” and “I will be much obliged to you when you have leisure to fulfill your Promise of Sending me the Ideas you Picked up in Your Pilgrimage thro’ the Highlands and your early Rhimes”—which not only clarified the mentoring role Moore believed he ought to adopt toward Burns, but also limited it as well. This role of literary patronage was still prevalent in the late eighteenth century although perhaps we are seeing in the careers of Helen Williams, Charlotte Smith, and Robert Burns the last instances of it; the financial benefits of it had been largely replaced by the more precarious venture of subscription, but the roles of pupil and mentor still obtained. The relationship between Williams and Moore evolved into a friendship because they saw each other so often; the relationship between Moore and Burns never really evolved from the traditional role proposed in late 1786 by Mrs. Dunlop.

The letter concluded with an invitation to London along with the proposed new edition. “I will be happy to see you, and all my family are in the same way of thinking.” The closing contains the strongest expression of friendship thus far: “Adieu my dear Burns. Believe me, with much regard, your friend and servt” (Wallace, I, 54).

No correspondence between Moore and Burns survives for 1788. The younger man’s letter of 4 January, 1789 suggests that Burns may have written Moore since the preceding summer. Its extent gives no indication of coolness or reserve between the two; on the contrary, the letter responds directly to several issues raised by Moore fourteen months earlier (or perhaps reiterated during 1788 in letters lost). Moore’s role as mentor and critic is accepted:

To this end Burns enclosed “an Essay of mine, in a walk of Poesy to me entirely new” (Letters, I, 351). This was the first epistle to Graham of Fintry, whom Burns also deemed a patron. The rest of the letter discusses Burns’s dealings with Creech, which were not going very well, his marriage, and his expectations of Graham. The letter implies that Burns regarded Moore as his favored patron and friend.
Whether Moore replied to this important letter we do not know; if so, his answer is lost. Burns wrote again on 23 March with a copy of his ironic “Ode, Sacred to the Memory of Mrs. Oswald of Auchencrule,” an unpleasant woman Burns believed Moore knew from visits to Mrs. Dunlop (Letters, I, 386).

In the meantime Moore and his dear friend up north had conceived of a plan to place Burns beyond the ordinary obligation to provide for his family and at the same time furnish him with sufficient leisure to obey his muse. This was the newly proposed Chair of Agriculture endowed for the University of Edinburgh by William Johnston Pulteney. Both Moore and Mrs. Dunlop believed that Burns’s years of back-breaking toil at Mossgiel and Ellisland qualified him for this position. Pulteney had the option of initial presentation (Wallace, I, 240). Burns does not seem to have been informed at the outset of the intentions of his friends.

The Chair was announced in the Edinburgh papers where Mrs. Dunlop most likely saw it. She broached the matter to Moore. Moore then wrote Pulteney to place Burns’s name in nomination. His letter was passed on to Burns, Mrs. Dunlop explaining, “My reason for letting you see it was that, if you thought of the plan, you might take any step you thought could help it forward, as no time should be lost, if indeed it is not already over, which I am apprehensive of” (Wallace, I, 260). William Wallace doubted whether Burns ever seriously considered this position, which was eventually awarded to a Dr. Andrew Coventry of Shanwell in 1790 (Wallace, I, 240). Burns wrote to Mrs. Dunlop on 8 July 1789, “As I have no romantic notions of independancy [sic] of spirit, I am truly obliged to you & Dr Moore for mentioning me to Mr Pulteney,” but added that he never thought he had a serious chance (Letters, I, 421).

