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ROBERT BURNS,

THE BURNS CULT

AND

SCOTTISH POPULAR CULTURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two hundred years Robert Burns has been regarded as Scotland's national poet, and his name has become well-known inside as well as outside the Scottish border. His works have been translated into many languages and commemorations of his birthday still take place every year in the most diverse parts of the world. Burns Suppers, where poems and songs by the poet are recited and sung to accompany the traditional menu of "haggis, neeps and tatties", are popular at all levels of society and celebrated throughout the country as well as abroad. However, the majority of Scottish people are familiar with little more than the poet's name. They hardly know any more than a couple of his songs and often find it difficult to understand his poems and songs written in Scots.

Completely opposed attitudes to the poet can be found within twentieth-century Scottish society. He is sometimes admired as the country's greatest poet, sometimes despised as a boring recurrent icon of Scotland's history. But regardless of the different perceptions of the poet, only a small number of Burns's admirers or detractors are truly familiar with his work, and find themselves in a position to judge or analyse his contribution to Scottish literature.

Undoubtedly, Robert Burns has played a relevant role in Scotland's popular culture. His work as a collector, transformer, and writer of folksongs, together with his collaboration in the collections of Scottish folksongs published by James Johnson and George Thomson, had an influence on the Scottish folk scene. The publication of the songs made them available to a larger audience that sometimes did not have access to the songs in the oral tradition, but also contributed to the establishment of fixed versions of the songs. These no longer followed the natural development of those transmitted mainly through oral channels. Even if most of Scotland's folksongs went into print at some point in their history, and both written and oral transmission have often played a role in their development, the popularity of their author made the songs of Robert Burns undergo a different evolution. Despite being the product of Scotland's most famous poet, their popularity does not seem to correspond with that

of their author.

Robert Burns, who was already well-known as a poet within certain literary and upper-class circles during his lifetime, achieved a greater popularity soon after his death in 1796. During the nineteenth century the publication of several editions of his works and numerous biographies, often based on unsupported facts, contributed to create a legend about his figure, which soon became moulded and remoulded until he was turned into a myth, a gifted illiterate peasant inspired by a heavenly muse. His figure was acclaimed as the greatest Scottish poet, and celebrations in his honour soon started taking place every year.

The poet became a myth to Lowland Scots, and soon his renown figure overshadowed his works. These were given the most diverse interpretations and Burns was adopted by various social groups to represent their own ideologies, even those with the most opposite positions. It was mainly the middle classes that adopted the poet and cherished his name. They presented Burns as the representative of a nation which at the time was successfully taking part, together with England, in the creation of the British Empire. Thus Burns became the symbol of a nation engaged in an imperialist enterprise, and came to incarnate the pride of those members of society, mainly the middle and upper classes, at the head of the military campaign.

Burns not only represented Scottish identity within imperialist Britain, but the universal messages of his poems, in defence of human liberty and egalitarianism, made him popular among other sectors of society, thus contributing to the expansion of the myth. This led him to be perceived as a unique writer, different from all the others Scotland had hitherto produced.

The overwhelming popularity of the myth soon diverted attention from his works, which were left in a secondary position. Only a few of his poems and songs were still widely known, and were repeated again and again in all the celebrations of the poet.

Traditional music was still very fashionable during the nineteenth century.

Romanticism had aroused interest in the nation's rural life and customs, and folksongs were closely identified with that traditional way of life, considered to be closer to the country's origins. However, European musical tendencies had an influence on traditional music. The country's folk tradition was used as an inspiration for new compositions, and folk pieces were arranged and adapted to non-traditional instruments and trained voices, in order to be performed in high society's drawing-rooms and public concerts. Therefore, the songs of Robert Burns were transformed and separated from the folk tradition they were linked to. Even if some of his songs may still have been transmitted, orally or with the help of the written text, in their more traditional versions, Burns's songs soon became identified with the polite world of upper and middle class entertainment.

In the twentieth century a change in the perception of the poet took place. At the beginning of the century Burns was perceived as the greatest Scottish poet, according to the image the cult around his figure had created in the previous century. Since Burns's death Scottish literature had been highly influenced by the poet. Writers of the so called "kailyard school" such as S.R. Crockett, James Barrie or Ian Maclaren, tried to recover an idealized rural past based on Burns's and Walter Scott's representation of the country. Under their influence many later works tended to look back to a sentimentalized rural world, similar to the one depicted in Burns's works.

After the end of World War I Scotland produced a series of writers who tried to put an end to the literary current followed by Scottish letters since the late eighteenth century. Authors of the Scottish Renaissance Movement saw the need for taking literature along a different path. Amongst those writers, Hugh MacDiarmid fiercely fought against the Burns cult, still strong in the first part of the twentieth century. He considered that the cult was focusing all literary attention on Burns, thus preventing any further evolution of Scottish letters, not allowing it to develop and become a distinctive European literature.

MacDiarmid's attacks on Burns and his cult continued throughout his life. Even if they did not succeed in putting an end to it, he contributed to the desmytification of

the poet. MacDiarmid questioned Burns's position as Scotland's national poet, the literary value of his work, as well as the scarce contribution of the cult to the diffusion of Burns's work or the development of Scotland's language and literature in general. The Burns cult continued in the twentieth century, but Burns was no longer the legend he had hitherto become, and started being regarded merely as one of Scotland's poets. This encouraged a more serious approach to his figure and the study of his work.

However, the Burns cult went on and by the time of the Scottish Folk Revival during the 1950s and 60s, the poet's image was still closely related to it. He had stopped being a myth of Scottish letters, but his figure still maintained many of the connotations it had acquired in the nineteenth century. He was considered the poet of the higher classes, and his songs were still identified with the drawing-room and concert performances they had been arranged for. Whenever the songs were taught in schools, it was with the nineteenth-century arrangements, or as mere poems in the literature class.

Therefore, despite his relationship with Scotland's folk tradition, Robert Burns was not considered to be part of the country's popular culture. In the early years of the revival his songs could not be heard in the folk clubs and festivals that spread all over the country. However, as the interest in popular tradition increased, many artists turned to Burns's songs. Nineteenth-century arrangements were rejected in favour of the original tunes. Thus Burns's original songs were rediscovered. They were introduced into many folksingers' repertoires and began to be performed in the revival events, as part of the popular tradition of Scotland.

The folk revival brought Burns's songs back into the world of traditional music. His songs were accepted as traditional pieces and were soon included in many folksingers' repertoires, folk records and concerts. However, their evolution has been different from that of other Scottish traditional pieces. Even if all the songs Burns contributed to publish have survived in print, only a few of them are commonly known by the public.

Twentieth-century movements, such as the Scottish Renaissance and the folk revival helped to change the image of the poet created in the nineteenth century. They tried to divest him of all the connotations attached to his figure and present him merely as an author who was interested in his country's folk tradition and worked to guarantee its continuance.

However, the use of Burns's figure as well as his songs to defend certain ideologies and represent Scotland within the British Empire has thoroughly affected the perception of the poet in the late twentieth century. The Burns cult is still active amongst certain sectors of society in Scotland as well as abroad, working to keep the poet's memory alive. He is still regarded as Scotland's own patrimony and used as a symbol of the nation. In a time when national identity issues are being newly raised and the country is looking for elements to define itself, Burns's figure is still useful, and now his image has also been adopted by the Scottish Tourist Board as one of the country's symbols.

This has supported Burns's popularity while creating an opposite reaction from those who reject this stereotyped image of Scotland. Nowadays there is a more serious approach to Burns the poet, his poems and songs. However, he is still regarded as a recurrent symbol by the majority of Scottish society, who feel no interest in his literary work, unless it is used to emphasize its Scottish origin and the way it can represent Scotland.

The continuous use of Robert Burns since his death has led to the creation of many prejudices concerning his figure which have affected the way his songs have been taken by the public. Despite the later changes in the approach to the poet and his songs, these are irremediably linked to his figure, and can often be cherished or rejected by people who are not even familiar with them.

Do the songs of Robert Burns, inspired by or directly based on eighteenth-century folksongs, still have a place in Scotland's folk culture? And if so, what is their position within Scotland's popular tradition? To what extent have they influenced the

development of Scottish folksong? What effect has Burns's own popularity had on his songs? Only the analysis of the treatment of Burns during the last two centuries can provide an explanation for the position of his songs in late twentieth-century Scotland.

2. ROBERT BURNS AND FOLK SONG

Robert Burns's contribution to Scottish popular tradition is the result of his work as collector, reviser and writer of folksongs, which gradually became the most important aspect of his literary production. The position of Robert Burns in relation to Scotland's folk literature is a very controversial one. Throughout his life, and especially during his later years, the poet took a great interest in folksong. In the eighteenth century there was an increasing interest in folksongs and ballads, which spread a singing tradition equally popular among all social classes. Attention was turned to the works of the past, in order to gather the remainings of older times and recover the features that would help redefine the country's own identity.

After the union of England and Scotland with the "Act of Union" of 1707, Scotland tried to present itself as a different country with its own history and traditions. In order to recreate its own historical past, the nation's old achievements should be recovered. This vogue, called "Antiquarianism"[1], led to the revival of Scottish vernacular literature, and the publication of many collections of Scottish poems, songs and ballads.

Allan Ramsay's anthology of Scottish songs *The Tea-Table Miscellany*, published in four volumes between 1723 and 1737, brought Scottish song back into fashion, and by

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[1] "Antiquarianism" was an approach to the study of history which was developed during the Renaissance, even if its origins can be traced back to the activities of the medieval monks. The antiquary employed not only written records such as chronicles, but relied greatly on coins, relics, ruins, and other non-literary sources of information, and was less concerned with historical causes or personalities. Non-literary objects were used to check the literary remains of older times.
By the mid-seventeenth century in Britain the term developed more connotations and became widely used. It was applied to the searching of ancient manuscripts, to Anglo-Saxon studies, to studies of the Roman occupation, of genealogic and heraldic topics, etc.
According to Arnaldo Momigliamo, historians produce facts to illustrate or explain a given situation, whereas antiquaries collect all the items related to a certain topic, regardless of whether these help to provide an explanation or not.
Mendyk, Stan; *"Speculum Britanniae"*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989, p.8-10.

1792 eighteen editions of the book had been published. The collection included traditional folksongs and new lyrics written or commissioned by himself, some of them written for traditional tunes. Ramsay also published some pretended Scots songs from Tom D'Urfey's collection *Wit and Mirth: or Pills to Purge Melancholy*, first published in 1682, and whose final edition appeared in 1719-20. D'Urfey had included songs in fake Scots, which contributed to make Scottish song popular.

The first Scottish song collection that included words and music was *Orpheus Caledonius: A Collection of Scots Songs. Set to Musick*, by William Thomson, a professional singer of Scottish descent based in London, who supplied many of Ramsay's songs with music. The book first appeared in 1725, with an expanded edition in 1733.

During the eighteenth century many other collections such as Allan Ramsay's *The Ever Green* (1724), Adam Craig's *A Collection of the Choicest Scottish Tunes* (1730) or Robert Bremmer's *Thirty Scots Songs for Voice and Harpsichord* (1753) were published, thus reviving a taste for Scottish literary works. Any song with some Scots features, whether authentic or not, was considered a "Scotch" song.

The popularity of Scottish folksong continued throughout the eighteenth century and had a definite influence on the poet. His youth coincided with the publication of new collections such as David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.*, which first appeared in one volume in 1769 and later in1776 in two volumes. Herd made use of many of the songs and ballads which had appeared in Ramsay's works, especially in the *Tea-Table Miscellany*. However, Herd gave no references to the sources of the contents of his collection, no names of authors nor any other information regarding their probable date, etc., which has made it very difficult to determine the authorship of some of the songs. Not only the publication of many collections of folksongs, including *The Charmer*, *The Nightingale* and *The Lark,* but also his rural background aroused Burns's interest in popular culture.

2.1 EARLY CONTACTS WITH POPULAR CULTURE

During his childhood Robert Burns became familiar with Scottish popular traditions and literature. In his autobiographical letter to John Moore in August 1787 Burns mentions one of his first contacts with that tradition, through a cousin of his mother's called Betty Davidson, a superstitious old woman who lodged with them in Alloway, in return for some help and work in the house:

> I owed much to an old Maid of my Mother's, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition.- She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, inchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery.[2]

Through Betty Davidson, his own mother and the songs of ploughmen and women at work and leisure, Burns got to know Ayrshire popular songs and traditions, and began to write folksongs himself. In his letter to John Moore Burns claims to have written his first song at the age of fifteen for a girl called Nelly Kilpatrick. They worked together on the land and the song is set to a tune she used to sing:

> Among her other love-inspiring qualifications, she sung sweetly; and 'twas her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme.- I was not so presumtive [sic] as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he, for excepting smearing sheep and casting peats, his father living in the moors, he had no more Scholarcraft than I had.-
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> Thus with me began Love and Poesy; which at times have been my only, and till within this last twelvemonth have been my highest enjoyment.-[3]

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[2] De Lancey Ferguson, J. (ed); *The Letters of Robert Burns.* Vol.I, 1780-1789, Oxford, Clarendon, 1985. Letter 125, p.135.

[3] ibid., L. 125, p.137-8.

Music was present in Ayrshire's daily life, circulating orally and in written form. From the early sixteenth century folksongs and ballads were distributed in Britain in broadside form. They appeared at first on single unfolded broadsheets of paper, and later on in different formats, such as pamphlets of 8-16 pages called "chapbooks", or small collections of songs and ballads called "garlands". In the countryside or small towns they were sung by ballad singers, who tried to sell their broadsheets at fairs and markets, whereas in the cities broadsides could be bought from street singers and at small shops and stalls. Traditional folksongs tended to find their way into print, whereas songs coming from printed sources sometimes became very popular and were learned by heart.

Among his childhood books, Burns mentions a collection of songs that he especially cared for:

> My knowledge of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's and Guthrie's geographical grammars; my knowledge of modern manners, and of literature and criticism, I got from the Spectator.- These, with Pope's works, some plays of Shakespear, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, the Pantheon, Locke's Essay on the human understanding, Stackhouse's history of the bible, Justice's British Gardiner's directory, Boyle's lectures, Allan Ramsay's works, Taylor's scripture doctrine of original sin, a select Collection of English songs, and Hervey's meditations had been the extent of my reading.- The Collection of Songs was my vade mecum.- I pored over them, driving my cart or walking to labor, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true tender or sublime from affectation and fustian.[4]

There are several opinions regarding the "Collection of English songs" owned by Burns. In a footnote to his edition of the poet's letters, De Lancey Ferguson points out that Burns might have meant Robert Dodsley's *Collection of Poems* (1758), as Joseph Ritson's *Select Collection of English Songs* was not published until 1783. Donald A. Low, however, suggests that the collection mentioned can possibly be *The Lark:*

[4] ibid., L 125, p.138-9.

Being a Select Collection of the Most Celebrated and Newest Songs, Scots and English, published in Edinburgh in 1765.[5]

Burns extended his collection gathering the songs he could find in Ayrshire daily life, and he continued writing songs himself. According to Donald Low[6] Burns had written more than thirty songs by the time of the publication of his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* in July 1786, even if the Kilmarnock edition only includes three songs: "It was upon a Lammas night", "Now westlin winds, and slaught'ring guns" and "From thee, Eliza, I must go." In the Edinburgh edition of the poems, published in April 1787, he added seven more songs: "There was three kings into the east", "When Guilford good our pilot stood" (A fragment), "Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows", "Green grow the rashes, O", "Again rejoicing Nature sees", "The gloomy night is gath'ring fast" and "No Churchman I for to rail and to write."

2.2 THE SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM

During his first visit to Edinburgh in the winter of 1786 to arrange everything for the publication of the second edition of his poems and try to get a position in the Excise, Burns became acquainted with some of his antiquarian contemporaries. Like them, he also saw the need for collecting and making known the native oral tradition of Scotland. He was mainly interested in Scots songs, and he often used Scots fiddle popular tunes and wrote lyrics for them. During the seventeenth century the traditional Scottish fiddle had gradually been replaced by the Italian violin. Scots fiddle pieces continued to be transmitted and performed from memory, but players increasingly began to learn how to play the fahionable European concert music and English country dances, and written copies of the pieces started to circulate among the players.

Throughout the eighteenth century there was an intense musical activity in Edinburgh, which included regular concerts and recitals by professional singers, private musical

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[5] Low, Donald A. (ed); *The Songs of Robert Burns*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.4.

[6] ibid., p.1.

evenings as well as tavern singsongs. After the Act of Union Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland, had become a provincial town. The loss of political power made the city try to shine out in the cultural aspect. The "Scots drawing room" style was created by some Edinburgh composers, who adapted traditional Scots tunes to Europe's art music fashion of the time.

Burns was introduced to upper-class society by important citizens with Ayrshire connections such as the Earl of Glencairn[7] and Professor Dugald Stewart[8], and soon became a fashionable figure in aristocratic circles. On 30 December Mrs. Alison Cockburn, the wife of the Edinburgh advocate Patrick Cockburn, wrote to a friend:

> The town is at present agog with the ploughman poet, who receives adulation with native dignity, and is the very figure of his profession, strong and coarse, but he has a most enthusiastic heart of LOVE. He has seen Duchess Gordon and all the gay world...The man will be spoiled, if he can spoil; but he keeps his simple manners, and is quite sober. No doubt he will be at the Hunters' Ball tomorrow, which has made all women and milliners mad.[9]

In April 1787 Burns met James Johnson (c1750-1811) in a tavern in Anchor Close, at a meeting of the Crochallan Fencibles, one of the Edinburgh drinking clubs. Johnson was a music publisher, working on a collection of Scots songs called *The Scots*

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[7] Cunningham, James, fourteenth Earl of Glencairn (1749-91): Second son of the 13th Earl, he succeeded his father as 14th Earl in 1775, due to the death of his elder brother. From 1780-84 he was one of the Representative Scots Peers in the House of Lords.
When Burns arrived in Edinburgh in 1786 with a letter of introduction from Dalrymple of Orangefield, married to Lady Glencairn's sister, the Earl received the poet in his home and introduced him to his friends, among them the publisher William Creech and the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, Henry Erskine, who in turn introduced Burns to the Duchess of Gordon.

