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**“AS I WALK’D BY MYSEL”:
A BURNS AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT
AND THE PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION¹**

Patrick Scott

The very last item in James Kinsley’s *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* is the short two-stanza poem beginning “As I walk’d by mysel,” referenced by Kinsley to the “holograph owned by G. Ross Roy.”² Professor Roy had recently purchased the manuscript as an unrecorded Burns poem and had sent a photocopy to Kinsley whose edition was already in final proof.³ The Kinsley text reads:

As I walk’d by mysel, I said to mysel,
And mysel said again to me;
Look weel to thysel, or not to thysel,
There’s nobody cares for thee.

Then I answer’d mysel and I said to mysel;
Whatever be my degree,
I’ll look to mysel, and I’ll think o’ mysel,
And I care for nobodie.

Kinsley places the poem in his “Appendix,” where he prints or gives extracts from poems that “have been admitted at various times to the canon of Burns’s work, either wrongly or on inadequate evidence” (II: 917), and he does not reference any previous publication or attribution of the item as being by Burns, simply making the brisk assertion, echoed by James Mackay, that the verses are “probably traditional.”⁴ Ross Roy

¹ This note is the fourth in an on-going series reproducing Burns manuscripts in the G. Ross Roy Collection. The manuscript is reproduced here courtesy of the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

² James Kinsley, ed., *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), II: 932, item 686.

³ G. Ross Roy, “Poems and Songs Spuriously Attributed to Robert Burns,” *Études Écossaises*, 3 (1996): 11-24; reprinted in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns*, ed. Carol McQuirk (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1998), 225-237 (p. 227).

⁴ Kinsley, II: 932; cf. James Mackay, *Burns A-Z: the Complete Word Finder* (Dumfries: James Mackay Publishing, 1990), item B105, p. 763.

himself later commented philosophically that Kinsley “was, of course, right because the eight lines are to be found in Herd ... to the tune ‘Green Sleeves.’”⁵ More recently, Pauline Mackay reports that the song “appears in numerous late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century chapbooks.”⁶ The purpose of this note is to provide information about the manuscript’s early provenance and subsequent history, and to draw attention to some textual variants between the manuscript and other reported or printed versions of the song.

One of the continuing nagging issues in Burns scholarship is the delimitation of the Burns canon. On the one hand, Burns himself excluded so many significant early poems from the editions published in his lifetime that successive editors have prided themselves on bringing into print “new” Burns poems he had left unpublished.⁷ On the other hand, Burns’s influence on his contemporaries, and on the generations that followed, was such that many imitative or derivative poems and songs have at one time or another been swept up into the Burns canon, and, despite the best efforts of Burns scholars, such items, once claimed for Burns, are very hard to dislodge or de-attribute.⁸ Even the survival of a poem or song in Burns’s own hand cannot in itself be taken as proving his authorship, and, because Burns also reworked or tinkered with poems

⁵ Roy, as in n. 3 above.

⁶ Mackay: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/robertburns/works/as_i_walkd_by_myself/.

⁷ This process is conveniently charted in J. W. Egerer, *A Bibliography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), which lists first book-form publication of each poem in main entries as “Original Material”, with “Original Material First Published in Periodicals” separately listed on pp. 333-356. On the “reserved canon,” see, e.g., Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2006), 3, or “Burns and Publishing,” in *Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 3-19.

