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Roberts Burns and the Steuart Dinner

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priority for Ayton in any of these "parallels" would be difficult to maintain.

The poetry of William Mure has not been so neglected meantime as Mr. Jack believes. Music of Scotland 1500-1700 (1957, 1964) showed Mure as a lyric poet writing words to match the music of a Scots *air de cour* and a "Hymne" to match an Elizabethan dance-song from England for which his great-uncle had already composed a set of words in courtly Scots, "Melancholie." We know that Mure wrote songs also in another tradition, to match the "native air" or regional dance-song of Scotland—witness his "To the tune of ane new ilk" (1615), "To the tune of Pert Jean" (1615)—possibly for "Purt Jean Lindsay"—and "Ane reply to I cair not quither I get bir or no" (1614). His is the earliest poetry on record to have been thus written to such tunes, except for "Balu" in *The Grude and Godlie Ballatis."

Mure is indeed a competent poet and his place in literary history is worthy of reappraisal, and not only on the lines suggested by Mr. Jack's study of parallels with Vaughan. He is also interesting as a songwriter, of the first generation to write courtly lyrics after the departure of the court from Scotland in 1603. A discussion of the poet on this second count is attempted in my Song, Dance and Poetry of the Court of Scotland under King James VI to appear shortly from the Cambridge University Press.

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In early December, 1787, Robert Burns injured his knee so badly that he was unable to leave his room at William Cruikshank's, 2 St. James Square, Edinburgh, for several weeks; and he could get about only with difficulty thereafter until mid-February. This was the period of his famous correspondence with Clarinda, in which he dates his letters

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merely "Wednesday noon," or "Thursday evening," or "Saturday Morning." It is usually easy, however, to assign a specific date to a letter from internal evidence, or by consulting a calendar for December, 1787, or January and February, 1788, but the traditional date of January 3, 1788 for one letter seems questionable. This date was assigned in 1843 by the first editor of the correspondence, Clarinda's grandson W. C. M'Lehose, and it is of interest chiefly as it relates to Burns' disputed attendance at a dinner in honor of the Pretender, given on Monday, December 31, 1787.

Burns accepted an invitation to this dinner in a letter of Wednesday, December 26, 1787, to the host, James Steuart, of Cleland's Gardens, adjacent to St. James Square. He writes to Steuart, "Monday next is a day of the year with me hallowed as the ceremonies of Religion and sacred to the memory of the sufferings of my King and my Forefathers. The honor you do me by your invitation, I must cordially & gratefully accept." But in view of the letter to Clarinda mentioned above, it has generally been held that Burns was unable to attend the Steuart dinner. He writes to Clarinda, "Monday, for the first time, I dine at a neighbour's next door." Assuming the letter to have been written January 3, 1787, a Thursday, the "Monday" spoken of would be January 7, and hence Burns' first venture out would have been a week later than the celebration of the Pretender's birthday. But if M'Lehose erred in determining the date, and if the letter had actually been written earlier, then the "Monday" of the Clarinda letter and the "Monday next" of the letter to Steuart would almost certainly be the same day, and the day of the dinner. An examination of the Burns-Clarinda correspondence seems to make practically certain that an earlier date should be assigned to the letter in question.

That letter, numbered XI by M'Lehose, opens, "My dear Clarinda,—Your last verses have so delighted me, that I have copied them in among some of my most valued pieces." But these verses seem not to have been the song beginning "Talk Not of Love!" from M'Lehose's Letter X (Clarinda to Burns), and dated "Thursday Jan. 3rd 1788," because Burns discusses "Talk Not of Love!" at length and with emendations in Letter XII, dated by M'Lehose January 4. The "verses" referred to in

2 Ferguson, letter No. 165; also facsimile, Burns Chronicle, 3rd Series, II (1953), facing p. 42.
3 It was the Pretender's birthday.
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Letter XI, therefore, must be from Letter VIII (Clarinda to Burns), dated "Monday Evening" [December 21], eleven lines beginning, "The morning sun shines glorious and bright." If so, Letter XI (Burns to Clarinda) should follow letter VIII, with a date of December 26, or within a few days after. And Letter XI should be followed in turn by Letter IX (Clarinda to Burns), which has a New Year greeting and was obviously written on New Year's Day, 1788. Letter X (Clarinda to Burns), which includes "Talk Not of Love!" and which refers to the song beginning "The Patriarch to gain a wife," from Letter VI (Burns to Clarinda), would then naturally follow Letter XI, and Letter XII (Burns to Clarinda), would follow Letter X.

The dating of Letter XI within a few days after December 25 is suggested by Clarinda's report in Letter VIII (December 21) that she is going to the country the next day, December 22, and will not be back until December 25. The "Friday" [December 21] date of Letter VIII is determined by the "Friday Evening" [December 21] date of Letter VII from Burns, to which Clarinda replied the same night, writing late that she might finish before she left the next day.

To determine whether the argument outlined above is persuasive, one must read the complete correspondence of December, 1787, and early January, 1788. If the argument is persuasive, then the letters should be ordered VIII, IX, XI, X, XII, and Letter XI should be assigned a new date, December 26 or a little later. If this is done, then Letter XI will seem to confirm and not deny that Burns attended the Steuart dinner.

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