[8] Stewart, Dugald, Professor (1753-1828): A metaphysician who succeeded his father as Chair of Mathematics in the University of Edinburgh. In 1785 he exchanged his Chair for that of Moral Philosophy. Impressed by Burns's genius, having received a copy of the Kilmarnock edition from Dr.Mackenzie of Mauchline, Prof. Stewart got in contact with Burns and invited him to dinner. During Burn's stay in Edinburgh the following winter, he attended the poet and gave him hospitality.

[9] Low, p.11.

Musical Museum. Burns agreed to provide him with songs for his collection. Some of the old versions of the songs were not altered, but the poet often changed the lyrics of some of them, wrote new words for uncompleted traditional lines and stanzas or created completely new songs for popular airs and dance tunes, which are not known to have had words to them before then.

Burns's enthusiasm for the project is reflected in his letter to the Reverend John Skinner[10] on 25 October 1787:

> An Engraver in this town has set about collecting and publishing all the Scotch Songs, with the Music, that can found.[sic] Songs in the English language, if by Scotchmen, are admitted; but the Music must all be Scotch. Drs Beattie and Blacklock are lending a hand, and the first musician in town presides over that department. I have been absolutely crazed about it, collecting old stanzas, and every information remaining, respecting their origin, authors, &c.[11]

Drs. Beattie[12] and Blacklock[13], Mr. Tytler[14] and Woodhouselee[15] contributed to the

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[10] Skinner, John, Rev. (1721-1807): He took orders in the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1742, spent two years in Shetland as preceptor in the family of the Sinclairs of Scalloway and then ministered at Longside, Aberdeen, for the rest of his life. He was the author of an *Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* and many other theological works, as well as some Scots songs.

He wrote to Burns a long verse epistle and the poet answered on prose, asking him to send any songs that could be included in the *Museum*, and telling that the Reverend's songs "Tullochgorum", "John o' Badenyon" and "Ewie wi' the crookit horn" would appear in the 2nd volume, a copy of which Burns sent to him on 14 February 1788.

[11] Ferguson, Vol. I, Letter 147, p.168.

[12] Beattie, James (1735-1803): Professor of Moral Philosophy in Marischal College. In 1760 he published his *Original Poems and Translations* and he achieved his literary fame with "The Minstrel", a poem published in two parts in 1771 and 1774. He also published his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism,* against Hume's doctrines.

Beattie contributed to the publication of Thomson's *Collection.*

[13] Blacklock, Thomas (1721-91): Blind minor poet who studied divinity at Edinburgh and was ordained minister of Kirkcudbright in 1762, but was forced to retire to Edinburgh due to his blindness.

A letter from Dr.Blacklock on 4 September 1786 encouraged Burns to attempt a new edition of his poems in Edinburgh and abandon the idea of emigrating to Jamaica. Both poets met in Edinburgh and

collecting of old songs. The "first musician in town" in charge of the musical arrangements of the airs was Stephen Clarke (1744-97), organist in the Episcopal Chapel of Edinburgh in the Cowgate. Clarke followed the ideal of simplicity shared by Burns and Johnson, who considered unaccompanied or simply accompanied singing to be the most appropriate for Scots traditional songs.

The first volume of the *Scots Musical Museum* was nearly ready by the time Johnson and Burns met. It was published in 1787 and only contained two songs by the poet: "Green grow the rashes, O" and "Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass."

The second volume appeared in 1788 containing a hundred songs, 40 of them by Burns. In the Preface the poet expressed his admiration for the simplicity of popular traditional pieces:

> Ignorance and Prejudice may perhaps affect to sneer at the simplicity of the poetry or music of some of these pieces, but their having been for ages the favourites of Nature's Judges - the Common People, was to the Editor a sufficient test of their merit.[16]

Burns supplied about half of the hundred songs contained in both the third and the

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Blacklock contributed ten songs to the *Scots Musical Museum*, at least four of them matched to airs composed by himself. He also published books of poems in 1746, 1754 and 1756, an *Essay towards Universal Etymology* and some theological papers.

[14] Tytler, James (1747-1805): Son of the Rev. George Tytler, he studied medicine but never put it into practice. For some years he edited the second and third editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and helped in the compilation of the songs for the *Scots Musical Museum*, contributing several songs to the collection himself.

[15] Tytler of Woodhouselee, William (1711-92): He helped Johnson with the first volumes of the *Museum* and also helped Burns to collect the verses for later volumes. A historian and antiquary, he is well-known for *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence...against Mary Queen of Scots*, and editing the *PoeticalRemains of James I of Scotland.*

Tytler was a Jacobite and a supporter of Scottish music, and he also encouraged George Thomson to begin his collection.

[16] Daiches, David; *Robert Burns: The Poet*, Edinburgh, The Saltire Society, 1994, p.318-19.

fourth volumes, published in 1790 and 1792, and gradually got more and more involved in the project until he became the virtual editor of the collection. The fifth volume, to whose publication Burns also contributed, was published in 1796, after the poet's death. The sixth and final volume did not appear until seven years later.

Burns was not interested in making the extent of his contribution to the *Museum* known to the public. He considered that the songs belonged to Scottish popular tradition and preferred to remain anonymous. In the index to the third and fourth volumes of the collection he is cited as the author of six of the songs; 15 songs are attributed to him in the fifth volume, and 26 in the last one. In the posthumous volumes, the poet figured as the author of more songs than in the volumes published during his life.

2.3 TOURS OF THE BORDERS AND THE HIGHLANDS

Burns took new songs for the *Museum* from the singing of country people. Even if he was already familiar with Scottish folksong due to his rural origin, he had the opportunity to collect many songs and tunes during his tours of Scotland. From 5 May to 1 June 1787 he made a tour of the Borders with his friend Robert Ainslie (1766-1838), a law student, son of the land-steward of Lord Douglas's Berwickshire estates. One of the main reasons that led the poet to make his tours was his desire to know the country that inspired his songs and poetry. In a letter to his correspondent Mrs. Frances Anna Wallace Dunlop of Dunlop[17] on 22 March 1787 he said it to be his "dearer aim":

> Scottish scenes, and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. - I have

[17] Dunlop, Frances Anna Wallace (1730-1815): The eldest daughter of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie. Having read "The Cotter's Saturday Night" she sent a letter to Burns asking for half a dozen copies of his *Poems* and inviting him to visit Dunlop House. This was the beginning of a correspondence between them which lasted nearly until the end of the poet's life.
She gave a copy of Burns's *Poems* to Dr.John Moore, to whom the poet later sent his Autobiographical letter.

> no greater, no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagu'd with the routine of business, for which Heaven knows I am unfit enough, to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately tower or venerable ruins, once the honored abodes of her heroes.[18]

The poet felt the need for visiting the main sites of Scottish history before going back to Mauchline to become a farmer. For his tour he bought a mare he named "Jenny Geddes", after a woman who was said to have thrown a stool at the Bishop of Edinburgh on 23 August 1637 in St.Giles Cathedral, as he tried to impose the use of *The Book of Common Prayer* on the authority of Charles I in the Scottish Church.

The tour gave him the opportunity to discover that part of Scotland, whose standard of living at the time was much better than that of Argyllshire and the north and west, and increased his interest in Scots language and folksong.

In the middle of June 1787, soon after his return to Mauchline from his Border tour, Burns left again for the West Highlands, this time on his own. Many reasons for this tour have been given. Raymond Lamont Brown suggests that Burns may have made the trip in order to collect subscriptions due to him, or as a result of a "guilty conscience" after the death in childbirth of Mary Campbell[19], as hinted by Dr.F.B.Snyder and Catherine Carswell in their biographies of the poet, published in 1932 and 1930. However, there is no proof that Burns visited Mary Campbell's grave or her mother during his trip.[20]

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[18] Ferguson. Vol. I, L. 90, p.101.

[19] Campbell, Mary (1763-86): She went to Ayrshire and became a nursemaid in Gavin Hamilton's house in Mauchline. From there she moved to Coilsfield, where she worked as a dairymaid. The details of her relationship with the poet are not very clear, but he may have asked her to go with him to Jamaica. She died at Greenock from a fever, according to Burns, or as a result of premature childbirth. When her grave was opened in 1920, due to industrial expansion, the bottom board of a child's coffin was found.

[20] Lamont Brown, Raymond (ed.); *Robert Burns's Tour of the Highlands and Stirlingshire*, Ipswich, Boydell Press, 1973, p.5.

The poet went back to Mauchline on 2 July 1787 after having visited Glasgow, Tarbet, Inverary, Arrochar, Dumbarton and Paisley. There he continued his relationship with his future wife Jean Armour (1767-1834).

On 25 August he set out on a new tour of the central Highlands with his friend William Nicol (1744-97), a classic master at the High School at Edinburgh. Nicol had a bad reputation among the upper-class Edinburgh literati, and sometimes embarrassed his travel companion during their visits. He made Burns haste more than the poet would have wished, and Burns expressed his anger towards Nicol in his letter to James Hogg (1770-1835) of 20 October 1787, after Nicol forced him to leave Fochabers in a hurry and refuse an invitation to Castle Gordon:

> I shall certainly, among my legacies, leave my latest curse to that unlucky predicament which hurried me, tore me away from Castle Gordon.- May that obstinate Son of Latin Prose be curst to Scotch-mile periods, and damn'd to seven-league paragraphs; while Declension & Conjugation, Gender, Number and Time, under the ragged banners of Dissonance and Disarrangement eternally rank against him in hostile array!!!!!![21]

His fame as a poet preceded Burns during his trips and he was often invited by many aristocratic families who wanted to enjoy the company of the famous bard. Thus he had the opportunity of meeting Scotland's gentry and other influential figures of the time. On 31 August Burns visited the Scots fiddle composer Neil Gow (1727-1807) whom he described in his journal of the tour as "- a short, stout-built, honest highland figure, with his grayish hair shed on his honest social brow - an interesting face, marking strong sense, kind open-heartedness mixed with unmistrusting simplicity."[22]

Burns took some of Gow's dancing fiddle tunes as airs for his songs. In Aberdeen he met the Reverend John Skinner (1744-1816), primus of the Episcopal Church and the

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[21] Ferguson, Vol. I, L. 145, p.163.

[22] Brown, *Tour of the Highlands*, p.19.

son of the Rev. John Skinner, author of the song "Tullochgorum", described by Burns as "the best Scotch Song ever Scotland saw."[23] John Skinner gave an account of Burns's visit in a letter to his father:

> Our time was short, as he was just setting off for the south and his companion hurrying him; but we had fifty 'auld sangs' through hand, and spent an hour or so most agreeably. (...) He was collecting on his tour the 'auld Scots sangs' he had not before heard of, and likewise the tunes that he might get them set to music.[24]

Burns had composed one of his songs based on "Ewie wi' the crookit horn", written by Skinner's father. The mutual admiration of the authors started after this visit a brief friendly correspondence between them.

Burns continued writing and collecting Scots songs and airs during the tours. He visited the sites where the main events of Scotland's history had taken place, which encouraged his patriotic feelings and led him to write "Robert Bruce's Address to his Army at Bannockburn", "Macpherson's Farewell" or the famous "Scots wha hae". He also found in his trips the inspiration for the subjects of many other songs such as "The Banks of the Devon", "Allan Water", on the river Allan, "Castle Gordon" or "The Birks of Aberfeldy", and picked up the words and tunes of traditional songs that he reworked afterwards. He continued his visits to the gentry, always aware of the fact that he belonged to an inferior social class, and that his art was the only reason why his presence was required in the upper-class gatherings. The tutor of the Duke of Atholl's son, Josiah Walker (1761-1831) gave his impression of the poet, to whom he had been introduced in Edinburgh by Dr. Thomas Blacklock:

> His manner was unembarrassed, plain, and firm. He appeared to have complete reliance on his own native good sense for directing his behaviour. He seemed at once to perceive and to appreciate what was due to the company and to himself,

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[23] ibid., p.46.

[24] ibid., p.26.

> and never to forget a proper respect for the separate species of dignity belonging to each. He did not arrogate conversation, but, when led into it, he spoke with ease, propriety, and manliness. He tried to exert his abilities, because he knew it was ability alone gave him a title to be there.[25]

Only two weeks after his return to Edinburgh about 4 October 1787 Burns set out on another trip. This time his companion was Dr. James McKittrick Adair (1765-1802), son of an Ayr doctor and a relative of Burns's correspondent Mrs. Frances Anna Dunlop. Even if Burns did not keep a journal, Dr. Adair gave an account of the trip to Dr. James Currie, the poet's first biographer.

In 1788 Burns moved to Ellisland intending to become a farmer, but poor farming made him decide to work full-time as an Excise officer, collecting taxes and trying to prevent the smuggling of goods in the Dumfries-shire region. The job forced him to ride over two hundred miles a week and in 1791 he moved from Ellisland to Dumfries.

2.4 A SELECT COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL SCOTTISH AIRS

In September of the following year Burns was invited to contribute to George Thomson's publication of *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs.* Thomson (1757-1851) was a senior clerk to the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Art and Manufacture in Scotland, a body set up to promote Scottish trade with money given by the Parliament, in compensation for Scotland's assumption of a part of England's national debt after the Union. Thomson played in the orchestra of the St. Cecilia concerts held in Niddry's Wynd, Edinburgh, and enjoyed the polite versions of Scots songs performed by foreign singers, such as the castrati Tenducci, when they visited Scotland. The cultivated singing of Pietro Urbani gave Thomson the idea to match Scots songs to accompaniments of leading musicians of the time, and he decided to make a collection of Scottish songs and obtain accompaniments for them from the best European composers. Pleyel and Kozeluch were at first in charge of the

[25] ibid., p.27.

musical arrangements for the songs, but these were later replaced by Haydn's and Beethoven's versions.

Burns was eager to help Thomson. In his letter of 16 September 1792 accepting the invitation, he made it clear that he would not accept any money for his contribution:

> As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of Enthusiasm.- Only, don't hurry me: 'Deil tak the hindmost' is by no means the Crie [sic] de guerre of my Muse. Will you, as I am inferiour to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the Poetry & Music of old Caledonia, &, since you request it, have chearfully promised my mite of assistance, will you let me have a list of your airs with the first line of the verses you intend for them, that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me - you know 'tis in the way of my trade - still leaving you, Gentlemen, the undoubted right of Publishers, to approve, or reject, at your pleasure in your own Publication? - I say, the first line of the verses, because if they are verses that have appeared in any of our collections of songs, I know them & can have recourse to them. Apropos, if you are for *English* verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter.- Whether in the simplicity of *the Ballad*, or the pathos of *the Song*, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue (...) As to any remuneration, you may think my Songs either *above*, or *below* price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other.- In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c. would be downright Sodomy of Soul! A proof of each of the Songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favor.- In the rustic phrase of the Season, 'Gude speed the wark!'[26]

Burns intended to use his native tongue in the songs, but in his letter he also allowed Thomson the right to reject his work. The poet believed that the Scots language was an inherent characteristic of Scots song. However Thomson did not share his point of

[26] Ferguson, Vol. II, L. 507, p.148-50.

view. The publisher intended to anglicize the songs, making them suitable for the Edinburgh and London drawing-room performances. He not only asked the poet to supply him with Scottish folksongs, but also to rewrite some of the lyrics in order to eliminate some bawdy elements and Scotticisms, replacing them by more sentimental words and subjects. Thomson intended to present a "purified" selection of popular songs, and although Burns did not agree with this practice and tried to keep the original spirit and language of the songs, he often rewrote some of them in order to please Thomson.

The first set of the *Select Collection* was published in June 1793 containing 25 songs, six of them contributed by Burns. By the time of his death Burns had supplied Thomson with more than a hundred songs, but Thomson adapted the words or changed the tunes they were set to, according to his own criteria. The remaining four volumes of the collection were published after Burns's death.

Due to his work as a collector, reviser and publisher of popular songs, Burns took Scottish folk songs away from the popular tradition to the libraries and drawing-rooms of cultivated society. Like many other literate men of his time he thought it was necessary to preserve and make known Scottish vernacular literature, but he did not intend to turn it into a more "sophisticated" tradition. In April 1793 he wrote to Thomson:

> Give me leave to criticise your taste in the only thing in which it is in my opinion reprehensible: (you know I ought to know something of my own trade) of pathos, Sentiment and Point, you are a compleat judge; but there is a quality more necessary than either, in a song, & which is the very essence of a Ballad, I mean Simplicity.[27]

2.5 THE MERRY MUSES OF CALEDONIA

Burns was interested in maintaining the "native features" of Scottish songs. However,

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[27] ibid., L. 554, p.196.

his work was not merely that of an antiquarian. He also intended to make Scotland's popular tradition known to the public. Together with his writings and revisions for Johnson's and Thomson's collections, he also compiled a series of traditional bawdy songs in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. The "purified" versions of some of the songs appeared in the other two collections. Burns had begun collecting popular bawdy songs at least in 1786, before he met James Johnson. Most of the poems in *The Merry Muses* were traditional or based on traditional pieces, and some of them were written by Burns himself. They were considered male songs, therefore unsuitable for publication, but he used to sing some of these songs with his friends and quoted some fragments in his letters.