Moore did not write Burns until 10 June, after Zeluco, his best-selling novel, had come out.34 For various reasons this is perhaps the most disappointing letter from Moore that survives. It goes back to the same concerns, opinions, and directions of his letter of 8 November 1787. It is as though Moore remembered he had owed Burns a letter for some time, but had forgotten what had already been said, and returned to topics on his mind just after the publication of Burns’s Edinburgh volume. His major points concern Burns’s use of Scots and the stanza-form in “The Holy Fair,” a poem Moore first saw in December 1786 but had said nothing about until now. The tag “that day” he thought was “fatiguing to English ears & I should think not very agreeable to Scottish.” Moreover, “all the fine satire and humour of your ‘Holy Fair’ is lost on the English; yet, without more trouble to yourself, you could have conveyed the whole to them [had you written it in English?], the same is true of some of your other poems.” On the other hand, lest he appear too censorious, he sin-

34 Zeluco was advertised in The London Chronicle for 27 May. Toward the end of June two copies of this novel were forwarded to Burns and Mrs. Dunlop from Creech in Edinburgh.
gled out certain stanzas of the "Epistle to James Smith," which "are easy, flowing, gaily philosophical and of Horatian elegance—the language is English, with a few Scottish words & some of those so harmonious as to add to the beauty" (Chambers-Wallace, III, 50-51). Ironically, Moore seems to overlook the manifesto quality of this poem in which Burns proclaims to Smith his preferences for a life of artistic gifts to write the kind of poetry he wants to write over wealth or recognition.

By this time Mrs. Dunlop had slowly come to realize that Moore could no longer support her emotionally as he once had. Someone else had to take his place, and that had come to be Burns. Between 1787 and 1789 he was able to visit her three times. But correspondence with Moore fell off sharply after 1789. On top of this came the outbreak of the French Revolution, which absorbed the attention of everyone for several years. Moore sent the poet a copy of Zeluco soon after it was published on 27 May 1789 and asked for his views. Here was the beginning of a gesture of equality, asking the poet to react to his work as Moore had reacted to the work of Burns. Burns delayed until he could reply fully and respectfully to the older man's request. Hence he did not write until 14 July 1790, the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. At this time he enclosed several poems for Moore's reaction (some of which he also sent to Mrs. Dunlop, Professor Dugald Stewart in Edinburgh, and Graham of Fintry). If Moore replied to this, the letter is lost. 35

Burns next wrote 28 February 1791, enclosing a draft of "Tam o' Shanter." He had sent this poem to Mrs. Dunlop on 6 December 1790: she found it indelicate; and Burns did not write to her again until April. Part of the letter to Moore described the poems he had sent, another part reacted enthusiastically to Zeluco, and the last third brought Moore up to date on his life. There is nothing in this to suggest that the epistolary connection was going to fade. Moore's reply expressed enthusiasm for all the poems Burns sent, especially "Tam o' Shanter":

What I particularly admire are the three striking similes from 'Or like the snow falls in the River,' and the eight lines which begin with 'By this time he was cross the ford,' so exquisitely expressive of the superstitious impressions of the country and the 22 lines from 'Coffins stood like open presses,' which, in my opinion, are equal to the ingredients of Shakespeare's cauldron in Macbeth. 36

The "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson" also pleased Moore for "the very graphical description of the objects belonging to the country in which the poet

35 Rogers, I, 314; and Letters, II, 36-8.

writes, and which none but a Scottish poet could have described." That Moore could admire a stanza like

Mourn, ilka grove the cushat kens;
Ye hazly shaws and briery dens;
Ye burnies, wimplin down your glens,
   Wi' toddlin din,
Or foaming, strang, wi' hasty stens,
   Frae lin to lin. 37

shows that poetry in the Scottish vernacular, despite his reservations about "The Holy Fair," was still a delight to him. Nevertheless he returned to the prior pleas that Burns compose in standard English. The vernacular added "humour, yet is lost to the English fancy." Why write for only part of the island "when you can command the admiration of the whole."

