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TOWARDS A NEW BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT BURNS

Craig Lamont

The new free online resource *A Bibliography of Robert Burns for the 21st Century: 1786-1802*, launched at the National Library of Scotland on March 16, 2017, is the culmination of almost a year's worth of fresh investigation.¹ Its aim is to improve on, and ultimately supersede, J. W. Egerer's *A Bibliography of Robert Burns*, now over fifty years old.² Egerer covers Burns editions from 1786 through 1953. His list of 984 items is extended to over 1200 when translations and undated editions are counted. Egerer also identifies original material first printed in periodicals, bringing his total tally to 1352 entries, beginning with the Kilmarnock edition and ending with a New York printing in 1962 of "On an Innkeeper in Tarbolton." A compilation on this scale in 1962, before the advent of the internet and digital facsimile, is an incredibly impressive scholarly achievement. Indeed, the number of entries (76) in our new *Bibliography* pales in comparison. But our first year's work was always intended as a beginning. I described the initial development of the work, an offshoot of the larger AHRC-funded "Editing Robert Burns for the Twenty-First Century" project, in the 2017 *Burns Chronicle*.³ Since then, several developments have taken place which this paper will address.

First, it is important to emphasize the methodology driving the new bibliography. Egerer's intention was to include in the contents listing for each separate Burns edition only the Burns items (poem, song, letter, or other item) making their *first appearance* in print, but the new bibliography sets out to include the a full list of all the contents in the description of every edition. Describing in such detail obviously takes

¹ Access the bibliography through the Centre for Robert Burns Studies website here: www.gla.ac.uk/burnsbibliography.

² J.W. Egerer, *A Bibliography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964; Carbondale, IL: Souther Illinois University Press, 1965).

³ Craig Lamont, "The beginning of a new bibliography of Robert Burns editions," *Burns Chronicle for 2017*, 126 (2016): 78-83.

much more time and effort. As an example to illustrate the purpose of this expanded description, we might take Burns's poem "To a Mouse." Egerer's entry for Burns's first book of poems, published in Kilmarnock in 1786 (Egerer 1), tells us that it appears on p.138. It is listed there because it is new, "original material." In Burns's second book of poems (the Edinburgh edition, Egerer 2) Egerer lists the 22 newly printed items only: "To a Mouse" is not listed as it is not "original material." This approach is understandable, perhaps, but its limitation is that a user relying on Egerer does not know how many more times or in what manner 'To a Mouse' was printed following that first appearance, and so cannot track either the poem's continuing popularity or the possibility of textual revision or other variants. A search for the poem in the new bibliography shows, after the Kilmarnock, it appears on p.196 of the 1787 Edinburgh edition(s); on p.136 of the Belfast and Dublin imprints, on p.200 of the London edition, and so on through to editions published in 1802. The intention here is to aid readers and scholars who are looking to track particular items and to explore to what extent the text of these items may have varied through the years and across editions.

Describing each edition in this fuller manner is a standard if labour-intensive bibliographical method, used, for instance, for the Pittsburgh Series, in the U.S., and for most volumes in the Soho/StPaul's bibliographies in the U.K.⁴ The result for Burns's first book (even with some substantial abridgement to save space here) is as follows:

The Kilmarnock Edition (1786)

Title-page	POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT, BY ROBERT BURNS. [decorative rule] THE Simple Bard, unbroke by rules of Art, He pours the wild effusions of the heart : And if inspir'd, 'tis Nature's pow'rs inspire ; Her's all the melting thrill, and her's the kindling fire. ANONYMOUS. [decorative rule] KILMARNOCK: PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON. [double rule] M, DCC, LXXXVI.
Publisher	John Wilson (1759-1821).
Format	8vo; a ⁴ A-2F ⁴ .
Contents	Pp. viii [9]-240: [i] title-page; [ii] 'Entered in Stationers-Hall'; iii 'PREFACE.'; vii 'CONTENTS.'; [9] 'The TWA DOGS, a

⁴ A good example using a similar style of description is Warner Barnes's *A Bibliography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1967). A sample entry on this pattern can also be found in: Philip Gaskell, 'Appendix B' *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 376-380. Gaskell comments that "collation on this scale is a laborious but commendable technique for investigating the writings of a poet, in which textual minutiae are liable to matter." This is certainly true of Burns.