After the death of the poet the discovery of the private collection shocked his early biographers. James Currie published *The Life of Burns* in 1800, only four years after Burns's death. Many letters, documents and manuscripts were given to him as material for his research on the poet's life. They included the Glenriddell MSS, both Commonplace Books, the Journals of the Border and Highland tours and a notebook beginning as a farming memoranda and ending up as a poetical miscellany. Currie is believed to have got the manuscript of *The Merry Muses* with the rest of the papers. According to DeLancey Ferguson, when Currie printed Burns's letter of 1792 to John McMurdo, chamberlain to the Duke of Queensferry, where the poet mentions his collection of bawdy songs,[28] the biographer included a sentence that Burns had not written: "A very few of them are my own." In his letter Burns does not claim to have written any of the songs, but rather to have "gathered" them. If Currie had not known the collection, he would have had no reason to add the sentence. However, the holograph that Currie may have kept never appeared again when the Burns papers were given away or sold by his descendants at an auction in 1865.[29]

Four years after the poet's death a version of the book was printed clandestinely and started to circulate that way. At that time Currie still kept all his papers, as he planned

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[28] ibid, L. 449, p.138.

[29] Barke, J. & Goodsir Smith, S. (eds.); *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, London, W. H. Allen, 1965, p.17.

to publish a revised and enlarged edition of the biography, so probably *The Merry Muses* was printed from a different source. Burns's notes taken from oral tradition as well as the songs that survive in holograph differ from those in *The Merry Muses*. And there is no reason why the songs should be different from Burns's jottings taken from oral recitation and from the copies he transcribed for friends. Burns was used to writing down the songs from memory, which can cause some textual variations, but changes of form and the omission of whole stanzas are less likely to occur. The texts in the published volume are not always Burns's final versions, and it does not include the majority of his bawdy compositions, as could be expected. Therefore in the preface to Barke and Goodsir Smith's edition of the book, DeLancey Ferguson suggests that the Dumfries or Edinburgh printing of *The Merry Muses* could be a collection taken from memory or from quick transcriptions by somebody else.

Another of Burns's biographers, Minister George Gilfillan, found it hard to accept that the poet may have enjoyed popular obscene songs and blamed it on alcohol, saying that Burns must have been drunk when he collected *The Merry Muses*.

2.6 BURNS AS PART OF POPULAR TRADITION

There are not many records of the extent to which Burns's songs may have been transmitted orally. However, singing seems to have been one of Burns's major hobbies. Songs were handed on to his friends and acquaintances orally as well as through the written text. Singing was a common practice at the Bachelor's Club in Tarbolton, of which Burns was the president, as well as at the Crochallan Fencibles in Edinburgh. He enjoyed reciting his poems and singing songs during the meetings with his friends, in contexts where traditional material was performed, or when his excise duties would take him away from home and he had to stay overnight with people he had got to know in the different areas.

Even if Burns does not seem to have had a good voice himself, he had a good ear. He is believed to have learned to play the fiddle and used the instrument as a help in the writing of songs. He could read music and was extremely interested in dance tunes

and dancing, a practice that became extremely popular in eighteenth-century Scotland at all levels of society.

Music and dancing had been strongly repressed during the seventeenth century by the Church of Scotland, but the enthusiasm for music that invaded Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century weakened the opposed attitude of the Church, once the worst period of religious oppression had passed. It was mainly the upper classes that contributed to the regeneration of Scottish dance music. Their admiration for European music and England's country dances led to the opening of many aristocratic dancing clubs in Edinburgh and the invention of new dances for the Scottish reels and jigs. The lower classes had maintained their traditional music and dances despite the repression of the Church, and by the middle of the century the new aristocratic dancing trend had already extended to the middle classes, resulting in the formation of many local bands and the writing of many new dancing tunes.

Burns sang and transcribed some of his songs for his friends and acquaintances, and some of them were probably also learned from multiple hearing by others, who in turn transmitted them. Imitations and parodies of his works also contributed to spread Burns's original songs and poems. Therefore his songs were not only transmitted through the written word in collections such as Johnson's and Thomson's, *The Merry Muses* or his *Common-place Books*[30], but also by word-of-mouth.

Burns's intention was not only to collect, improve and preserve Scottish vernacular songs, but also to make them known to Scottish society. And publication was simply another way of spreading that tradition. Songs were published together with the tunes to them, and even if they did not always correspond to the airs they were originally sung to, it is evident that they were intended to be sung. Despite the influence of

[30] Burns wrote two Common-place Books during his lifetime. The first one was begun in April 1783 and ended in October 1785. It contained some of his earlier poems and various reflections on life and poetry, made for his personal use. The second Commonplace Book is sometimes referred to as the *Edinburgh Journal.* It was begun in April 1787 and contained many ideas and observations that Burns intended to use in later works.

European cultivated music that invaded eighteenth-century Scotland, Burns did not expect the songs arranged or written by him to be exclusively known by the literate people of the cities and performed in the drawing-rooms of the upper classes. He intended to transmit the songs, while offering his personal versions of them, improved according to his own taste, an attitude similar to that of the previous transmitters of oral literature.

Burns refused to accept any fees for the songs he contributed to the *Scots Musical Museum* and Thomson's *Select Collection*, and he did not even try to use them as a way of establishing his own fame as a poet. He did not claim authorship for his songs, so that the public did not know the extent of his personal work, and could not make distinctions between traditional pieces and his own creations and arrangements. Therefore it is not always possible to determine his own contribution to the songs. This attitude follows the spirit of oral tradition, where the piece was altered in every performance, due to the performance circumstances or the performer's own taste, thus becoming an anonymous piece, always in evolution.

However, at the end of his life Burns seems to have planned the publication of his songs, an intention that he expressed in a letter to George Thomson in May 1796:

> When your Publication is finished, I intend publishing a Collection on a cheap plan, of all the songs I have written for you, the Museum, &c.- at least of all the songs of which I wished to be called the Author. I do not propose this so much in the way of emolument, as to do justice to my Muse, lest I should be blamed for trash I never saw, or be defrauded by other claimants of what is justly my own.[31]

Burns's late wish that his own works were publicly acknowledged seems to be a proof of an increasing sense of copyright concerning his songs, which never had worried him before. The wish that nobody else could claim the authorship of his own songs and that only his own compositions were attributed to him can have been the result of

[31] Ferguson, Vol. II, L. 695, p.380.

his disapproval of Thomson's treatment of his songs, the polite and anglicized lyrics he was forced to write and of the setting of his songs to tunes he did not consider suitable for them; or a last attempt to secure his immortal fame. Burns died only two months after writing the letter, before having the opportunity to carry out his project.

3. ROBERT BURNS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By the time of his death, Robert Burns was no longer a fashionable figure among Edinburgh upper-class society. During the last years his financial situation was quite precarious. His salary from the Excise was reduced as a result of his absences on sick leave, and he was forced to borrow money from his family and friends[32]. He had to ask his brother Gilbert for the payment of an old debt, and also asked his cousin James Burness in Montrose and George Thomson for financial assistance. At the end of his life Burns no longer had the active patronage of those members of society who had supported him during his first visit to Edinburgh. But his sudden death at the age of thirty-seven made him become once again one of the most popular figures of the Scottish literary scene.

His funeral, held on 25 July 1796 in Dumfries, where he had lived during the last three years of his life, was attended by thousands of persons. From that moment onwards, Burns's popularity continued to increase and he soon became regarded as Scotland's national poet.

The first biography of the poet appeared in 1800, only four years after his death. It was published in four volumes by Dr. James Currie, who has been accused of inaccuracy in his account of the poet's life and of portraying him as a dissolute drunkard. This image of the poet was reproduced again in the following biographies written during the nineteenth century.

Shortly after Burns's death two *Memoirs* were published, one written by Robert Heron, which was first edited in *The Monthly Magazine and British Register*, and another one by Burns's friend Maria Riddell, who tried to give a more favourable picture of the poet. Robert Cromek included some new but romanticised information in *Reliques of Robert Burns* (1808) and *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (1810).

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[32] MacKay, James; *Burns*, London, Headline, 1993, p.616-623.

In 1828 John Gibson Lockhart, Walter Scott's son-in-law, published the *Life of Robert Burns*, and in 1834 the poet's *Life* was written by Allan Cunningham, son of one of Burns's neighbours at Ellisland. Early biographies were based on Currie's model, which, as shown by James MacKay in his own study of the poet's life, was quite inaccurate and full of false presumptions that contributed to establish the bad reputation of the poet as drunkard and womanizer.

In 1850 Robert Chambers published the *Life and Works of Robert Burns*, revised by William Wallace 46 years later; in 1898 William Ernest Henley edited *Life, Genius, Achievement.*

During the second half of the nineteenth century biographies of Burns became more critical and tended to disregard the vision of the poet portrayed in Currie's book and those influenced by it, and to rehabilitate the image of the poet.

Not only his life, but also the works of the poet were reedited throughout the nineteenth century, thus contributing to his increasing popularity. By 1825 his poems had been printed in 15 Scottish towns and several towns and cities of the North of England such as Alnwick, Newcastle, Durham, York and Liverpool. In London 14 editions appeared between 1787 and 1810, whereas in Ireland there were 6 impressions of Burns's works in Belfast between 1789 and 1806, 4 in Dublin between 1787 and 1803, and one in Cork in 1804. His works were even printed twice both in Baltimore and Philadelphia.[33]

At first the languages used by Burns - English and Scots - kept his fame within the English-speaking world, but soon translations of his works were published in several countries. In the 1820s articles about him appeared in Russian periodicals, with some of his poems being translated into Russian. They were also translated into French between 1825 and 1840, and the translations of the nineteenth-century Norwegian poet Henrik Wergeland took Burns's fame to Scandinavia. During the rest of the

[33] Sprott, Gavin; *Pride and Passion*, Edinburgh, HMSO, 1996, p.143.

century his works were also published in Bohemian, Flemish, Hungarian and even medieval Latin. The numerous emigrants who left the country during the nineteenth century as a result of the Highland Clearances, increasing industrialization, as well as the expansion of the British Empire, extended Burns's popularity to several far-away parts of the world, such as the States, Canada, India and Australia.

3.1 ROMANTICISM

During the nineteenth century Europe was dominated by a trend of Romanticism that influenced the arts and literature. It emerged as a result of the increasing industrialization that was quickly transforming European society. Civilization and industrialization were regarded as the origin of a corrupted society which was losing the natural purity of more primitive communities.This idea caused the rejection of civil society and the idealization of rural life and the rural character, which were considered to maintain the natural virtues and innocence of former societies.

The ideas of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were at the heart of the Romantic movement. He claimed that the original man was entirely solitary, but he was healthy, happy, good and free. According to Rousseau, the vices of men appeared when societies were formed, so he did not blame human nature but society for the emergence of vices. Civil society was created with two purposes: to provide peace for everyone and to ensure the right of property for those who had possessions. But societies also contributed to the development of those passions that generate human vices.

The Cult of Sensibility was also at the origin of Romantic literature. The sentimental novel developed in England during the eighteenth century partly in reaction against the austerity and rationalism of the Neoclassical period. It exploited the reader's feelings of tenderness, compassion or sympathy to their limits by presenting an unrealistic view of the subject. Rousseau's idea of the natural goodness of man and his belief that experiencing sympathy for others could lead to moral development were also at the heart of the novel of sensibility. This had a great influence on the literature

of Romanticism, which adopted many elements of the sentimental novel, such as its feelings for nature, the belief in the wisdom of sentiment and the power of sympathy, although it did not maintain its characteristic optimism. The Scottish author Henry MacKenzie began to imitate eighteenth-century English sentimental novel. His book *The Man of Feeling* was one of Burns's favourite literary pieces.

The idea of the innate goodness of man was established, and primitive societies became the symbol of a natural unsophisticated state of mankind, characterised by spontaneity and lack of artifice. This vision of natural uncorrupted rural life, together with the nationalist feeling which generated throughout Europe during the nineteenth century, following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, raised a new interest in the nations' origins. During the Romantic period the peasant was seen as the preserver of a pure uncorrupted way of life and the country's cultural heritage. This figure came to embody the true national identity, whose main features were being endangered by industrialized society.

The rejection of industrialization caused a reaction against civilized society and an attempt to return to nature. Thus in the middle of the nineteenth century attention was turned to popular culture, and native folklore was studied all over Europe in an attempt to recover the essence of the primitive way of life through the artless popular traditions, and redefine the countries' own national identities.

The term "folklore" was first used in 1846 by William J. Thoms in a letter to *The Athenaeum*, suggesting a new name for what until then had been called "Popular Antiquities". The term, formed from the words "folk" and "lore", referred to a group of popular customs. Later on the word "folklore" has come to define the science that studies the popular traditions, customs, literature, legends, songs and beliefs of a certain area, and then the traditions, customs, legends and songs themselves.

Popular tales were studied at first, followed by the songs and then all the traditional aspects of society that were not studied by any other discipline. The study of folk art also tried to recover a time of spontaneous literary creativity, going back to what was

regarded as the purest stage of society.

In the Romantic period popular poetry was seen as a natural way of expressing personal emotions, being produced in an instinctive and spontaneous way. It was believed that the unsophisticated peasant was able to express himself more effectively in a few words than those who had received a regular literary education.[34] And Robert Burns responded to the image of the uncorrupted ploughman poet, which helped to spread his fame during the nineteenth century.

Popular literature was believed to have originated spontaneously in primitive cultures as a natural way of expressing the people's feelings and emotions. It was created by the community, instead of individual authors, and transmitted orally through generations without any influence of social conventions. This kind of artless literature composed by illiterate people reflected the feelings of a community that had created it and identified itself with it. Goethe described this relationship between folksong and the community in his essay on "Old German Folksongs":

> We have been accustomed for years to give the name of 'folksongs' to this species of poetry, not because it is really composed by the people or for the people, but because it embraces in itself something so vigorous and wholesome that the healthy stock of the nation understands it, remembers it, appropriates it, and at times propagates it.[35]

Popular culture was considered to belong to the people, the uncultivated lower classes, but in previous times and especially during the nineteenth century it also appealed to the literate classes. As Goethe expressed it:

> It has an incredible charm even for us who stand on a higher plane of culture.[36]

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[34] Blackie,John Stuart; *Scottish Song: Its Wealth, Wisdom and Social Significance*, Edinburgh, William Blackwood & sons, 1889, p.27.

[35] Spingarn, J.E. (ed.); *Goethe's Literary Essays*, Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921, p.216.

[36] ibid., p.216.

The German writer sees Burns as the mere spokesman of the songs of Scottish people, that were part of his community a long time before him, and served him as models for his own compositions:

> Now, take up Burns. How is he great, except through the circumstance that the songs of his predecessors lived in the mouth of the people - that they were, so to speak, sung at his cradle; that, as a boy, he grew up amongst them, and the high excellence of these models so pervaded him that he had therein a living basis on which he could proceed further? Again, why is he great but from this, that his own songs at once found susceptible ears amongst his compatriots; that, sung by reapers and sheaf-binders, they at once greeted him in the field; and that his boon-companions sang them to welcome him at the alehouse?[37]

Popular culture surrounded Burns from his childhood in everyday life. Therefore he had the possibility of collecting samples of that tradition and returning them regenerated to the people by whom they were first created, as well as providing new works that guaranteed the continuation of that tradition.

Romanticism influenced the perception of Burns in the nineteenth century. He was regarded as an illiterate poet coming from a rural background. The education he received during his early years was completely disregarded, even though his father had provided him and his brother Gilbert with an important education in classic and contemporary literature and other subjects. Robert Burns himself contributed to the creation of his image as a rustic ploughman, which made him more attractive and exotic in the eyes of the Edinburgh literary society. Even if in his correspondence he acknowledged familiarity with many classical and contemporary authors, he often transmitted the image of an uncultivated peasant inspired only by his Muse. In the Preface to the Kilmarnock edition of his poems Burns begs his readers

> particularly the learned and the polite, who may honour him with perusal, that they will make every allowance for education and the circumstances of life.[38]

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[37] Blackie, p.26.

[38] Paul, Hamilton, Rev. (ed.); *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Ayr, Wilson, M'Cormick &

Burns presents himself not as a learned upper-class poet who chooses a rural theme for his poems, but rather as a rustic countryman, "unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing poet by rule", who "sings the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language."[39]

Thus the myth of the Heaven-taught ploughman was created by the poet himself, and reinforced by his contemporaries, who found the figure of a rustic bard very attractive. Burns's image as a ploughman poet continued to spread itself during the nineteenth century, as rural life and poetry were considered to be closer to man's original uncorrupted way of life.

This perception of the poet was quickly spread and affected the representations of Burns during that century. Many drawings and paintings of the poet at his plough were made, where the poet was depicted briefly interrupting his labour while having a vision of his Muse.

This image was not only very attractive to the upper classes, but also helped the rural community identify itself with the poet. His inspiration in nature has been emphasized by many authors who believed that all his best works as a poet were done "in the open air", and that his residence in Edinburgh not only reduced the quality of his poetry, but affected also its amount.[40]

3.2 THE BURNS CULT

The myth of the "Heaven-taught ploughman" led to the creation, in the immediate years following the poet's death, of what the Scottish Renaissance writers called the Burns Cult. Burns's popularity increased rapidly and the number of his admirers and

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Carnie, 1819, p.XLVI.

[39] ibid., p.XLV.

[40] Haliburton, Hugh; *Furth in Field*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1894, p.220.

detractors became larger and larger.

Many Burns Clubs were created throughout the country, inspired by the Bachelor's Club, formed in 1780 and presided over by Burns in Tarbolton.They expanded and were followed by others in the States and the British colonies.