Moore had been a poor correspondent to Frances Dunlop, worse than Burns had been, and so he asked the poet to remember him to her. Burns was to tell her that "she must not judge of the warmth of my sentiments respecting her by the number of my letters." 38 But to Burns he wrote something very personal and touching, wishing that they could spend some time together because Moore had things to say to Burns which he could not write. It is not known what Moore would have wanted to share with the poet, but the most probable topic was the revolution in France and the increasing hostility toward it Moore felt in England. Perhaps Moore also wished to know what was developing among the radicals in Scotland and whether Burns had any confidential information. Like the invitation to comment on his novel, here Moore is reaching out to Burns as he had not done before—attempting to converse, as it were, with the Scottish poet as an equal. This is where the relationship on Moore's side reaches its peak. And here we see one of the great failures of this relationship: we know from prior information that the two men shared many views and would have enjoyed each other's company enormously. Burns was directed to reply to Moore in care of George Aust, Francis Moore's immediate superior in the Foreign Office. It is not known whether he did.

From this point the relationship began to decline. Moore apparently was not corresponding frequently with anyone aside from his two sons on military duty. Mrs. Dunlop wrote Burns some fifteen months later saying, "I had last day a long kind letter from the Dr. He inquires earnestly after you, and writes


so warmly, so like the friend I have ever found him, that I like the whole world the better for his sake” (Wallace, II, 203). But one infers that he did not write often enough for her. The second reason follows from the first: Moore was so involved with political developments that Burns’s work did not excite him as much as it did in 1787. Almost half of 1792 he spent in France, and for the next eighteen months he would be absorbed in writing so much on French affairs that he spent little time on other concerns, outside his family.

We know that Moore wrote Burns at least one more time, in late 1794. The letter apparently miscarried. Mrs. Dunlop, who spent Christmas in London and visited often with Moore and his family, talked about the poet frequently. “I was with your friend the Doctor about a week,” she reported. “In our country he would be called a sad democrat, for we are the very pink of loyalty.” Moore’s opinions of Burns’s talent and the use he was thought to be making of it had not changed. “He was convinced,” she continued, “if you would write Seasons, and paint rural scenes and rural manners [sic], not as Thomson did, but as you would naturally do, he would undertake to dispose of the manuscript to advantage, as he was certain you would succeed,” adding that Moore advised that Burns remit to the reading public one part at a time, saying “you first revise with that coolness an author gains by laying aside his work a while before he reads it over again” (Wallace, II, 292). This was her last letter to Burns, reporting on Moore’s last letter to her. It can also be inferred that once Mrs. Dunlop withdrew her friendship over political differences, Moore withdrew his patronage although his political views remained similar.

Burns’s collection of traditional Scots songs and revisions of their lyrics was quite different from Moore’s frequently reiterated expectations of the poet, and Burns instinctively chose more congenial friends with whom to share this new interest. Finally, the relationship failed for lack of personal contact, which could have overridden other difficulties. Moore, astonishingly, made no point of seeking Burns when he traveled to Scotland for the last time in 1795, nor did he invite him to London. 39 So while Mrs. Dunlop occasionally exchanged news of each with the other, the two men no longer corresponded directly.

Moore and Burns were on the verge of transforming this relationship into a more fruitful and mutually beneficial one. Despite his repeated advice to write more poems in English, Moore had shown himself capable of appreciating Burns’s early efforts in the vernacular as well as his songs. Moreover, in more instances than cited here, the London author had shown a desire to help the poet make a greater name for himself in the larger reading public south of the border. And he seemed ready to alter the terms of their relationship by a

---

39 According to Moore’s second son, James, Moore proposed to invite Burns to their residence on Clifford Street but was “stoutly opposed” by his wife “on occasion of rumours which had reached her respecting the Bard’s social excesses” (Rogers, II, 98).
desire to talk about issues other than poetry and patronage—issues where they were sure to feel much common ground and political sympathy. Moreover, Moore was reversing the master-pupil relationship by asking Burns to comment on his work and Burns was soon in the act of doing so. Much could have continued through correspondence alone, perhaps, but other circumstances intervened. For Moore it was the revolution in France, about which they thought in similar ways; for Burns it was Scots song, which Moore thought Burns handled with particular aptitude.

All this potential complement was lost.

*Central Michigan University*