- | TALE.'; 22 'SCOTCH DRINK.'; 29 THE AUTHOR'S EARNEST CRY | AND PRAYER, TO THE RIGHT | HONORABLE AND HONORABLE, | THE SCOTCH REPRESENTATIVES | IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.'; 37 'POSTSCRIPT.'; 39 [thistle vignette below text]; [...]233 'FOR R. A. Esq;' & 'FOR G. H. Esq;'; 234 'A BARD'S EPITAPH.'; 236 'GLOSSARY.
- Consulted** [1] GU Sp. Coll. 21; [2] GU Sp. Coll. 3016; [3] NLS Sp. Coll. RB.s.65.
- References** *Memorial Catalogue of the Burns Exhibition: 1896* (Glasgow: William Hodge & Company, 1898), 253 (§312); J. W. Egerer, *A Bibliography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 1 (§1); *Catalogue of Robert Burns Collection: The Mitchell Library, Glasgow* (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries and Archives, 1996), 33.
- Notes** [2] Donated to the University Library by Centre for Robert Burns Studies in 1926. Previous owners: Fitz-Greene Halleck (1790-1867); John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854). Contains two paper cuttings: from *The Scotsman* (22 September 2000) '£2,500 Burns'; word-processed reproduction of manuscript poems (one by each previous owner) to be found on verso of front flyleaf. Lacks original title-page, has facsimile replacement and retains a further replacement title-page. [3] Digital copy at <http://digital.nls.uk/74571116>. **Redacted names:** p. 69, James Smith (1765-c. 1823); p. 124 & 233, Robert Aiken (1739-1807); p. 185 & 233, Gavin Hamilton (1751-1805); p. 195, John Lapraik (1727-1807); p. 208, William Simpson (1758-1815); p. 218, John Rankine (d. 1810). **First lines:** p. 222, 'It was upon a Lammas night...'; p. 224, 'Now westlin winds, and slaught'ring guns...'; p. 227, 'From thee, Eliza, I must go...'; p. 230, 'O Death, hadst thou but spar'd his life...' & 'One Queen Artemisa, as old stories tell...'.
ESTC No. [T91548](#)

In the "Contents" field, a quasi-facsimile description is provided for every poem, song, and letter, leading to several pages of searchable information per edition. In the interest of transparency the new Bibliography, unlike Egerer, contains a "Consulted" field, where the call number for each copy of the edition I have seen is provided. This should be particularly useful in keeping track of copies across institutions and in aiding scholars in their own research. Egerer is sometimes tantalisingly vague regarding the location of the copies he consulted. For editions where there is an engraved portrait of Burns or a high number of internal illustrations, an "Illustration" field describes these in full. Finally, I provide the ESTC number, which links the user through to the online English Short Title

Catalogue (unavailable to Egerer), where global holdings for most eighteenth-century texts are normally available. Like the “Consulted” field, this addition helps scholars locate extant copies of the relevant edition if they want to consult it for themselves.

In Patrick Scott’s paper for this symposium, one can read about some specific kinds of research incorporated in the new bibliography for editions that had not been described or not fully described by Egerer. There have been quite a few significant revisions of Egerer that have helped shape the new Bibliography. First, Burns’s second book, the “Edinburgh Edition” of 1787, no. 2 in Egerer, is now described now as two separate editions. Patrick Scott and I have explained the decision-making behind this in a recent article.⁵ Beside the well-known misprint of “stinking” for Burns’s “skinking,” on p.263, of Burns’s second book of poetry there are hundreds of others, subtler variants between these two editions (as we now distinguish them). In writing to Mrs. Dunlop on 22 March 1787, Burns himself wrote “I have both a second and a third edition going on as the second was begun with two small a number of copies.”⁶

While the new bibliographical resource breaks the two Edinburgh settings into separate editions proper, it does the opposite with numbers 3 and 4 in Egerer. Traditionally, the 1787 Belfast and Dublin *Poems* have been described as separate editions. In South Carolina I used the University’s Hinman Collator to compare each page of these books to confirm a long-standing scholarly assertion that these were not two separate editions, but “were separately-marketed issues of a single edition, printed in Belfast.”⁷ This was also put largely beyond doubt by the research into watermarks in Belfast publications from the eighteenth century carried out by Alison Muir of the National Museums, Northern Ireland.⁸ The only difference between these Belfast and Dublin books turns out to be the title-page. For Edinburgh and London publishers, the Irish edition, whatever its title-page, was unauthorized or “pirated.” It is for this reason that the London edition of *Poems*, which appears on the market after the Belfast and Dublin issues, is described as the “third edition.”