The Burns Club of Greenock claims to have been the first Burns Club, founded in 1801, only five years after the poet's death. However, this has not been proved due to the loss of the minute book that accounted for its first ten years of existence. The Burnsians of Paisley own a minute book dating from 1805, and many other clubs were formed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Kilmarnock Burns Club was founded in 1808 and that of Dunfermline in 1812. The main aim of the clubs was to promote his works and maintain alive the memory of the man who was regarded as Scotland's national bard. The Kilmarnock Burns Club collected valuable manuscripts and in 1885 set up the Burns Federation, in order to coordinate the work of the different Burns Clubs.

The Clubs from Scotland as well as abroad started to organize Burns Nichts to celebrate the anniversary of the poet's birthday. The first one is said to have taken place on 29 January 1802 at the Alloway Cottage where the poet was born, which had been turned into a public house. The celebration was held on the 29 instead of the 25 January due to a hitherto unnoticed mistake in James Currie's biography of the poet.

That celebration established a tradition of Burns Suppers which has continued until our days. In the early years of the nineteenth century they were already held by Burns admirers in many parts of Scotland as well as abroad, and included the recitation of the "Address to a Haggis" and the proposing of numerous toasts: "To the Lassies" or "To the Immortal Memory"of the poet. The first toast "To the Immortal Memory" seems to date from the inaugural meeting of the Paisley Burns Club at the Star Inn, proposed by William McLaren.[41]

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[41] McIntyre, Ian; *Dirt and Deity*, London, Harper Collins, 1995, p.413.

Besides the Burns Nichts celebrated every year, there were numerous events to commemorate the memory of Burns throughout the nineteenth century. In 1844 there was a festival celebrated in Ayrshire, in honour of Robert Burns's sons, two of whom had returned to Britain after spending several years in India.

Only three of the nine children that Burns had with his wife Jean Armour survived. Robert, the eldest (1786-1857), continued his studies and went to university, whereas the two younger ones, William Nicol (1791-1872) and James Glencairn (1794-1865), were appointed to cadetships in the East India Company in 1811, thanks to the influence of Sir James Shaw, an admirer of the poet.

William Nicol got married in India to Catherine Crone but had no descendants. James Glencairn married Sarah Robinson first and later Mary Beckett, and one daughter survived from each marriage. His eldest daughter Sarah, born in India in 1821, was sent back to Scotland after her mother's death and lived in Dumfries with her grandmother Jean Armour, until the latter's death in 1834. Annie, product of James Glencairn's second marriage, was born in India in 1830.

There is no evidence of the exact date when the two brothers, who had lost their wives in India, returned to Britain, but in 1844 both of them, together with their brother Robert, were present in Ayrshire for the celebration of the festival to welcome them home. Soon afterwards the two younger brothers moved to London with James Glencairn's daughters, and later to Cheltenham, where they lived for the rest of their lives.

Beside the three brothers, the Ayrshire festival was attended by Burns's sister, Mrs. Begg, and her daughters, as well as many other visitors from Britain and the Continent. Among the invited guests there were relevant literary figures of the time, such as the poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850); Samuel Rogers (1763-1855), the author of "The Pleasures of Memory" and other poems; Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873), author of *Pelham* and other novels; Captain Frederick Marryatt (1792-1848), author of *Peter Simple* and other novels; Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881); Thomas

Noon Talfourd (1795-1854), author of *Ion* and other dramatic pieces; John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854), author of the *Life of Robert Burns* and editor of the *Quarterly Review*; Thomas Moore (1779-1852), writer of "A Canadian Boat Song"; Henry Taylor (1800-1886), author of the play *Edwin the Fair*; the novelist Charles Dickens (1812-1870); Andrew Park (1807-1863), writer of a centenary ode to the Memory of Burns; the poet Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), etc. This clearly shows the extent of Burns's popularity, and how his figure was also celebrated by the vaste majority of nineteenth-century British men of letters.

The festival, arranged for 10 July was finally postponed until 6 August, coinciding with the Agricultural meeting in Glasgow on 7, 8 and 9 August. 80,000 people are said to have attended[42], among them the members of many Burns Clubs, school pupils, Farmers' Societies, and other guilds such as the Shoemakers of Ayr, Yeomen from Cummock, Shepherds from Straiton, etc. The day was a holiday in Ayr and even the Railway company offered free tickets for those gentlemen working as volunteers during the festival, and charged only a single fare for common passengers.

The procession started in Ayr and, passing the poet's birthplace cottage, Alloway Kirk, and the "Auld Brigg", walked all the way to the Burns Monument in Alloway, built in 1823, where it was met by the poet's relatives and other authorities. After some speeches there was a lunch in a pavilion specially built for the occasion, as well as outdoors entertainment. The day ended with an evening ball and Mr. Blewitt's recital of Burns's songs at the piano-forte in the Ayr Theatre.

Despite the fact that the festival was attended by thousands of people, it was quite a small event compared to the celebrations of the hundreth birthday of Robert Burns, fifteen years later. Meetings to celebrate the hundreth anniversary of the poet's birthday took place in several towns inside as well as outside Britain.

In his *Chronicle of the Hundreth Birthday of Robert Burns* James Ballantine records a

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[42]Ballantine, James; *Chronicle of the Hundreth Birthday of Robert Burns*, Edinburgh, A. Fullarton & Co., 1859, p.71.

total of 872 meetings worldwide. 676 meetings were held only in Scotland, 76 in England, 10 in Ireland, 48 in the Colonies, 61 in the United States and even 1 in Copenhagen, which gives an idea of the popularity achieved by the poet in 1859.

In Edinburgh alone, there were four different meetings at the Music Hall, the Corn Exchange, Queen Street Hall and Dunedin Hall. Miss Annie Burns, granddaughter of the poet, and three daughters of George Thomson were present at the Music Hall.

The continuous toasts and speeches show the perception that Burns's admirers had of the poet in the middle of the century. Lord Neaves, one of the guests at the Music Hall celebration, expressed his view of the poet, which was shared by most of Burns's admirers:

> We now know the man as he was, with many errors that in him were unhappy, and in us would be unpardonable, but with virtues at the same time that far outweigh all his faults; with a deep feeling of piety, an ardent patriotism, a wide philantropy [sic], a tenderness of heart that embraced even the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, a lofty love of independence, a scorn for everything sordid and base, and a sincere self-abasement for his own faults.[43]

The image of the poet as drunkard and womanizer depicted by his biographers is still inevitably associated with his figure. Burns's dissolute life cannot be accepted under the strict norms of behaviour imposed by Victorian society, and his irregular conduct is often the main argument used by his opponents. But even his followers cannot avoid condemning his many "errors", which can only be admitted in someone with such extraordinary positive qualities. Thus Burns's "virtues" are exaggerated to counteract the weaker points of his social conduct, and he is presented as a pious patriot, with a deep love for independence and nature, and capable of experiencing the highest and noblest feelings.

By the time of the celebration of his hundreth anniversary Burns was a very

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[43] ibid., p.10.

controversial figure in Scotland, but also a very popular one. His influence on Scottish people was highlighted by Lord Ardmillan, chairman of the meeting celebrated at the Music Hall in Edinburgh:

> I am not now called upon to repeat what has been so well said by others around me of the influence of Burns's poetry upon the people of Scotland. Undoubtedly that is an influence which subsists at this moment; it affects them in their homes, it affects them at their social meetings, it affects them in their public convocations,- it affects the heart and mind of Scotchmen not in Scotland only, but throughout the whole world at this day.[44]

Burns seems to be have found a place in Scotland's everyday life. According to Lord Ardmillan, Scottish people are familiar with his works and influenced by them. This opinion was shared by Mr.Duncan M'Laren, chairman of the meeting at the Corn Exchange, Edinburgh, who stated that

> if, by some extraordinary event, the writings of Burns were to be all burnt, they could be reproduced from the memories of the people of Scotland.[45]

Burns's popularity among Scottish people is highly emphasized, and so are his inner humane qualities. Mr.Duncan M'Laren also points out the main virtues attributed to the poet by his unconditional admirers:

> I should like to notice - the deep and heart-felt sympathy which he had for everything calculated to elevate man - his ardent love of liberty; his sympathy with every just and good cause; his utter abhorrence of everything like obsequiousness, or falling down and worshipping the rich and the great, in whatever society he was placed.[46]

In the nineteenth century Burns, as well as William Wallace, was used to embody

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[44] ibid., p.12.

[45] ibid., p.19.

[46] ibid., p.19.

anti-aristocratic sentiment. Industrialization had contributed to the rise of a middle class that was quickly becoming more and more powerful. The suffrage franchise extended in 1832, allowing some male members of the middle classes to vote. However, they still had to struggle to defend their increasing influential position in society. The bourgeoisie adopted Burns's notions of egalitarianism and liberty, and his refusal to value men according to everyone's position in the social ladder, for their own purposes. Burns was thought to have completely identified himself with his social class, and to be the poet of the poor. As the Reverend Alex Wallace, also invited to the celebration at the Corn Exchange, put it, Burns has sung

> the joys and sorrows of the poor man's lot, and given a voice at the same time to noble sentiments which make the poor proud of him as their poet - for he is emphatically the poet of the poor.[47]

Burns's concern for the poor was also used to present him as a religious and pious man, arguing that he followed the "true Christian theory of the dignity and brotherhood of man."[48] The accusations of his being "a slave to drink, a slave to passion, a slave to profanity"[49] were outdone by the numerous praiseworthy qualities attributed to him, and disregarded by some members of the clergy. At the meeting in the Assembly Rooms, Dumfries, attended by Colonel William Nicol Burns, by then the eldest surviving son of the poet, the Rev. Mr.Hogg condemned the traditional negative attitude of the Church to the poet and claimed that there had been a change in that attitude.

> The time has, in great measure, gone past when prejudice was manifested with regard to our great national bard. I firmly believe that, with reference to many ministers in the Church of Scotland, and indeed the clergy of Scotland of all denominations, there at one time existed much prejudice, much misrepresentation, and much misunderstanding in regard to Burns.[50]

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[47] ibid., p.24.

[48] ibid., p.30.

[49] ibid., p.114.

[50] ibid., p.119.

Even if not every member of the Church of Scotland shared the Rev.Mr.Hogg's opinion, there were many who praised Burns's work for inculcating family values, which occupied a very relevant place in Victorian society, in poems such as "The Cotter's Saturday Night", or for making the traditional old bawdy Scottish songs respectable.

There was a common attempt to disregard the poet's faults in favour of a sanitised image, even if the constant allusion to his weaknesses was evidence that they still had not been forgotten. However, there was a general feeling and hope that his errors would be disregarded and only his better qualities would participate in the making of his immortal fame. This was expressed by the chairman at the City Hall meeting in Glasgow, attended by Colonel James Glencairn Burns.

> A more serious charge brought against Burns is that his life was sometimes irregular, some of his poems effusions which, however admired at the moment, his warmest friends must now lament.(...) But one great moral truth I extract from the fate of Burns, and that is that no lasting fame is to be acquired, even by the brightest genius, save that which is devoted to the purposes of Virtue; for the few poems of Burns which we now lament have long since passed into oblivion, and those on which his immortal fame is rested are as pure as the driven snow.[51]

Robert Burns was also considered to be the voice of Scottish patriotism. His poems and songs were inspired by the Nature and the people of his land, Scotland. The poet's love of the country and his exaltation of Scotland's historical past turned him into a representative of Scottish nationalist feeling. Sir James Fergusson, chairman of the meeting at the County Hall, Ayr, stated that

> It is this tie to our soil that gave music, even voice, to Burns' muse - as it has nerved the arm and steeled the heart of many a Scotch soldier (...) Many a Scotch soldier has been heard in his last moments crooning over some song of

[51] ibid., p.43.

the national bard.[52]

Burns's works were used to convey a vision of Scotland as a proud nation, in Britain as well as abroad, and his songs became symbols of the nation's identity, as perceived by the Lowland middle classes.

> 'Auld Langsyne' has become the national air of Scotland - the expression of the love of home and of the scenes of infancy to the entire civilised world. 'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled' is already the war-song of the bold and the patriotic in every country of the earth - and the passion of love in its purest form was never so finely expressed as in his immortal lines to Highland 'Mary in Heaven'.[53]

The Scottish patriotism represented by the poet was not a reaction against England's dominance. Nineteenth-century Scottish nationalism was affected by the expansion of the British Empire. England and Scotland were regarded by the Scots as two distinct nations working together for a common goal. The contribution to the creation of that Empire influenced Scotland's conception of its own identity and often both Scottish nationalism and British patriotism could be found among the people of Scotland. Burns came to incarnate British as well as Scottish nationalism. He no longer represented Scotland's national pride, but the love of one's country "to the entire civilised world", and his patriotic songs were said to encourage not only Scottish people, but those "in every country of the earth". Eventually there was a universalization of every aspect of the poet's own or attributed ideas.

His popularity increased throughout the nineteenth century, and numerous celebrations were held again in 1896, in Britain and abroad, to commemorate the hundreth anniversary of the poet's death. The Dumfries commemoration on 21 July 1896 was attended by many of the relatives of the poet, such as Miss Margaret Constance Burns Hutchinson, third daughter of Mrs.Sarah Hutchinson, Cheltenham,

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[52] ibid., p.97.

[53] ibid., p.42.

and great-granddaughter of the poet; Mrs.Burns Thomas, Martinstown, Co.Wexford, granddaughter of the poet's eldest son, Robert; Mr.R.Burns Begg, grandson of Isobel Burns, the youngest sister of the poet; and Mrs.Burns Begg and Mrs.Hawken, Manchester, grand-niece of Mrs.Burns.

Burns's relatives continued to be involved in the preservation of his memory. William Nicol Burns bought the house in Mill Street, Dumfries, where the poet died, and left it to the Dumfries Education Society. It later became a Burns Museum.

3.3 OTHER PERCEPTIONS OF BURNS

Robert Burns was not equally admired by all members of nineteenth-century Scottish society. His controversial figure had numerous opponents as well as many unconditional admirers, and there were diverse opinions regarding his life and works. It was especially among the members of the clergy that most of the critics of his work and conduct were to be found. An example of it was the Reverend Fergus Ferguson, who criticised the extended Burns Cult in his sermon "Should Christians Commemorate the Birthday of Robert Burns?". The discourse was delivered in the East United Presbyterian Church, Dalkeith, in 1869, and a great part of it was published in the *Scotsman* the following morning.

The Reverend's main criticism concerned the worshipping of the poet's works, regardless of their moral worth. Their dissociation from the Christian principle was, according to him, reason enough to condemn the poet as well as his works. Death was not enough to erase human sins, and his weaknesses and errors should not be so easily forgotten. He regarded Burns's life as a failure, and thought that it should be used to prevent others from following his example, instead of idealizing his figure:

> Viewed as a whole, in the outcome and sum-total of his earthly existence, we regard Burns as a gigantic failure; and the chief worth of his career is, that it is fitted to serve as a great and impressive warning to every age (...) he failed - failed in his work as a poet, failed in his character as a man, failed in his philosophy of life, failed in the term of his earthly existence, and failed even in

gaining an adequate livelihood.[54]

Burns's failure as man and poet was not blamed on his lack of ability, but on his "idleness, pride and profligacy."[55] The perception of the poet as a drunkard and womanizer was very extended in the nineteenth century, and often reinforced by his critics and biographers. In his sermon, the Rev. Fergus Ferguson also stressed this idea, stating that

> He was a *seducer*, and he gloried in it.(...) He was rebuked by the Church, and then he attacked the Church. He was a *drunkard*, being frequently in "scenes of swaggering riot". He was animated by a *Satanic pride*.[56]

Not only was he accused of immoral behaviour, but also of blasphemy, due to the writings where he criticised the members of the Church or where he compared earthly love with Heaven. The Rev. Fergus Ferguson also accused Burns of being vain, proud, and a man who, despite denouncing hypocrisy and cant, was a "canting hypocrite" himself.

> What is hypocresy [sic] and cant, but to say one thing and do another; to sneer at proud men, and be as proud as Lucifer one's self; to condemn immorality in others, and excuse it in one's self; to shudder in print at seduction, and yet be a seducer; to recommend others to control their passions, and have no self-control?[57]

This perception of Burns was so extended in the nineteenth century that it was even accepted by the poet's admirers. W.E.Henley, editor of the poems together with Henderson, and of the poet's *Life*, wrote about Burns that some time before the end of

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[54] Ferguson, Fergus, Rev.; "Should Christians Commemorate the Birthday of Robert Burns?", Edinburgh, Andrew Elliot, 1869, p.12-13.

[55] ibid., p.14.

[56] ibid., p.15.

[57] ibid., p.18.

his life he was "neither a sober companion nor a self-respecting husband."[58] Henley also presented the poet as a drunkard, but blamed his failure on his rural background.

> We must accept him frankly and without reserve for a peasant of genius perverted from his peasanthood, thrust into a place for which his peasanthood and his genius alike unfitted him, denied a perfect opportunity, constrained to live his qualities into defects, and in the long-run beaten by a sterile and unnatural environment.[59]

This vision of Burns's life as a failure led to the idea that his premature death came at a good time, when he had already achieved his literary fame. It was considered that there was no hope of improvement for his precarious situation, and death was the best solution for the poet. Henley argues that

> the Man had drunk his life to the lees, while the Poet had fulfilled himself to the accomplishing of a peculiar immortality; so that to Burns Death came as a deliverer and a friend.[60]

The idea that Burns's death came at the right moment can be repeatedly found during the nineteenth century. It was also defended by Lord Rosebery in his speech as chairman of the Dumfries commemoration of the poet's death on 21 July 1896:

> Was Burns fortunate in his death - that death which we commemorate? There can, I fancy, be only one answer; it was well that he died when he did; it might even have been better for himself had he died a little earlier.[61]

The same idea was also shared by the author Robert Louis Stevenson, who considered that Burns's death "was indeed a kindly dispensation."[62] His death was thought to be a

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[58] Henley, W.E.; *Burns: Life, Genius, Achievement*, Edinburgh, T. C & E. C. Jack, 1898, p.337.