⁸ For this Burns apocrypha, see Kinsley, “Undated Poems and Dubia,” and “Appendix” (II: 895-916, 917-932; Mackay, *Burns A-Z*, Appendix B” “Dubious and Spurious Works,” 699-765; Davidson Cook, “Poems Wrongly Ascribed to Burns in Orations and Otherwise,” *Motherwell Times* (Friday, January 25, 1924), p. 3; Cook, “The Burns Apocrypha, A Collection of Spurious Poems Erroneously Ascribed to Robert Burns” (Mitchell Library, Glasgow: MS 54/5, undated); and G. Ross Roy, “Poems and Songs spuriously attributed to Robert Burns,” as in n. 3 above. For a recent example of a Burns attribution disproved in 1918, but lingering in the canon for another hundred years, see Patrick Scott, “A Burns Puzzle Solved: Davidson Cook and the ‘English’ Original for ‘It is na, Jean, thy bonie face’ (SMM 333),” *Editing Burns for the 21st Century* (January 5, 2016; also *Burns Chronicle*, forthcoming). For a more general discussion of attribution, see Murray Pittock’s W. Ormiston Roy lecture, “Who Wrote the *Scots Musical Museum?*,” as in n. 15 below.

and songs that he did not originate, authorship is not always a yes-no question.⁹

Two tell-tale, but not conclusive, tests that an item might well be apocryphal are the absence of references to it in Burns’s letters or those of his contemporaries, and the absence or very late appearance of a manuscript in Burns’s hand. “As I walk’d” would be excluded on one of these tests but passes on the other. No Burns scholar who has seen the Roy manuscript, the only known manuscript of the song, has ever questioned the hand being that of Burns himself. Nonetheless, there has been little information available about where the manuscript came from before Ross Roy bought it. Kinsley gives no information about the manuscript other than its ownership, and neither he nor the editors of the standard *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* had apparently seen the manuscript itself.¹⁰ The *IELM* entry, though, notes that a facsimile had been published in the *Burns Chronicle* for 1926. The brief article accompanying the facsimile reported that the manuscript (“Burns’s holograph, but not Burns’s composition”) had been auctioned at Sotheby’s on July 16th, 1924, and purchased for £82 by Mr. George A. Ball, of Muncie, Indiana, who had provided the photograph to the *Chronicle*.¹¹ The facsimile shows that Burns’s holograph only occupies the top half of a half-sheet of paper, with additional writing on the bottom half. This shows an earlier dated inscription in one hand reading:

Burns Holograph
Presented to Mr. R. A. Smith
by Joⁿ Anderson
Engraver
Edinh
22nd Novr 1820

Above, the same information has been rewritten, in a smaller, neater hand, thought to be that of Smith himself:

⁹ See, e.g., Patrick Scott, “‘At Whigham’s Inn’: Mrs. Provost Whigham, the Allan Young Census, and an Unexpected Discovery,” *Burns Chronicle for 2016* (November 2015): 81-86 (p. 86).

¹⁰ Margaret M. Smith and Penny Bouhmela, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, III:1 (London: Mansell, 1986), 104 (BuR 41).

¹¹ James Thomson, “A Burns Manuscript,” *Burns Chronicle*, ser. 2, 1 (1926): 103 (with facsimile facing). George A. Ball (1862-1955), industrialist and philanthropist, was president, and later chairman, of the Ball Corporation, which he and his brothers had founded in 1880. Perhaps because it was not being sold as a poem by Burns himself, the sale appears to have gone unrecorded in the relevant volumes of *Book-Prices Current*, 38 (1924) and *American Book-Prices Current*, 32 (1926), manuscript supplement.

As I walk'd by mysel, I said to mysel,
 And mysel said again to me;
 Look weel to thyself, or not to thyself,
 There's nobody cares for thee.
 Then I answer'd mysel & I said to mysel;
 Whatever be my degree,
 I'll look to mysel, and I'll think o' mysel,
 And I care for nobody.

*Burns' Autograph — Presented to R. A. Smith,
 by John Anderson, Engraver, Edinburgh, 22^d Nov: 1820.*

Burns' Autograph
 Presented to *R. A. Smith*
 by *John Anderson*
 Engraver
 22^d Nov: 1820 *Edw'd*

Burns’ Autograph—Presented to R. A. Smith,
by John Anderson, Engraver, Edinburgh, 22^d Nov^r 1820.