⁵ Patrick Scott and Craig Lamont, “‘Skinking’ and ‘Stinking’: the Printing and Proofing of Robert Burns’s *Poems* (Edinburgh, 1787),” *Book Collector*, 65.4 (Winter 2016): 601-616. (p. 607).

⁶ *Letters*, I: 102; Scott and Lamont, *ibid.*, p. 607.

⁷ Scott and Lamont, “The first Irish edition of Robert Burns: a reexamination,” *Scottish Literary Review*, 8.2 (Autumn/Winter 2016): 133-140 (p. 134). See also Craig Lamont, “Robert Burns in the Heat of the South: Rare Books and Modern Technology,” *Robert Burns Lives!*, ed. Frank R. Shaw, no. 243 (September 2016).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.137.

It might be useful to see how these revisions have impacted numbering for the first five entries in the new bibliography:

Egerer (1964)

1. Kilmarnock (1786)
2. Edinburgh (1787)
3. Belfast (1787)
4. Dublin (1787)
5. London (1787)

New Bibliography (2017)

1. Kilmarnock (1786)
2. Edinburgh 1: ‘Skinking’ (1787)
3. Edinburgh 2: ‘Stinking’ (1787)
4. Ireland [Belfast & Dublin] (1787)
5. London (1787)

There are also some internal incongruities turned up by the new Bibliography. Some of these are misprints, but others help us say new things about the relationship between editions in a given year. Take the 1798 editions of *Poems* printed in Edinburgh (two volumes) and Philadelphia (two volumes in one) for example. The subtitle for the latter is “From the latest European Edition.” Egerer had speculated that the latter is a reprint of the former.⁹ However, if one compares the contents of both editions, as the new Bibliography allows, several differences can be spotted. Firstly, the footnote for the title of Burns’s “Holy Fair” is retained in the Edinburgh edition but removed in the Philadelphia edition. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the spelling of “Scottish” in Burns’s “Epistle to J. Lapraik, an old Scottish Bard” in the Philadelphia edition to the earlier reading “Scotch.” On a smaller scale, “Loch Turit” (Edinburgh, p. 235) is later misprinted “Loch Turst” (Philadelphia, p. 265). More significantly, the series of epitaphs (“On a Celebrated Ruling Elder,” “On a Noisy Polemic,” “On Wee Johnny,” etc.) are provided *before* “On the Late Captain Grose’s Peregrinations through Scotland” in the Edinburgh edition, whereas they appear last in the run of poems printed in the Philadelphia edition. These sort of differences might seem immaterial at first, but when brought together they often help rebuild the contextual base on which we understand Burnsian print culture. That so many textual variants can be traced in as small a time-frame as 1786-1802 is promising for future research.

As regards the ways in which the new bibliography expands on Egerer, it was helpful first of all, in the name of bibliographical integrity, to consult more copies than Egerer had done of the most important editions. At the time of writing, I have consulted copies of early Burns editions in the following repositories: Glasgow University Library, the Mitchell Library, the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Library, Paisley Library, and the University of South Carolina. To build on the initial AHRC-funded

⁹ Egerer, p.58.

research I will soon consult additional copies in the University of British Columbia,¹⁰ the British Library, and the Bodleian Library. Travel for this second phase of consultation is being funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh.¹¹ The ultimate aim is to go beyond 1802 and push much further into the nineteenth century. And while at present this new bibliography tends to give emphasis to printed editions and chapbooks (as being indicative of the quick proliferation of Burns's work soon after his death), we must also look in due course at periodicals to obtain the fuller print picture. Only with consideration of periodical sources might the new bibliography become fully comprehensive.

For now, the work-in-progress helps us take an important step forward in the development of Burns studies in the twenty-first century. By unpacking Burns's books and print appearances edition-by-edition, text-by-text, appearance-by-appearance, the rich diversity and published development of Burns's oeuvre can be more easily foregrounded, inviting a new generation of readers and researchers to consider his canon in the fullest sense.

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¹⁰ The A. M. Donaldson Collection at the University of British Columbia is often-overlooked, containing many significant items in the early years of Burns print culture, including both editions of *Poems* (Edinburgh: 1787), the London edition (1787) and the Dublin setting of the Irish edition (1787), as well as some important early chapbooks.

¹¹ The ongoing research for "The early editions of Robert Burns, 1786-1802: towards a new descriptive bibliography," based in the Centre for Robert Burns Studies, remains part of the AHRC-funded project "Editing Robert Burns for the Twenty-First Century," but this further specific funding facilitates my travel to these other archives as I conclude this phase of the research.