[59] ibid., p.339.

[60] ibid., p.341.

[61] *Burns Chronicle*, Dec.1995, vol.4 (New Series), No.3, p.10.

[62] Stevenson, R.L.; *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1882, p.80.

punishment for his bad habits in life. He had tried to enjoy temporary earthly pleasures and therefore real happiness and solid industry escaped him. "He had trifled with life, and must pay the penalty."[63] However, his death was not only regarded as a punishment for his love of drink and debauchery, but also as a relief from his failure and the precarious situation of his last years. According to Stevenson

> he had failed in life, had lost his power of work, and was already married to the poor, unworthy, patient Jean (...) before that inclination [to convivial nights] had become dangerous either to his health or his self-respect.[64]

Burns's rural background and his incapacity to adapt himself to civilised Edinburgh society were also some of the causes on which his failure was blamed. The myth of the 'Heaven-taught ploughman' was still very strong and it was commonly thought that

> He had not studied under the learned professors of the day 'the art unteachable, untaught', but had acquired it by the direct inspiration of the mountain air and the mountain stream.[65]

Burns was regarded as a poet of Nature's own making, who was able to write the finest poetry due to the inspiration of his Muse and the surrounding Nature of his native Ayrshire. He was regarded as an untutored countryman who found the source for his poetry in the simplest and humblest things of his daily rural life. Thomas Carlyle, however, maintained that Burns's real potential as a poet was never fully realised, due to his lack of education and his humble rural life:

> What Burns's force of understanding may have been, we have less means of judging: it had to dwell among the humblest objects; never saw Philosophy; never rose, except by natural effort and for short intervals, into the region of

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[63] ibid., p.80.

[64] ibid., p.80.

[65] Park, Andrew; *Festival in Honour of the Memory of our National Poet: Robert Burns*, Glasgow, Andrew Park, 1844, p.7.

great ideas.[66]

However, this idea was not shared by everyone. Robert Louis Stevenson acknowledged that the poet had received a good education due to his father's interest in the upbringing of Robert and his brother. But Stevenson considered that Burns's idle time in Edinburgh, his contact with the upper classes and his tours of the Borders and the Highlands had seriously damaged his habit of working:

> He had been idle for some eighteen months, superintending his new edition, hanging on to settle with the publisher, travelling in the Highlands with Willie Nichol, or philandering with Mrs.M'Lehose; and in this period the radical part of the man suffered irremediable hurt. He had lost his habits of industry, and formed the habit of pleasure.[67]

Stevenson considered that from that time onwards the poet lost all his habit of concentration and his capacity of work, and until the end of his life he never wrote any serious piece of work again.

> To business he could bring the required diligence and attention without difficulty; but he was thenceforward incapable, except in rare instances, of that superior effort of concentration which is required for serious literary work. (...) He may be said, indeed, to have worked no more, and only amused himself with letters.[68]

The Rev. Fergus Ferguson, however, does not blame Burns's faults on the circumstances of his life. According to him, it was the man's character and weaknesses that account for his failure as a man and as a poet:

> The age in which he lived has been blamed. It was, as a whole, a bad, worldly, shallow age; but we are not speaking of any mere creature of circumstances.

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[66] Carlyle, Thomas; *Essay on Burns*, New York, Macmillan, 1916, p.33.

[67] Stevenson, p.73.

[68] ibid., p.73-74.

> We are speaking of a man of unusual force and originality; and to condone the faults of such a man, on the ground that he was no worse, or not much worse, than the ordinary men around him,- a ground on which the weakest man can have no hope of justification,- is, to say the least, a singularly unsatisfactory way of putting the matter.[69]

Nevertheless, despite all the faults and failures attributed to him, Burns's figure soon became an example to Scottish society. His faults and weaknesses tended to be obliterated and there was an exaltation of his poetic achievements. His concern with the situation of the lower social classes and egalitarianism, as well as his interest in the aims of the French and American Revolution, led to a greater acceptance among the nineteenth-century public.

His sentimental Jacobite works were not seen as a serious defence of Jacobitism, which was commonly regarded as a lost cause since the defeat of the last Jacobite rising in 1745-6. Soon after the defeat of Prince Charles Edward's army Jacobitism became sentimentalised, and all hopes of any real political opportunity to restore the Stuart dynasty were completely lost, except by some radical factions which re-emerged in the 1850s. Burns's treatment of Jacobitism was seen as a way of supporting the oppresed classes, and his Scottish nationalism was replaced by British patriotism, so popular during the nineteenth century. According to W.E.Henley, Burns "was a true Briton at heart, and in the beginning his Jacobitism was chiefly, if not solely, an effect of sympathy with a tortured people."[70]

As we have seen, there were many different perceptions of the poet throughout the nineteenth century. He had numerous followers as well as detractors. However, the accusations of his opponents concerning his moral values and social behaviour did nothing to undermine the poet's increasing popularity. Burns's fame travelled with Scottish emigrants and his works became more and more popular among all social classes. In his Essay on Burns, Thomas Carlyle stated that

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[69] Ferguson, Rev., p.23.

[70] Henley, p.340.

> after fifty years of the wildest vicissitudes in poetic taste, they [his poems] still continue to be read; nay, are read more and more eagerly, more and more extensively; and this not only by literary virtuosos, and that class upon whom transitory causes operate most strongly, but by all classes, down to the most hard, unlettered and truly natural class, who read little, and especially no poetry, except because they find pleasure in it.[71]

Not only Burns's poetry but also his figure became strongly associated with Scotland. By the middle of the nineteenth century the poet had already become a national attraction. In the 1860s James Ballantine, secretary of the Edinburgh Burns Club, suggested the establishing of a Burns Museum in Edinburgh, with letters and manuscripts of the poet.

By that time Burns already seems to have played an important role in the Scottish tourist industry, as suggested by a letter sent by James Glencairn Burns to James Ballantine in July 1865:

> There is a clever artist in Cheltenham, Mr.Bartlett, who has made a capital photograph of the poet from Nasmyth's portrait. My daughter, Mrs.Hutchinson, takes a great interest in him and wrote me about him since we came. He is anxious to know if the photographs are likely to sell at the Calton Hill Monument.[72]

Whereas Burns's fame as a poet increased worldwide and he became one of Scotland's national figures, attractive to Scottish people as well as foreigners, the perception of his songs by society also evolved throughout the nineteenth century.

3.4 BURNS'S SONGS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the nineteenth century opinions concerning the poet's songs were also very

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[71] Carlyle, p.15.

[72] Pulford, Tina; "The Cheltenham Connection" in the *Burns Chronicle*, Dec.1995, p.30.

different. Some critics regarded them as minor pieces of work, which had no real relevance compared to his poems. They acknowledged that the songs were more popular among the general public, but these were denied great literary value.

> Burns, among the general at least, is better sung than read. But if the Songs, his own and those which are effects of a collaboration, be the more national, the Poems are the greater, and it is chiefly to the Poems that Burns is indebted for his place in literature.[73]

Stevenson even argued that Burns only wrote songs at the end of his life because he could not find the strength necessary to create more complicated pieces of work. Stevenson found the writing of songs much simpler than the creation of longer poems, and considered it to be the reason why, after his stay in Edinburgh, Burns limited his main artistic production to the writing and revising of songs, and never dared to publish a new book of poems: "He refused to make another volume, for he felt that it would be a disappointment."[74]

Furthermore, Stevenson argued that the reason why the poet did not accept any salary for his contribution to Johnson's and Thomson's collections of songs was the fact that he did not consider them worth the money:

> For the songs, he would take nothing; they were all that he could do; the proposed Scotch play, the proposed series of Scotch tales in verse, all had gone to water (...) he would rather stoop to borrow than to accept money for these last and inadequate efforts of his muse. And this desperate abnegation rises at times near to the height of madness; as when he pretended that he had not written, but only found and published, his immortal *Auld Lang Syne*.[75]

Obviously, Stevenson's opinion was not generally agreed with. For many, the poet's songs were some of his finest works and the main cause for his extraordinary

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[73] Henley, p.227.

[74] Stevenson, p.79.

[75] ibid., p.79.

popularity. Authors like Carlyle considered that some of Burns's greater works were actually some of the songs he wrote: "by far the most finished, complete, and truly inspired pieces of Burns are, without dispute, to be found among his *Songs*."[76] Unlike Stevenson, Carlyle regarded the writing of songs as a fairly complicated task. Despite the brevity of the piece, the author has to follow certain rules that cannot be ignored:

> Song is a brief simple species of composition; and requires nothing so much for its perfection as genuine poetic feeling, genuine music at heart. Yet the Song has its rules equally with the Tragedy; rules which in most cases are poorly fulfilled, in many cases are not so much felt.[77]

For Carlyle, as well as many of Burns's followers, not only did the poet master the writing of songs, but they were one of the main reasons for his worldwide fame. According to Dr.W.A.F. Browne, chairman of the meeting at the Assembly Rooms, Dumfries, in 1859

> Burns' songs are the speech of the human heart (...) Songs live longer than history, are mightier than wisdom; and we believe this grand recognition of Burns' power is attributable chiefly to his lyrics.[78]

Whether this was true or not, it must be admitted that Burns's songs had achieved a great popularity during the nineteenth century. Some of the songs had been adopted to represent Scotland's nationalist feelings. Songs such as "Auld Lang Syne" and "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled" were regarded as the national heritage of Scotland, even if they conveyed a universal message that also made them attractive to other nations.

However well-known Burns's songs may have become throughout the nineteenth century, their popularity seems to have been restricted to a certain number of pieces. From the approximately 370 songs to which the poet contributed in a way or another, it is often the same pieces that are mentioned or performed in public meetings. During

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[76] Carlyle, p.45.

[77] ibid., p.46.

[78] Ballantine, p.121.

the commemoration of the poet's hundreth birthday, several of his songs were sung at the different meetings. At the meeting in the Music Hall, Edinburgh, the songs "There was a lad was born in Kyle", "John Anderson, my jo", "Willie brew'd a peck o' maut", "Highland Mary", "Of a' the airts", "Scots wha hae", "My Nannie's Awa" and "Auld Lang Syne" were performed accompanied by an orchestra led by Mr.Howard. At the Dunedin Hall, Edinburgh, the songs performed were "My Nannie's Awa", "Bonnie wee thing", "A man's a man for a' that", "The Birks of Aberfeldy", "Banks and Braes" and "Auld Lang Syne"; at the City Hall, Glasgow, the songs "Highland Mary", "Duncan Gray", "Behind yon hills", "Scots wha hae" and "Auld Lang Syne"; at the Cottage demonstration in Alloway, "There was a lad", "Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming", "The flowers of the forest", "Gae, bring my gude auld harp ance mair" and "Auld Lang Syne"; and at the Assembly Rooms, Dumfries, "Scots wha hae", "Farewell, thou fair day", "There was a lad", "Of a' the airts", "Wandering Willie" (band), "Willie brew'd a peck o' maut", "My Nannie's Awa", "My Nannie, O", "There was a lass and she was fair" (tune), "O let me in this ae night", "I winna let ye in, jo", "Up in the morning early" and "Saw ye Johnnie comin'?".

As can be seen, there were some songs that enjoyed a greater popularity and were sung and performed more often than the rest. As a result, these songs became better and better known by the public, whereas the others tended to be set aside and eventually forgotten.

During the nineteenth century there was a general interest in the musical tradition of a country, but the increasing influence of the bourgeoisie led to a new conception of music. Up to the nineteenth century Scotch songs belonged to all social classes, and were often performed without or with simple accompaniment. But after 1800 music was looked upon as a refined and exclusive luxury, and more sophisticated versions were created to be performed in concert halls and drawing-rooms. Popular songs were considered to be vulgar, and became associated with the lower classes and a dissolute way of life. Therefore polite versions of popular songs were created for the consumption of the higher and middle classes, that tried to differenciate themselves from the lower ones.

Popular art-songs became very fashionable among good society, especially Italian, German, French and Hungarian airs. Some foreign singers made Scotch songs popular in the concert halls of Edinburgh and London, and soon the refined versions of Scottish popular airs also found their way into the British theatres and drawing-rooms.

Burns's songs also became fashionable among good society. But the versions published in the *Scots Musical Museum* with simple accompaniment became less popular in the nineteenth century. Already by the end of the eighteenth century some popular songs were being arranged by well-known composers of the time. In 1792 William Napier's *The Most Favourite Scots Songs* was published with settings by Haydn, and some of Burns's texts also appeared, apparently without his consent, in Pietro Urbani's *Selection of Scottish Songs* (1792-1804), arranged for a string orchestra. The songs published in Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* had arrangements by Pleyel and Kozeluch, which were later replaced by Haydn's and Beethoven's versions.

Due to their publication and performance in concert halls and drawing rooms, the polite versions of Burns's songs became very fashionable among the upper classes, who enjoyed popular songs but rejected their simplicity, thus extending Burns's fame and transforming into art songs the tradition-based airs of the Heaven-taught ploughman.

4. HUGH MACDIARMID AND ROBERT BURNS

4.1 THE SCOTTISH RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT

In the years following the end of the first World War Scotland's literary scene experienced a radical transformation. A generation of writers tried to change the current followed by Scottish letters since the end of the eighteenth century, and renew the general attitude towards Scottish literature, as well as other aspects of Scottish life.

The poet and writer Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) (1892-1978) tried to give rise, together with some other contemporary writers, to the revival of Scottish literature. MacDiarmid considered that Scottish letters had not produced any relevant or original piece of work since the death of Robert Burns. Scottish writers had limited themselves to following and imitating the works of the poet, leading Scotland's literature to a dead end. At the beginning of the twentieth century MacDiarmid saw the need for a renewal. New subjects and a whole new way of approaching Scottish literature were necessary in order to make it rise again and develop like its European contemporaries. MacDiarmid tried to unite the efforts of many Scottish writers in order to achieve a "renaissance" of Scottish literature. He saw himself at the heart of the Scottish Renaissance Movement, and throughout his life he claimed to express his ideas on behalf of that group.

According to him, the Scottish Renaissance began in Scotland in 1920, only two years after the end of the first World War. It started as a purely literary movement, but soon its influence extended to other areas of Scottish life. Through his numerous poems, lectures and newspaper articles and letters, MacDiarmid fought for a renewal of Scottish letters as a way of influencing other aspects of Scottish life. He took his ideas beyond the limits of the literary world, thus affecting other spheres of the nation's arts and affairs.

The origins of the movement can be found in the literary and political situation of

Scotland at the beginning of the twentieth century, and in the influence of the nationalist feelings which sprung up throughout Europe in the aftermath of the first World War. At that time the British Empire was still strong, and whereas some Scottish subjects were proud of Scotland's contribution to the creation of the Empire and the benefits for the nation, others, like MacDiarmid, considered that Scotland was not taking part in the decisions concerning the future of the Empire and was forced to submit to English political dominance and its influence on numerous aspects of Scottish life.

According to MacDiarmid, through the use of Scots, one of Scotland's vernacular languages, Scottish literature would be able to evolve beyond England's influence towards the new European literary tendencies, and learn from European authors such as Dostoevsky (1821-1881) or Baudelaire (1821-1867), who were at the origin of the Modernist and Symbolist movements. Linguistic and political independence from England were seen as necessary in order to achieve the true development of every aspect of Scottish life.

Authors such as Edwin Muir (1887-1959), Neil M.Gunn (1891-1973) or William Soutar (1898-1943) were related to the Scottish Renaissance movement. They also aimed at a revival of Scottish literature, which would help develop a distinctive Scottish culture capable of keeping up to the standards of other European cultures.. However, most of the writers who have been connected to the movement did not agree with MacDiarmid's most radical positions and nationalist ideas.

For MacDiarmid, the revival of Scottish literature was an essential step in the full development of Scotland as a distinctive country. In order to attain this aim, MacDiarmid had to face the figure that at the beginning of the twentieth century still occupied the central position in the Scottish literary scene: Robert Burns.

4.2 McDIARMID'S APPROACH TO BURNS

Robert Burns had occupied a relevant position in Scottish literature throughout the

previous century and his figure had had a strong influence on later literary works. Many Scottish writers tended to imitate Burns's concern with the common people living in rural areas of Scotland, which led to the establishment of a rustic tradition. The "kailyard school" writers gave a sentimental representation of rural Scotland. It arose as an effect of the Industrial Revolution, becoming a way of escaping from the sudden changes that Scottish society was undergoing.

Many writers associated with the Scottish Renaissance Movement continued writing about rural Scotland, but for MacDiarmid, this continuous return to a romanticized rural past prevented any further literary evolution in Scotland. The rustic world constantly depicted by Scottish authors was a false, idealized setting, and at the beginning of the twentieth century it was farther than ever from the industrialized society most of the inhabitants of Scotland were familiar with. By that time, Scotland had become one of the most highly industrialized nations of Europe. As a result of the Clearances, the Highlands were practically depopulated and two thirds of the whole population of Scotland lived in the industrialized areas of the south and north-east of the country.

MacDiarmid blamed the current situation of Scottish literature on Burns, whose influence had been "wholly bad, producing little save puerile and platitudinous doggerel",[79] and had "reduced the whole field of Scots letters to a 'kailyaird'"[80], an image used to represent the sentimentalized rural world that dominated Scotland's literary scene.