John Anderson had served his apprenticeship as a music engraver with James Johnson (of the *Scots Musical Museum*), was in business on his own in 1808-1810, in partnership with Johnson’s widow in 1811-1815, and was then in partnership with George Walker at Foulis Close, 42 High Street, from 1815-1826.¹² The recipient of the manuscript, Robert Archibald Smith (1780-1829), had been a muslin weaver in Paisley, who gave up weaving to teach music, became precentor of Paisley Abbey church in 1807, and then of St. George’s, Edinburgh, in 1823. In addition to volumes of church music, Smith compiled an important six-volume series, *The Scottish Minstrel*, published between 1821 and 1824, where Burns’s “Red, red rose” was first matched to the air “Low down in the Broom.”¹³

Anderson became the channel through which at least one other Burns manuscript, probably from the Johnson shop, made its way to Smith. The writer of the 1926 note, James Thomson, instances the very similar inscription from the same date on a manuscript of Burns’s song “O, gude ale comes,” in possession of the Paisley Burns Club: “Burns’ Autograph. Presented to R.A. Smith for the Paisley Burns Club by Jno. Anderson, Engraver. Edinburgh, Nov. 22d, 1820” (Thomson, *loc. cit.*). Smith duly presented it to the Club on January 11, 1821.¹⁴ Both extant autograph manuscripts of “O gude ale comes” (the other is at Alloway) carry cover notes by Burns addressed to James Johnson, and it was the Anderson-Smith-Paisley manuscript that provided the text Johnson printed in the *Scots Musical Museum*, part 6 (1803), as song 542, where it is unsigned but noted as “Corrected by R. Burns” (Kinsley II: 883-884, and III: 1518). There seems little reason to doubt that Anderson came on both Burns manuscripts among James Johnson’s papers after Johnson’s death in 1811, or that Burns had sent “As I walk’d” to Johnson for possible inclusion in the *Scots Musical Museum*.

¹² George Herbert Bushnell, *Scottish Engravers, A Biographical Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 3, citing Davidson Cook, *Scottish Notes & Queries* (November 1928); Charles Humphries and William C. Smith, *Music Publishing in the British Isles...*, A Dictionary, 2nd ed. with supplement (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 52; and *Scottish Book Trade Index*, Part 2: <http://www.nls.uk/catalogues/scottish-book-trade-index/allan-armour>.

¹³ Cf. Kirsteen McCue, “‘O My Luve’s like a Red, Red rose’: Does Burns’s Melody Really Matter?,” in *Robert Burns and Friends: Essays by W. Ormiston Roy Fellows*, ed. Patrick Scott and Kenneth Simpson (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Libraries, 2012), 68-82 (reissued as *SSL* 37, 2013).

¹⁴ Thomas Hunter, *History of the Paisley Burns Club* (Paisley: J. & J. Cook, 1939), or: <http://www.paisleyburnsclub.org.uk/clubdocs1.htm>.

If “As I walk’d” is an authentic Burns manuscript, with a documented provenance, and was intended by Burns for publication, does that make it in some sense authentically a Burns poem or song, authorized if not authorial? Or should it be dismissed as a mere transcript of a non-Burnsian song, with no relevance to future Burns editors? In his W. Ormiston Roy Lecture on Burns’s role(s) in the *Scots Musical Museum*, Murray Pittock cautions against treating questions such as this “in a binary fashion, ... dividing the sheep from the goats” with the yes-no decision “Did Burns write this?”¹⁵ In particular, he emphasizes that attribution research must recognize the complex and increasing influence of printed texts in late 18th-century Scottish song.¹⁶ Some well-informed commentators have treated “As I walk’d” as being a well-known piece of orally-transmitted folklore, authorless and undateable, existing in some sense out of time and independent of textual evidence. Iona and Peter Opie, writing on “Burns and the Nursery,” described it as a song “with which many a well-grandmothered child is familiar today.”¹⁷ However, in apportioning or setting aside authorial responsibility or significance, it is worth looking more closely at the available sources for the pre-Burnsian and non-Burnsian versions.

As Professor Roy noted, the major pre-Burns source is in David Herd’s *Antient and Modern Scottish Songs and Heroic Ballads*. The Herd text is identical in both the second edition (1776) and the third edition (1791):

Tune, *Green Sleeves*.

As I walk’d by myself, I said to myself,
And myself said again to me,
Look well to yourself, take care of thyself,
For no body cares for thee.

Then I answer’d to myself, and said to myself,
With the self-same repartee,

¹⁵ Murray Pittock, “Who wrote the Scots Musical Museum? Challenging Authorial Practice in the Presence of Authorial Absence,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 42:1 (2016): 3-27 (p. 12 *supra*) (also issued separately, Columbia, SC, 2016).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, and see also Murray Pittock, ed., *The Scots Musical Museum* [Oxford Edition of Robert Burns, vols. 2 and 3] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), II: xi (“the impossibility of using MSS to ascribe authorship or degrees of authorship”), 11-14, 21-24, *et passim*.

¹⁷ Iona and Peter Opie, “Burns and the Nursery,” *Scots Chronicle 1951* [*Burns Chronicle*, 1951], 71-79 (p. 73). One suspects that, for many readers, the feeling of always having known the song comes from the overlap of phrasing with another song, “The Jolly Miller,” or “The Miller of Dee,” who “cares for nobody, no not I, / for nobody cares for me.”

Look well to thyself, or not to thyself,
It’s the self-same thing to me.¹⁸

The distinctive feature of the Herd text is the seventh line, where the rhyme phrase is “the self-same repartee” rather than the “Whatever be my degree” of the Burns autograph. It is the Herd version that is used in most of the other early printed appearances.¹⁹ It is the Herd text, also, that appears in the chapbook printing that Pauline Mackay mentions.²⁰ Walter Scott uses the song as an epigraph to open his journal for 1828, citing it as “Old Song,” but only quotes the first three lines:

As I walk by myself
I talkt to myself
And thus myself said to me.²¹

The extract, however, is too brief to provide firm evidence that variant texts were in oral circulation. The earliest version I have found that does not follow the Herd text for line 7, replacing “repartee” with the simpler idea “reverie,” comes from a mid-19th-century report of a Suffolk gravestone, which used the song as epitaph for a ninety-year-old who had died in 1810.²²

¹⁸ [David Herd, ed.], *Antient and Modern Scottish Songs and Heroic Ballads*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: John Wotherspoon for James Dickson and Charles Elliott, 1776), II: 229; [David Herd, ed.], *Antient and Modern Scottish Songs and Heroic Ballads*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: for Laurie and Symington, 1791), II: 189-190. Herd’s stated tune, “Green Sleeves,” seems an impossible match to these verses, but is taken over by several later editors.

¹⁹ Vicesimus Knox, *Elegant Extracts* (London: Rivington, 1791), Bk. V, 323 (as “A Rhapsody,” with “rapartee” for “repartee”); *The Asylum or Weekly Miscellany* (Glasgow: William Bell, 1796), 321; *The Poetical Epitome* (London: J. Johnson, 1810), 295; *Kilmarnock Mirror and Literary Gleaner*, no. 8 (May 1819), 330 (also with “rapartee”).

²⁰ *A Garland of New Songs: Muirland Willie; Maggy Lauder; As I walk’d by myself; Sandy o’er the lee* (Newcastle: Printed by J. Marshall [ca. 1810]); Elizabeth Sudduth, *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns, An Illustrated Catalogue* (Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2009), 54. This Newcastle printing is the only chapbook appearance of “As I walk’d” listed in e.g. Charles Welsh and William H. Tillinghast, *Catalogue of English and American Chapbooks and Broadside Ballads in Harvard College Library* (orig. 1905; repr. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968), 1337, or in the Glasgow online chapbook database.