MacDiarmid did not become familiar with Burns's works in his early years. His father, James Grieve, was a devout Presbyterian and Burns's books were not allowed in the house. At school MacDiarmid learned some of the most hackneyed love songs, but it was his teacher and friend F.G. Scott who introduced him to Burns's works.[81]

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[79] MacDiarmid, Hugh; "Albyn: or Scotland and the Future" in *Albyn*, Riach, Alan (ed.), Manchester, Carcanet, 1996, p.4.

[80] ibid., p.7.

[81] Riach, Alan; "MacDiarmid's Burns" in Crawford, Robert (ed.); *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*,

He soon became involved in literary circles, where Burns was still the most relevant figure. He was a member of the Montrose Burns Club but was eventually expelled from it as a result of his continuous attacks on Burns. As soon as he became familiar with the poet and his work, MacDiarmid criticized the figure of Burns, his legacy to Scottish literature and the cult created around him. His opposition was constantly expressed in his poems, lectures, essays, newspaper articles and reviews, and continued throughout his whole life. In 1922 he attended the Burns Federation annual conference in Birmingham as a delegate of the Montrose Burns Club, and on 13 February 1924 he gave a lecture to the Vernacular Circle of the Burns Club of London.

In his lecture, entitled "Unexpressed Elements of Scottish Life"[82], he claimed that current literature was suffering from a lack of criticism and a definite purpose. The linguistic and literary restrictions imposed by Puritanism and Anglicization had provoked the decay of Scots language and literature, and he blamed the Scottish Vernacular movement for the perpetuation of that situation. No real efforts were being made to promote the Vernacular languages of Scotland. The Vernacular circle was a highly conservative movement that kept Scots restricted to the conventional image of the kailyard, dissociated from Scotland's daily life. MacDiarmid maintained that only the resources of the Vernacular languages could lead to a Scottish literary renaissance, but a real effort to revive those languages was still necessary.

Burns and the tradition of the kailyard that had dominated Scottish literature since his death prevented Scotland's literary evolution. He embodied the end of an era, and according to MacDiarmid, the cult created around Burns's figure did nothing but contribute to maintain the inert state of Scottish letters, preventing any further evolution.

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997, p.199.

[82] *Burns Chronicle*, 1924, p.121.

4.2.1 FIRST ATTACKS ON BURNS

In the 1920s MacDiarmid's attacks on Robert Burns were very explicit and direct. From the beginning he dissociated the Burns cult from the poet's work and presented them as two separate issues. He maintained that most Burnsians were not familiar with the poet's work or even the ideology he defended, and most of them would not have agreed with Burns's ideas, had they known what they were.

> Only it must not be forgotten that Burns is one thing and the poetry of Burns another. Burns is little read today - instead of being reborn in the minds of successive generations of readers his fame propagates itself by a process of parthenogenesis which has increasingly little relation either to the man himself or his work - and the majority of his annual celebrants know scarcely anything of his poems and would have scant practical sympathy with the great majority of his ideas if they knew what they were. Indeed Burnsians as a body are for the most part politically and socially opposed to all that Burns stood for and are doing nothing, jointly or severally, either to hasten the time "when man to man the warl' owre shall brithers be an' a' that", or even to "sing a sang for Scotland's sake."[83]

According to MacDiarmid, the Burns cult had created an artificial image of the poet to suit the needs of his followers. Burns had become a symbol for a large part of Scottish society, who had no real interest in the poet, his work or literature in general. He was mainly acclaimed by the middle classes, who had moulded the poet's ideas to suit their own purposes, and were contributing nothing to the study of the poet, the diffusion of his work or the development of Scottish literature.

For MacDiarmid, Burns's figure had not contributed anything to the evolution of Scottish letters, though he recognized the literary value of some of his works:

> Burns the satirist is another matter. And the Burns of the verses that are not to

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[83] MacDiarmid, H.; "Burns and Baudelaire" (1923) in *The Raucle Tongue*, Vol. I, Calder, Angus; Murray, Glen; Riach, Alan (eds.), Manchester, Carcanet, 1996, p.69.

> be found in the expurgated editions - those little lewd revelations which enable us to discern in him (*sed longe intervallo)* a forerunner of James Joyce.[84]

However, most of Burns's work did not keep up to the standard which should be expected from a great poet. It was not as spontaneous as it was claimed. The circumstances of his life, his limited education and life experience, had forced him to suppress his most powerful poetic impulses, which were only partially released in the composition of his satires and ribald epigrams.

> He was afraid to let himself go - he had not sufficient confidence in himself. Had he been less imitative, had he given full vent to his natural instincts, his product would never have become acceptable to convention-ridden minds.[85]

Had Burns been less conventional, he would have never become the object of a cult which radically differed from his own spirit. MacDiarmid accused Burns of being responsible for the cult created around him. He was too much influenced by his circumstances and was never radical enough to avoid the misuse and misinterpretation of his work.

MacDiarmid wrote about the Burns cult again in 1926, accusing Burnsians of not knowing even the "accepted Burns", and not having any real interest in or knowledge of literature apart from his work. In his famous poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, MacDiarmid criticized once more the world-wide expansion of a cult, moved by no real interest in literature, but by the members' need to use a literary authority to support their own ideas.

> Croose London Scotties wi' their braw shirt fronts
> And a' their fancy freen's, rejoicin'
> That similah gatherings in Timbuctoo,
> Bagdag - and Hell, nae doot - are voicin'

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[84] ibid., p.70.

[85] ibid., p.70.

Burns' sentiments o' universal love,
In pidgin English or in wild-fowl Scots,
And toastin' ane wha's nocht to them but an
Excuse for faitherin' Genius wi' *their* thochts.[86]

Most of the members of the Burns Clubs belonged to the middle classes, and according to MacDiarmid, would never have agreed with the ideas and values of the poet. The numerous Burns Clubs, Scott Clubs or Stevenson Societies were formed by lawyers, business men or ministers who did not want to celebrate the men of letters, but use them as an example for the rest of society, presenting them as good citizens, devoted Christians, anti-Socialists, or any other image that suited their own ideology.

The stereotyped image of the poet was reinforced every year and his message distorted to make it acceptable to conventional standards.

No' wan in fifty kens a wurd Burns wrote
But misapplied is a'body's property,
And gin there was his like alive the day
They'd be the last a kennin' haund to gi'e-[87]

An artificial Robert Burns, modelled according to the needs and ideas of the bourgeois Burns Clubs, was being exported to the farthest corners of the world. The Burns Cult continued expanding itself and the Scottish poet became known by people from all nationalities. As MacDiarmid satirically claimed:

You canna gang to a Burns supper even
Wi'oot some wizened scrunt o' a knock-knee
Chinee turns roon to say, "Him Haggis - velly goot!"
And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney.[88]

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[86] MacDiarmid, H.; *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1987, p.8, line 45-52.

[87] ibid., p.8, l.41-44.

[88] ibid., p.6, l.37-40.

Despite the racist connotations that the stanza may carry, MacDiarmid was not so much concerned with foreign fondness for and assimilation of Scottish cultural heritage, as with the false stereotyped image Scotland was conveying to the world. The poet celebrated in the Burns Suppers was an artificial adaptation of Burns. And not only the foreign adepts, but also the majority of the Scottish public were unaware of the distorted image that had been created.

Burns became a legend and his circle of enthusiasts tended to concentrate on the biography and belongings of the poet, his relatives and acquaintances, rather than on his literary work. This led to the preservation of places of interest, the establishment of shrines and the erection of monuments, rather than to the study of the man's true character and work and the attempt to realise the ideals he defended.[89] MacDiarmid considered that an authoritative re-study of the poet was necessary, in order to put an end to the false images conveyed by his figure and determine his real relevance to Scottish letters.

> It is high time the Burns legend was destroyed and the man himself, "in the round", a credible human figure, rescued from the eponymous proliferation of moralitarian, "patriotic", propagandistic and counter-propagandistic excrescences under which he is buried.[90]

In the two articles entitled "The Burns Cult", published in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* in July 1926, MacDiarmid claimed that the circumstances of Burns's life had prevented him from realising his lyrical genius. His precarious economic situation and his want of cultivation did not allow him to produce pieces of work more in accordance with his great poetic abilities. For MacDiarmid, "the content of nine-tenths of his work is on an altogether deplorably low level"; Burns was not able to appreciate "the distinctive functions of the Scottish genius"; and accepted current moral, social

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[89] MacDiarmid, H.; "The Burns Cult" in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, Riach, Alan (ed.), Manchester, Carcanet, 1995, p.354.

[90] ibid., p.356.

and political thought and the literary conventions of his time. Thus "his political opinion was suppressed, his moral views commonplace and opportunist, his descriptions of scenery generalised (...) His use of the vernacular was exiguous - eked out with English. His attitude to women wholly unreal; his songs to any of them might as easily have been addressed to any other - or to some abstraction - for all the precise psychology that transpires from them". The true Burns in relation to women was to be found, according to MacDiarmid, in *The Merry Muses*. MacDiarmid presented Burns as a man of his time, writing under English influence; "He did not inaugurate a new era in Scottish literature. He merely crowned the tendencies which had been long at work".[91]

4.2.2 THE BURNS CULT

In the 1930s MacDiarmid continued his attacks on the Burns cult. According to him, it not only interfered with the development of new literary tendencies in Scotland, but did not even contribute to the evolution of Burns scholarship. The use of the poet for different purposes had diverted attention from his work to irrelevant details of his life, and more attention was paid to the relics that belonged to him, his family and acquaintances than to his literary production. In 1934 MacDiarmid satirized this attitude again in another article called "The Burns Cult"[92], where he described Charlie Crichton's disclosure of the last great discovery on the poet: Burns's closet.

Burnsian interest was focused, and only once a year, on the mere man, his love affairs and other insignificant details and his work was not even known by those who considered themselves devoted followers of the poet. Burns's fame was expanding but the real knowledge of his work was declining. The progressive decay of Scots and the dominance of English language and literature in Scottish schools made it more

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[91] ibid., p.359-60.

[92] MacDiarmid, H.; "The Burns Cult" in *At the Sign of the Thistle*, Plymouth, The Bowering Press, 1934, p.166.

difficult for children to understand and appreciate Burns. But even the members of the Burns Clubs were not totally familiar with the poet's work.

MacDiarmid criticised again the scant real knowledge of the poet and his work, and the lack of good critical studies about him, while he was being moulded to conform to conventional middle-class standards he would never have agreed with. MacDiarmid considered that, due to their position and influence in Scottish society, the Burns Clubs were able to improve the static situation of Scottish literature. However, they failed to encourage a critical study of Burns's work which could put an end to the widely accepted myth and contribute to the development of Scottish letters. They made no serious attempt to make Burns's works known to a bigger public. Instead, the same poems and songs were repeated *ad nauseam.* Neither did they support new Scottish writers or make any efforts to promote Scottish literature or the Scots language, whereas much money was spent on private celebrations.

Due to the adoption of the poet by nineteenth-century imperialist members of the middle classes, Burns's celebration had become a middle-class institution. Burns clubs were composed mainly by the kind of citizens Burns detested and strove against. And regardless of the decline of the vernacular languages of Scotland and Scottish literature, the Burns cult had only become an obstacle to the progress of young Scots writers.

MacDiarmid also criticised Burns's work, which, according to him, contained little description of Scottish scenery, little concern with Scottish history, little sense of Scotland's destiny, and once again he stated that Burns's love-songs were so general that they might all have been written to the same woman, as the girls could not be distinguished from one another.[93]

However, MacDiarmid's attitude to the Burns Clubs was not always so pessimistic as could be deduced from this article. In 1927 he had acknowledged the clubs' change of attitude in *Albyn: or Scotland and the Future*:

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[93] ibid., p.175.

> Even the Burns cult itself, which long confined itself to an "annual guzzle" on the poet's birthday, is now proclaiming itself a Scottish literary and patriotic organization, and advocating the teaching of Scots in the schools.[94]

4.2.3 BURNS TODAY AND TOMORROW

MacDiarmid's attacks on Burns and the cult around him continued throughout his life, without showing any relevant variation in his approach to the poet. In 1959 MacDiarmid expressed once more his opposition to the Burns cult in *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, an essay written on the occasion of the bicentenary celebration of the poet's birthday. This time he repeated the ideas he had defended over a quarter of a century before.

> Scotland will signalize that it has come to itself again and resumed its proper attitude to world affairs when it makes a bonfire of all the worthless, mouldy, pitiable relics that antiquarian Burnsians have accumulated at Mauchline, Dumfries, and elsewhere, and reconcentrates on the living message of Burns's poetry the world-wide attention devoted today (at least once a year) to the mere man and his uninteresting love affairs and the ramifications of the genealogies of his quite insignificant acquaintances and the poor bric-a-brac of his *lares* and *penates*, and the witless lucubrations of the hordes of bourgeois "orators" who annually befoul his memory by the expression of sentiments utterly antipathetic to that stupendous element in him which ensured his fame - an element, it cannot be overstressed, utterly and forever irreconcilable with the political, religious, social, and all the other bearings and elements of the personalities and lives of 99.9 (repeater) of his yearly panegyrists. Burns Cult, forsooth! It has denied his poetry to laud his amours. It has preserved his furniture and repelled his message. It has built itself up on the progressive refusal of his lead in regard to Scottish politics, Scottish literature, and the Scottish tongue. It knows nothing about him or his work - or the work that should be done in continuance

[94] MacDiarmid, "Albyn", p.4.

> of his - except the stupid and stereotyped sentiments it belches out annually. (...) It has produced mountains of rubbish about him, but not a single good critical study, not a single appreciation above the literary level for which a first-year Higher Grade schoolboy would be thrashed if he so dealt with some petty English novelist or poetaster. It has failed (because it never tried - it has been numerically ample to succeed if it ever had) to get Burns or Scottish literature or Scottish history or the Scots language, to which Burns courageously and rightly and triumphantly reverted from English taught in Scottish schools.[95]

MacDiarmid continued claiming that a nation's literature and art in general can never rest on past achievements, but must evolve to be able to face new needs and difficulties. He re-stated that Burns clubs are middle-class institutions that "exalt his name, but deny in practice, if not in precept, all the values he stood for",[96] and show no real effort to make his works known to the general public or towards the development of Scots language and literature. He insisted on the teaching of Scotland's vernacular languages in the schools, so that Scottish children might be able to appreciate their country's cultural heritage.

The recurrent issues indicate that MacDiarmid did not consider that any real transformation had taken place regarding the general approach to Robert Burns. He realised that his continuous efforts to make the Burns cult work in favour of Scottish letters had hitherto been fruitless, and presented the cult itself as a failure.

> Although the World Burns Movement is a unique phenomenon, it is necessary to remember that its members have failed to follow Burns's lead in every vital connection. They have failed to follow him in turning from English to Scots. They have failed to show a like concern to his for Scotland's welfare and independent place (and voice) among the nations. They have failed in politics to maintain Burns's radical spirit, his scorn of hipocrisy [sic], and the empty shows of royalty and rank. They have failed to have Scottish literature and history, and our native languages, taught in our schools and colleges, where,

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[95] MacDiarmid, H.; *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, Edinburgh, Castle Wynd Printers, 1959, p.1-2.

[96] ibid., p.6.

> instead, a virtual monopoly has been given to the language, literature and history of our traditional enemy.[97]

MacDiarmid still considered that Scottish literature could lead to the development of Scotland in all the different cultural, social and political areas, and his main reaction against Burns was caused by the fact that this mythical figure still dominated Scottish letters in the middle of the twentieth century, but its world-wide popularity had not made any relevant contribution to Scotland's nationalist interests.

Not only did he attack the attitude of Burns Clubs and Burns's negative influence on Scotland's later literature, but also the poet himself. He accused him of anti-intellectualism, for preventing Scottish evolution instead of encouraging it, and of xenophobia. According to MacDiarmid, Burns's works showed a

> chauvinism and aversion from what was foreign, that again is a betrayal of one of the greatest impulses the Scottish people have shown all through their history - that internationalism which stands in such contradistinction to English insularity.[98]

He also presented Burns's work as a constant repetition of the same lines and phrases, and argued that his great work was only a small portion of the remaining parts, generally unknown to the public. Burns followers had overvalued the poet's work, which was not as innovative as it was considered to be. Once again MacDiarmid claimed that Burns had not contributed anything new to Scottish letters, but simply was the culmination of the literary tendencies which dominated Scotland before his time. Far from being original, his work was

> full of eighteenth century conventionalism and the minutiae of dead and even at the time very local controversies. It marked the end of a phase - not a fresh start in Scots letters.[99]

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[97] ibid., p.94.

[98] ibid., p.23-24.

[99] ibid., p.25.

MacDiarmid's fierce opposition to Burns was caused by his intention to reach certain particular goals. In *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, written nearly forty years after what MacDiarmid regarded as the beginning of the Scottish Renaissance, he also defined the three main aims of the movement, which he still considered to be alive and working for the revival of Scottish literature. According to him, the aims of the movement included:

> (1) to bring Scots poetry abreast of contemporary intellectualism and as a first step towards that took the slogan, "Not Burns - Dunbar!"(2) to bring Scots poetry into line again with contemporary political requirements, and give our people a proper appreciation of their literary patrimony, and (3) to get back behind the Renaissance - in other words, to break out of confinement to a mere "earthly eudaemonism with Christian nuances", that pseudo-religious mental climate which keeps the harmonies and solutions of our writers on so contemptibly shallower a level than the conflicts and tragedies which encompass our lives.[100]

MacDiarmid was especially concerned with three aspects of Scottish life: literature, politics and religion. A close connection was seen between the three of them, and a literary revival was considered to be essential in order to develop a genuine Scottish culture, with distinctive artistic, political and religious elements as opposed to those of England.

He thought that a revival of Scottish literature could only be achieved through the use of the native languages of Scotland. He considered Scots and Gaelic to be the only languages which allowed Scottish people to express themselves properly, as English was not able to reflect all the elements of the Scottish mind. MacDiarmid maintained that

> English is incapable of affording means of expression for certain of the chief

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[100] ibid., p.125.

elements of Scottish psychology - just as English has no equivalents for many of the most distinctive words in the Scots vocabulary.[101]

Therefore the revival of Scotland's vernacular languages was an essential aspect and one of the main concerns of the poet. He shared the viewpoint that, as a result of historical events such as the Reformation of John Knox and the introduction in Scotland of King James's Authorized Version of the Bible (an English translation of 1611 which led to the teaching of English in parish schools), the union of the English and Scottish crowns due to the succession of James VI (1566-1625) to the throne of England in 1603 and the Act of Union of 1707, England had a strong influence on Scotland, and that it was necessary to fight against that influence, which had turned English into the language of the higher classes, and the language of culture.

During the eighteenth century there was an interest in Scots language and literature which continued throughout the nineteenth century. However, Scots[102] was considered to be a dying language that belonged to a sentimentalized past, thus raising only the interests of the nostalgic and antiquarians. Vernacular languages were regarded as inferior to English and the language of the uneducated, therefore children were not allowed to speak them in the classroom. The revival of the Scottish national sentiment and the efforts of the Scottish Renaissance movement changed the attitude towards Scotland's vernacular languages and literature.

MacDiarmid maintained that the natural speech of many Scots was an Anglicised Scots dialect, and that Scots was still present and affected the language of the people

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[101] MacDiarmid, "Albyn", p.14.

[102] Scots developed from a Teutonic tongue introduced in Scotland by Anglian settlers in the 5th century AD. Originally it was almost identical to the language spoken in the North of England - Northumbrian or Early Northern English - but as Scotland became a separate nation, the Teutonic language became more and more different from it. In Northern England Northumbrian speech gradually gave way to south-eastern English as a written language, whereas the form spoken in Scotland continued to develop away from it. The medieval Makars, such as Robert Henryson (1430-1506) and William Dunbar (ca.1460-ca.1520) also contributed to the evolution of the language through the use of Latin, Southern English and French forms.

brought up in Lowland Scotland. Standard English was imposed in the classrooms, but the children reverted to Scots as soon as they were outside. This language was therefore the most appropriate one to express the feelings of Lowland Scottish people and should be used in literary creation.

One of the main problems Scots had to face was the lack of a generally accepted standard of spelling and grammar. The influence of English on eighteenth-century Scots writers resulted in the adoption of English terms and the Anglicization of many Scots words. MacDiarmid saw the need for the creation of a new standard Scots. He thought it was possible to create a "synthetic Scots", recovering the elements of the old Scots language and getting rid of the Anglicization present in all eighteenth-century writers. He wanted to recover the Scots used by the medieval Makars. These writers also employed foreign terms in their writings, but MacDiarmid considered their language to be in a less corrupted state. Once adopted, "synthetic" or "plastic" Scots would allow the evolution of Scottish poetry and literature in general.

During the 1940s and 1950s the "synthetic Scots" used by the Renaissance poets was called "Lallans". However, the language concern of the Scottish Renaissance movement was not restricted to Scots. MacDiarmid also encouraged the development of Gaelic and its introduction into Scottish schools, for its future was even more endangered than that of Scots. As he stated in 1927:

> The Scottish Renaissance Movement is even more concerned with the revival of Gaelic than of Scots. It regards Scotland as a diversity-in-unity to be stimulated at every point, and, theoretically at any rate, it is prepared to develop along trilingual lines. Actually the revival of the Gaelic - and the output of Gaelic letters of quality, despite the efforts of the Hon Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr, is lagging behind in comparison with Braid Scots, and it is questionable whether Gaelic has any similar alignment with the "becoming tendencies" in *Weltliteratur.*[103]

[103] MacDiarmid, "Albyn", p.4-5.

He intended to support all the languages of Scotland as the only way of developing Scottish letters, and considered that Gaelic could take writers closer than ever to Scotland, as it was previous to the Anglicization of the country.

Through the use of the vernacular, it would be possible to recover those elements of the Scottish past which would help to create a distinctive Scottish culture, free of English dominance. This aim could only be achieved through the eventual political independence of Scotland. British centralization affected the evolution of Scottish arts and affairs, which were controlled from London, thus restricting them to English standards and preventing their free realization. The re-establishment of an independent Parliament or a federation of assemblies, in the event of a return to a system of Provinces, was seen by MacDiarmid as an essential step in order to guarantee the free development of Scottish culture.

Already in 1927 he had claimed that complete political independence of Scotland from England was absolutely necessary, and Scotland could not accept any other solution:

> Opponents of Scottish Home Rule, of course, generally argue that such a measure [a complete disjunction of the two countries] would be a piece of retrogressive parochialism at variance with the part we are called upon to play as citizens of a great Empire. Especially is this argument being used against the newer forms which that demand is taking. The reason for this is that they represent that growth or rebirth of national sentiment in Scotland in recent years, which has brought with it the increasing realization that any measure of devolution which does not carry with it full financial autonomy is not worth having. Besides, the powers granted to the Irish Free State render it impossible, as derogatory to its historical status as a nation, that Scotland should accept any less.[104]

According to MacDiarmid, Scotland had strongly contributed to the creation of the British Empire and should be considered an equal to England and have also a voice in

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[104] ibid., p.23.

the decisions concerning its future. He placed Scottish nationalism before British patriotic sentiment and his ultimate goal was a renewal of Scotland's political and cultural life, a transformation of the whole of the Scottish nation, which could only be achieved through the revival of Scottish literature and a return to Scotland's own traditions.

MacDiarmid was also concerned with Scotland's religious situation. The industrial development of Lowland Scotland, and especially the Clydeside, attracted a great number of Irish immigrants. The Church of Scotland reacted against the growing Irish community, and presented them as a serious threat to Scottish nationalism. However, MacDiarmid considered that the main reason for this rejection was the Church of Scotland's fear of the increasing growth of Catholicism, which was being imported into the country. He maintained that Catholicism could bring back the atmosphere existing in Scotland before the Reformation, allowing Scottish literature to flourish again. Literature could also evolve under Protestantism, but writers of all denominations should take part in the revival of Scottish letters.

> I am not contending that Protestantism is essentially antagonistic to arts and letters. That would be absurd. But Scottish Calvinism has been: and just as many of the great figures in the Irish literary movement have been Protestants, so , on the other hand, if there is to be cultural progress in Scotland, must many of the emerging artists be Catholics.[105]

MacDiarmid's nationalist ideas played an important role in his approach to Scottish literature and determined his fierce criticism of Burns and the Burns cult.

4.2.4 ON BURNS'S SONGS

MacDiarmid's approach to popular culture was influenced by the ideas of the

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[105] ibid., p.4.

Modernist movement, in vogue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modernist artists had an elitist perception of arts and culture, and tried to prevent the general access of all social classes to the cultivated world. In his essay *Burns Today and Tomorrow* MacDiarmid quotes the English modernist writer Virginia Woolf to support his claim that the real danger for society "is not the extinction of the highbrow but the triumph of the middlebrow."

> "The true battle", she wrote, "lies not between highbrows and lowbrows, but between highbrows and lowbrows joined together in blood brotherhood against the bloodless and pernicious pest who comes between". Most of the Burns orators are middlebrows - what John Buchan stigmatized as "the interpreting class" - ministers, bankers, schoolteachers, business men, and what not.[106]

MacDiarmid's main opposition was focused on the middle classes, whose access to the arts and interpretation of them had turned Robert Burns into the legendary representative of middle-class British imperialism, with outrageous consequences for Scottish letters.

In a letter to the *Scotsman* on 10 April 1964 MacDiarmid referred to traditional folk song as "the simple outpourings of illiterates and backward peasants", sharing the extended idea that only a certain cultivated portion of the population was capable of producing, appreciating and understanding fine works of art. However, MacDiarmid contradicted that idea and defended Scotland's popular tradition. In 1951-52 he attended the Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidhs to promote Scotland's popular culture and he often defended the preservation of Scotland's oral tradition.

In *Burns Today and Tomorrow* he maintained that the common people should not be given inferior works of art, as they were as willing as any other class to make the effort necessary to understand difficult things if they considered it was worthwhile. He advocated the reunion of the artist and the people, which could only be achieved by going directly to the people, and avoiding the interpretation of the middlemen, who

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[106] MacDiarmid, "Burns Today and Tomorrow" in *Albyn*, p.231.

falsify and spoil all works of art by popularizing and simplifying them, trying to make them accessible to the illiterate public. MacDiarmid claimed that before the development of popular education, greater poetry than that produced at his time had a general currency, and the illiterate common people had no difficulty in understanding and appreciating its value. This could only happen again if artists had real contact with the people, declaiming and explaining poetry in street corners, market squares, pubs, and "wherever two or three are gathered together and prepared to listen", and did not take their relative unintelligence and lack of interest in higher things for granted.

MacDiarmid defended the return to a situation similar to oral tradition, where poets had direct contact with the people in the streets, as a way of allowing the lower classes access to poetry. Oral transmission of literary works was no longer necessary in twentieth-century society, when even the lower classes could have access to written literary works. With this proposal MacDiarmid tried to emphasize the need for common people to appreciate literary works without the interference of the middle classes. He regarded common people as a perfect ally for highly cultivated people against the increasing intervention of the bourgeoisie.

He also made use of popular culture in his attempt to promote Scottish vernacular languages and literature. In *Burns Today and Tomorrow* he stated that "the soul of Scotland can only be revived by return to our true tradition", and he also warned that ballads, songs, and folk tales in Scots would be lost if Scots was not taught in schools. MacDiarmid argued that Scots was the language of Border ballads and a great proportion of Scottish songs, and without it, a great part of Scotland's balladry, song and folk-tales would soon be lost.

He referred to Scotland's folk tradition as an immense treasure which should be preserved, and praised the suppression of detail and simplicity which, due to the influence of English poetry, with its strong effects and accumulation of details, were no longer appreciated. According to MacDiarmid, Burns's finest line could be found in one of his songs, Mary Morrison[107]:

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[107] ibid., p.227.

It was its delicate simplicity, inherited from the country's folk tradition, that made it Burns's greatest line.

MacDiarmid considered that many of Burns's original songs were among the best in the collections published by Johnson and Thomson, but he criticised foreign influence for transforming Scotland's folk tradition in the nineteenth century, adapting it to fashionable art music. Still in the middle of the twentieth century, great national songs such as "Scots wha hae" continued to be sung to "a hopelessly inappropriate dirge-like German setting."[108]

According to him, "it is only the more innocuous pieces, the silly love songs" that Burns's followers are concerned with, as they are afraid that if they gave other pieces a chance, they could discover ideas different from those they defend. For MacDiarmid this general attitude towards Burns's songs, together with the disappearance of Scots, was leading to their loss. He supported his idea with a BBC survey which showed that a random number of Glasgow citizens failed completely, given a line from one of the most popular of Burns's songs, to give the following line, and where all those interviewed admitted that they knew little or nothing about Burns's works. MacDiarmid blamed it on the use that the middle classes had made of Burns.

In spite of his continuous attacks on Burns, years later MacDiarmid acknowledged that Burns was a great song writer, and that this largely accounted for his expanding world-wide fame. Despite claiming that Burns's was a worthless cult, and that his fame would finally give way to new writers, MacDiarmid recognized Burns's immortality in his introduction to *Burns: Love Songs*, published in 1962:

> the simple fact remains that these songs are immortal, and that through them

[108] ibid., p.289.

> Burns has an international acceptance no other poet equals.[109]

MacDiarmid praised Scotland's folk tradition only to support his defence of Scots language and literature. However, his approach to popular culture was very much influenced by the elitist view of Modernist writers. He believed that common people should have access to great works of art, but he still regarded them as "illiterates and backward peasants", incapable of producing any relevant work of art. In a letter to the *Scotsman* on19 January 1960, only a year after having referred to Scottish folk tradition as an "immense treasure", he described the collection of folk-songs and ballads undertaken by the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh as "a waste of time and money."[110]

He regarded art culture as far superior to folk culture, and claimed that that was the kind of art which should be spread among the people.

> "Highbrow" although my work may be, and certainly at the furthest remove from "folk-poetry", it ought to be pointed out that no Scottish poet since Burns has commanded anything like the sales and recognition I have done, while through radio and TV I have reached many millions of listeners in this and several other countries.[111]

MacDiarmid despised folk poetry and only defended it to encourage the preservation of Scots and his nationalist interests. However, he still respected some of Burns's songs and poems, and often tried either to despise him or compare himself to the poet, in an attempt to become Scotland's greatest poet himself.

4.3 MacDIARMID'S AIMS

MacDiarmid's strong criticism of Burns, the Burns cult and its influence on Scottish

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[109] Riach, "MacDiarmid's Burns", p.211.

[110] Finlay, Alec (ed.); *The Armstrong Nose*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 1996, p.97.

[111] ibid., p.98.

literature had no immediate results and was apparently unable to change the general attitude towards the poet's figure and work. Far from being discouraged, MacDiarmid continued his attacks throughout his life, continuously restating his strong opposition to the well-established Burns myth, and the need to go beyond it and encourage the further development of Scottish letters. As a result of his radical reaction against Burns, MacDiarmid was eventually expelled from the Montrose Burns Club, of which he was a member, and was subsequently considered *persona non grata* in the Burnsian circles.

Throughout his literary career, MacDiarmid tried to undermine the relevance of Burns in Scottish literature. Even if he acknowledged that Burns had a great poetic genius, he maintained that the poet had not made any real contribution to the evolution of Scottish literature, but rather the cult which emerged around his figure was preventing it. The Burns cult had produced a distorted image of the poet and the Scottish literary scene had been, and still was, mainly dominated by the Burns myth, which not only did not help to spread the poet's works or encourage a serious academic approach to them, but was also preventing the emergence of any new authors who did not continue to write under Burns's influence.

MacDiarmid's attacks on Burns were not so much based on a real contempt for the poet, as on the need he saw to make a place for new writers who would contribute to the development of Scottish letters. MacDiarmid thought it was high time for a change in Scottish literature, a literary Renaissance which would allow Scotland to keep up with other European cultures. Change was part of the natural evolution of literature, but it had been lacking in Scotland since the eighteenth century.

> Is it not the case that in all the greater literatures certain authors have a dominant influence for a time, but that, sooner or later, fashions change and the source of influence and inspiration passes to other authors eclipsed for a time by the former? And is that not a healthier state of affairs than that literature should be dominated generation after generation, irrespective of changes no matter how tremendous in all other directions, by one great figure whose overshadowing reputation denies due consideration to all others, blurs his own

> relationship to his predecessors, makes it difficult to apply proper literary standards and "distinguish and divide" among his own works even, but insists that they must all be accepted without criticism as beyond question and justifies their effect in assimilating all else to their own type?[112]

MacDiarmid considered that Burns should be put aside so as to let new authors take the lead in Scottish literature. Through his solid rejection of Burns, he intended to make place for his own works and those of other Scottish Renaissance writers.

But MacDiarmid's denial of Burns was also caused by his refusal of the bourgeois and imperialist ideologies the poet had come to incarnate in the nineteenth century. Burns had been used by the middle classes to represent British patriotic sentiment, reinforced by the expansion of the British Empire. Through his rejection of Burns, MacDiarmid was also rejecting the deep British sentiment shared by some members of the Scottish population, in favour of Scottish nationalism. He considered that a complete dissociation from England was necessary in every field, in order to guarantee the progress of Scotland as a nation.

During the first half of the twentieth century some efforts were being made to preserve and promote the Scottish literary and linguistic heritage. In 1951 the University of Edinburgh created the School of Scottish Studies, which was engaged in the collecting of Scottish folk traditions over the country, and especially the recording of songs and bothy ballads from Aberdeenshire; the University of Aberdeen undertook the publication of the *Scots National Dictionary* and the first lectureship in Scottish literature was created at Glasgow University.. However, MacDiarmid considered that a complete revival of Scottish letters would not be possible unless Scotland was wholly independent from England. Therefore MacDiarmid actively participated in the political life of Scotland. He was a founding member of the Scottish National Party and later on joined the Communist party.

Despite criticizing the use that Scottish society had made of Burns, MacDiarmid also

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[112] MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.87-88.

used the poet for his own purposes. His rejection of Burns's figure and work was only a necessary step towards the social, cultural and political revival MacDiarmid intended for Scotland. Demystifying Burns's figure could raise an interest in new authors and literary tendencies and allow the development of Scotland's own national literature. But MacDiarmid could also appreciate the value of the poet's work and his defence of political liberty and egalitarianism. However, he criticizes the exagerated glorification of the poet, ironically pointing him out as an example to Scottish society.

> Rabbie, wad'st thou wert here - the warld hath need,
> And Scotland mair sae, o' the likes o' thee![113]

4.4 OTHER PERCEPTIONS OF BURNS

During the first half of the twentieth century new studies of Burns's life and work were published, and the Burns clubs continued growing and expanding all around the world. Most of them were interrupted during the First World War, but afterwards their annual or monthly meetings began to be hold again. They continued to celebrate Burns Nights and St. Andrew's dinners, and organize day trips to the places where the poet had lived. Concerts and lectures were given to the club members, on several aspects of Burns's work and life, as well as other elements of Scottish literature. The Clubs maintained their efforts to spread the poet's works among the younger generations, through the organization of school competitions in singing and elocution, and even by awarding scholarships to the winning children.