²¹ W. E. K. Anderson, ed., *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1972), 408. The Scott reference was first noted by Jessop H. Hulton, *Notes and Queries*, 12 series, 4 (April 1918): 105, who thought he recalled the lines that followed, but had no published source. A respondent then noted a version in seventeen stanzas by Bernard Barton, titled “A Colloquy with Myself”: see C.C.B., *Notes and Queries*, 12 ser., 4 (June 1918): 170.

²² G.A.C., *Notes and Queries*, 9 (March 25, 1854): 270, commenting “I know not whether the lines be original, but I have never seen them elsewhere.”

The Herd text is still the one used by mid-19th century editors, as, for example, in later editions of James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps's *The Nursery Rhymes of England, Obtained Principally from Oral Tradition*.²³ It is Halliwell-Phillipps who first connects the song with a period long before Burns, subtitling it as "A Song on King William the Third," citing manuscript evidence for the royal identification.²⁴ The identification was accepted by Hans Hecht, in his edition of the Herd manuscripts, who, though following Herd in giving the tune as "*Green Sleeves*," also noted an early 18th century manuscript source for a Scottish tune titled "As I walk'd by myself."²⁵ But neither Halliwell-Phillipps nor Hecht question or modify Herd's text.²⁶

If Halliwell-Phillipps's link between "As I Walk'd" and William III is accepted, then the verses would seem to share the zig-zag story of other songs from the Burns period: as likely to be English as Scottish in origin, starting out in the late 17th-century as anti-Whig satire on William's arrogance and political isolation, followed by a survival in the Jacobite song tradition, and then late 18th century reuse or reworking based on mood or sentiment rather than the original satiric political intent.²⁷ "Repartee," a word imported from French in the time of Charles II, had preserved a trace of the song's origin. Burns perhaps identified with the outsider voice of the verses, originally satirically distanced but which now (like Milton's Satan) seemed to articulate a kind of heroic independence. What had earlier been a song centred on the late 17th-

²³ J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales: A Sequel to the Nursery Rhymes of England* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), p. 11; Halliwell-Phillipps, *The Nursery Rhymes of England* (London: Warne, 1886), 11.

²⁴ Halliwell-Phillipps, *Popular Rhymes*, *loc.cit.*, citing MS. Harleian 7316. I have not been able to check this source to corroborate Halliwell-Phillipps's assertion, but see *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 4 vols. (London: Printed by Command, 1808-1812), III: 525, describing MSS 7316-7319 as "Four Quarto Books, containing Miscellaneous Poems of the same period [i.e. of the age of Charles II]; very fairly transcribed. In these five volumes there are many repetitions; & much trash."

²⁵ Hans Hecht, ed., *Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts* (Edinburgh: William J. Hay, 1904), 266, 332. Hecht cites the second tune from McFarlan MS., 1740, no. 31. Curiously, in Herd's manuscript, "As I walk'd" follows directly after "The Miller of Dee" (Hecht, 264-266), though in the 1776 edition they are separated by some thirty pages (Herd, as in n. 16 above, II: 185-186 and 229).

²⁶ Hecht follows Herd's manuscript, in giving "walk't" for "walk'd," but has no substantive variants.

²⁷ Cf., e.g., Patrick Scott, "Wanton Willie, Sailor Bill, and the Jacobite Tradition: the Sources and Background of James Hogg's 'The King's Anthem,'" *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 7 (1996 [April 1997]), 59-69.

century court was reworked to be a rejection of late 18th century class or social hierarchy (“whatever be my degree”).

Absent other evidence for earlier changes to the song text, one might posit that it was Burns who, in transcribing the song for sending to Johnson, modified it, to make the voice simpler and more sympathetic. But Burns’s changes, if Burns’s they were, were very minimal. No future Burns edition is likely to include the song as being “by Burns.” Equally, future Burns biographers should perhaps feel free to quote it as a song that Burns liked enough to send on to Johnson and with which Burns identified sufficiently to make (perhaps) his own modest textual improvements.

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