As MacDiarmid maintained, the Burns Clubs were still mainly middle-class institutions, more concerned with the cherished myth and the ideas Burns had come to embody than with the poet's work itself. However, the influence of the Scottish Renaissance movement together with the changes undergone by twentieth-century

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[113] MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, p.8.
MacDiarmid's recalls Wordsworth's lines: "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour; / England hath need of thee" (London, 1802). Despite rejecting England's literary influence, MacDiarmid imitates a Romantic English poet himself.

British society were transforming their aims and structure. Imperialist ideas were being slowly replaced by an increasing interest in art in the Burns clubs. Toasts such as "The Imperial Forces" were replaced by "Glasgow Art and Artists", etc., which shows the clubs' attempts to focus more on the Scottish literary and linguistic world and less on Britain's political situation. Another innovation in the early 1920s was the admission of women to some of the clubs, as members and even to the executive committees.[114]

However, Burns's figure continued to be used and reinterpreted by different political ideologies. It was adopted by the Socialist Party, for his works were considered to present a dignifying comprehensive picture of the life of the working class, and to reflect the spirit of the common people. His ideas were thought to have contributed to the establishment of democracy in Scotland. He fought against the control that the aristocracy and the Church had on people's actions and beliefs, and tried to get rid of the old conventions that determined life in Scotland. Not only did he defend the rights of Scottish common people, his work had a universal projection.

Burns was also presented as a victim of social injustice. Poverty had an influence on his education and professional life. His hard living conditions did not allow him to develop his whole literary potential, forcing him to work for the Excise, and even led to his early death. Therefore the Socialist Party defended Burns's ideals of Liberty and Brotherhood and used his figure in its campaign against a social order that was able to deprive the world of such a humane and gifted poet.

The Communist Party also celebrated the works of Robert Burns. For them, Burns had not limited himself to protest against the inequalities and injustices of a class society as many others before him. He was presented as a radical democrat who, at the time of the French and American Revolutions, used his poetry to transmit his progressive opinions. According to the Communist Party, only social ownership and the planned organisation of the great industries would enable the common man to enjoy the

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[114] *Burns Chronicle*, 1924, no.33.

freedom, dignity and culture regarded by Burns as every man's right.[115] Scotland could only flourish as long as its social and economic problems were dealt with within Scotland.

MacDiarmid's view of Burns had affected the perception of the poet in the first half of the twentieth century, and many authors followed his example in an attempt to demystify the poet. However, Burns's figure continued to be used and reinterpreted by different ideologies, and the Burns Cult continued its expansion. Burns was not merely regarded as a poet. His position in Scottish letters was very different to that of other well-known Scottish writers, for he had become a myth to Scottish society. As The Renaissance writer Edwin Muir expressed it:

> He is a myth evolved by the popular imagination, a communal poetic creation. He is a Protean figure; we can all shape him to our own likeness, for a myth is endlessly adaptable; so that to the respectable this secondary Burns is a decent man; to the Rabelaisian, bawdy; to the sentimentalist, sentimental; to the Socialist, a revolutionary; to the Nationalist, a patriot; to the religious, pious; to the self-made man, self-made; to the drinker, a drinker.[116]

Unlike MacDiarmid, Muir regarded the Burns Cult as an essential part of the poet. It was the result of the community's need to create a comforting figure who supported their own attitude to life. Burns's qualities made him the appropriate figure to incarnate that popular myth which was to be modelled around him. Therefore Burns the myth could no longer be dissociated from Burns the poet, as MacDiarmid intended. Muir acknowledged that Burns's followers did not fully appreciate the literary value of his work, and often were not even familiar with it, but he regarded the Burns cult as an intrinsic element of the poet.

> When we consider Burns we must therefore include the Burns Nights with him,

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[115] Scottish Office of Communist Party (ed.); *Burns Belongs to the People*,Kirkcaldy, Kirkcaldy Printing Works, 19--, p.23.

[116] Muir, Edwin; "The Burns Myth" in Montgomerie, William; *Robert Burns: New Judgements*, Glasgow, William MacLellan, 1947, p.6.

> and the Burns cult in all its forms; if we sneer at them we sneer at Burns. They are his reward, or his punishment (whichever the fastidious reader may prefer to call it) for having had the temerity to express the ordinary feelings of his people, and having become a part of their life. What the Burns Nights ignore is the perfection of Burns's art, which makes him one of the great poets.[117]

As a result of the cult, Burns's work had become the property of the common people. Even people uncultivated or not interested in literature had taken Burns's work and moulded his ideas and feelings to suit their own. His work had become popular and vulgarised, but it was also present in the more select world of the literati, and Burns scholarship was still evolving during the twentieth century. Edwin Muir defended the right of uncultivated people to have access to literary works, not through the writing of pieces which would be read in bigger quantity, but through education. Schools should be reformed and teach more and more people to appreciate literature of quality.

As Edwin Muir maintained, the Burns cult could not be dissociated from the poet, and it continued to flourish during the first half of the twentieth century. Controversy around him increased, due to the growing number of followers and detractors, who discussed the literary value of Burns's work as well as his role as the representative of Scotland abroad and of countless different attitudes and ideologies within the country.

Most of Burns's work was still unfamiliar to the majority of the Scottish population, and even to the members of the Burns clubs. In the first half of the twentieth century some of his works were taught in Scottish schools, and read or sung at Burns Nights or St. Andrew's dinners, but it was always the same hackneyed songs and poems that were repeated again and again. It was not so much Burns's work which was really appealing to people from Scotland and other countries, but their familiarity with some of the pieces, which made people feel part of a community. In the nineteenth century Burns had come to represent Scotland as a part of the British Empire, and was still being used as a figure with whom Scottish people could identify themselves. However, after the First World War nationalism was reinforced all over Europe, and

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[117] ibid., p.7-8.

people from every country were trying to define the common elements that could identify them as a nation. This was a new role Burns was assigned by Scottish society.

MacDiarmid's fierce opposition to Burns and the cult around him did not put an end to the general attitude to the poet and his work. Despite the influence of his numerous speeches and writings, Burns continued to be one of the central figures of Scottish letters, and undoubtedly the most popular one, even if, as MacDiarmid maintained, those who cherished the poet were not familiar with the majority of his works, and often had no interest in literature at all.

However, MacDiarmid's intense reaction against him aroused controversy about a figure which had never been deeply questioned before. He showed the need for a better knowledge and understanding of the poet through his work, and provoked the development of serious literary study of the poet. Instead of a complete rejection of Burns, he unsuccessfully fought for the teaching of the vernacular languages of Scotland in schools, so that young people could have access to the whole of Scottish letters directly, and not through someone else's interpretation.

MacDiarmid made use of Burns in an attempt to promote Scottish language and literature, and subsequently the whole of Scotland's cultural heritage. He considered that a revival of Scottish arts and the eventual emancipation of Scotland's political life could lead to the development of Scotland as a distinctive country within Europe. His work contributed to change the general attitude towards Scottish arts and affairs, and also the attitude towards Robert Burns, who began to be seen mainly as a Scottish poet, regardless of the countless roles that had been and still were being attributed to him.

5. SCOTTISH FOLK REVIVAL

In the late 1940s and early 1950s folk music became extremely popular in Scotland. Traditional singers became well-known and new professional folksingers appeared. They recovered and spread the old traditional Scottish songs, and wrote new songs using traditional tunes. They found a great acceptance amongst the general public, and this new tide aroused an interest in Scotland's popular tradition which had not taken place in Scotland since the eighteenth century.

The wide popularity achieved by Scottish folk music changed the public's perception. It was no longer seen as belonging to the common people, peasants, tinkers, and the illiterate in general, but rather as the common property of Scotland. The Scottish Folk revival not only affected the development of Scottish music, but had also an influence on the way Scottish tradition was perceived in Scotland. It raised a renewed interest in Scotland's literary and musical heritage, and worked on the preservation, diffusion and development of that tradition.

The figure of Robert Burns was not directly affected by the Folk revival but the perception of the poet's songs evolved due to the increasing interest in traditional music caused by the revival. At first his songs were not associated with traditional music, but later on they started being perceived as part of Scotland's folk tradition.

5.1 ORIGINS OF THE REVIVAL

The Scottish Folk Revival was directly affected by the revival that took place in the States after World War II. The American Folk Revival was influenced by many "topical" songs, dealing with current or local topics, by black music, religious hymns, songs of the Civil War and the migrant workers, Robin Hood-type ballads, etc. Social consciousness aroused an increasing interest in these songs and eventually raised the popularity of traditional songs amongst a wider public. This trend continued developing in the States until MacCarthyism put an end to it in the 1950s.

The wide success of the American and Irish Folk Revivals encouraged Scotland's interest in its own traditional music. The eighteenth-century enthusiasm for traditional Scots songs and fiddle music had continued during the following century, but the musical arrangements were often influenced by Italian and German art music, and the songs were performed by singers with trained voices, often accompanied by non-traditional instruments.

The general appreciation of Scottish traditional music was boosted by the visit of the American folklorist Alan Lomax in 1950. He was the son of John A. Lomax, the first major collector of contemporary folksong in the English-speaking world. His visit to Britain had the purpose of collecting material for the disc series *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*, for Columbia Records, of which Scotland was going to be Vol.VI. Guided by the collector and folksong writer Hamish Henderson, Lomax collected songs and ballads in the Western Isles and Aberdeenshire area. His collecting showed that numerous traditional songs and ballads were still being transmitted orally in certain parts of the country, and aroused an increasing interest in that aspect of Scottish culture. Scotland became newly interested in its own tradition, and especially the fact that collectors from America came to find out about Scottish cultural heritage, aroused a wide interest in popular culture.

From 1948 the Theatre Workshop performances organized by Joan Littlewood and the actor, singer and songwriter Ewan MacColl were followed by late-night ceilidhs. This interest in popular traditions also contributed to the foundation of the People's Festival, which was at the heart of the Folk Revival.

The People's Festival was created in Edinburgh in 1951. The International Festival of the Arts had started in Edinburgh in 1947. However, in some Edinburgh circles it was felt that Scotland's traditional culture was widely neglected. This led to the formation in 1951 of the Edinburgh Labour Festival Committee, in an attempt to promote Scotland's own traditions. The Committee was formed by representatives from the Labour Party, the Edinburgh Trades Council, various Trade Unions - including the Musicians' Union - the Co-operative Movement and some Scottish members of the

Workers' Music Association.[118]

The main purpose of the Committee was to make culture more accessible to the general public, modifying the elitist character of the Edinburgh International Festival. Some factors such as the ticket prices, which restricted the attendance of the lower classes were criticized, and they also tried to include working-class culture in the events organized by the International Festival.

The support of all labour organizations led to the creation of the People's Festival, a parallel event to the International Festival, which aimed to promote Scotland's own popular culture. The first People's Festival Ceilidh, organized by Hamish Henderson and recorded by Alan Lomax, took place in the Oddfellow Halls on 31 August 1951. Some of the performers taking part in the event were the Gaelic singers Flora MacNeil and Calum Johnston from Barra, Jimmy MacBeath from the North-East, the piper John Burgess and John Strachan. For the first time there could be found a "group of authentic traditional musicians and ballad-singers from rural Scotland singing together to a city audience."[119]

In the following year the People's Festival not only included popular culture, but also concerts of piano and violin music by Beethoven, lectures, poetry readings, art exhibitions and film shows. In 1952 the People's Festival celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of Hugh MacDiarmid, and some of his poems were read at the ceilidh social, late-night sessions following the official events.

However, the stress of the festival was always put on popular culture and traditions. In 1953 the Aberdeenshire traveller Jeannie Robertson appeared in the People's Ceilidh. She had been "discovered" earlier that year by Hamish Henderson during one of his recording trips, and due to her wide repertoire of traditional songs and ballads, her "wonderful dignity" and "extremely noble" performances[120], she became one of the

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[118] Munro, Ailie; *The Democratic Muse*, Aberdeen, Scottish Cultural Press, 1996, p.28.

[119] Henderson, Hamish; *Alias MacAlias*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 1994, p.16.

[120] Finlay. Letter 105, p.119.

most relevant figures of the revival.

The People's Festival had a great popularity, but a rather brief existence. It was banned by the Scottish Trade Union Congress as a response to the Theatre Workshop performance in 1952 of Ewan MacColl's anti US-imperialism play *The Travellers.* Nevertheless the festival continued for some years, but the debts accumulated due to the withdrawal of the Trade Unions' financial support provoked its end. The last People's Festival was celebrated in 1955. However, by the time of its disappearance it had already attracted many followers, who had become seriously interested in Scotland's traditional culture.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE REVIVAL

The People's Festival and Alan Lomax's recordings had extended folk tradition to a large number of people. The change of attitude towards Scottish traditional culture could be found at all levels of society. 1951 saw the establishment of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. The School undertook the collecting of traditional songs, tales and ballads, mainly in the Gaelic-speaking North-West and the Aberdeenshire area, with its rich legacy of ballads. A copy of Alan Lomax's recordings was kept in the School archives, and in 1951 Hamish Henderson was employed by the School to continue the collection of traditional material. The fieldwork and research of the School covered "traditional Scots and Gaelic music, material culture, social history and organisation, social anthropology, archaeology, a folk-tale archive and a place names survey."[121]

In 1954 the School moved from an old warehouse where it had first been located, to 3 eighteenth-century houses in George Square. In 1957 it started publishing the academic journal *Scottish Studies.*

But interest in traditional culture was not restricted to academic circles. The revival

[121] Munro, p.30.

saw the creation of many folk clubs and festivals, which in the 1950s extended to all areas of Scotland.

In 1953 Morris Blythman, a French and German teacher at Allan Glen's secondary school for boys, Glasgow, created the first folksong club in Scotland. The school boys started collecting songs and performing them in all sorts of places, as well as organizing school concerts and evening ceilidhs at the teacher's home. By 1955 Morris Blythman and the guitar teacher Josh MacRae were already inviting guests to the school concerts such as Moyna Flanigan, Enoch Kent, Jimmy MacGregor, Rena Swankey and even Jeannie Robertson.

Folk clubs soon spread all over the country. Sandy Bell's Bar, which later became Forrest Hill Bar, Edinburgh, was one of the main folk centres of the city. In 1958 Stuart MacGregor and Hamish Henderson founded the Edinburgh University Folk Song Society and in the following year a similar club was opened at the University of Glasgow by Adam McNaughtan and Ian Davison. Also in 1959 Arthur Argo, the great-grandson of the ballad collector Gavin Greig, established the Aberdeen Folk Club; and the same year the Edinburgh club "The Sporranslitters" became the Howff Folk Club. During the following years several folk clubs were opened in Glasgow (1959), St Andrews (1960-61), Perth (1961), Dunfermline (1961), Dundee (1962), Kirkcaldy (1962), etc.

During the 1960s the songs performed in folk clubs were a mixture of American, Irish, Scottish and English songs, including some in Gaelic. However, as the 1970s approached, more and more Scottish songs could be heard in the clubs.

Folk music was not only enjoyed by the restricted audience of the clubs and home gatherings, but was soon accessible to a bigger public thanks to the nearly 60 folk festivals organized throughout the country. The Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland, founded in 1965 organized their first folk festival at Blairgowrie in 1966. It was moved to Kinross in 1971. The festivals affiliated to the TMSA were especially concerned with the traditional element in their programmes,

and they mainly included authentic traditional singers such as Jane Turriff, Stanley Robertson, Betsy Whyte and Willie Scott.

The increasing number of folk clubs and festivals made traditional music extremely popular in the 1960s. The BBC also contributed to the diffusion of popular music to a mass audience, through the inclusion of folk artists such as Jimmy MacGregor and Robin Hall in "Tonight", one of its most popular programmes between 1959-64.

Instrumental music became increasingly popular at the end of the 1960s. Many young people learned how to play some of Scotland's traditional instruments such as the pipes and the fiddle. This tendency was not so much felt in the clubs and festivals, where singing still had a leading part, as in the pubs and home gatherings.

Meanwhile political events encouraged the writing of new songs and ballads. Traditional music was adopted by some political movements and played an important role in some political events during the 1960s. In 1961 the American submarine depot ship *Proteus* sailed into the Holy Loch near Dunoon, together with other smaller ships. It carried nuclear weapons, which raised the strong opposition of the general public and provoked the reaction of several groups. The Peace Movement, led by the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament); the Committee for Non-Violent Disarmament; church people; Quakers; the Committee of the 100 and members of several political parties such as Labour, the Communist and the Scottish National Party joined each other in the anti-Polaris campaign, "Polaris" being the name of a missile carried by the submarine.

Anti-Polaris songs became very popular amongst the demonstrators, and most of them were written to traditional tunes. The songs included "Ye'll no sit here", whose tune derived from "Hey Jock, ma Cuddy"; "We dinna want Polaris" to the tune "Three craws sat upon a wa'"; "Ding Dong Dollar", using the tune from the Glasgow children's street song "Oh ye canny shove yer Granny aff a bus", which is also the tune of "She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes"; "I shall not be moved", based on an American trade unionist song; and "Freedom Come-all-ye",

written a year before the Polaris event by Hamish Henderson, to his own adaptation of the pipe tune "The bloody fields of Flanders".[122]

Some of the Polaris songs were included in the *Ding Dong Dollar* disc, produced by the American Folkways Company. Despite the fact that most of the anti-Polaris songs were explicitly anti-American, they often made use of many traditional American tunes, and they even became very popular amongst those Americans who supported the anti-nuclear arms movement. However, as the event was over, the songs stopped being sung and now they are no longer heard, with the exception of Hamish Henderson's "Freedom Come-all-ye", whose more universal message has allowed its survival.

Protest songs were an important part of the folk scene in the 1950s and 60s. They became less fashionable in the 1970s, but they re-appeared again during the 80s as a response to different social problems.

In the late 1950s the commercialization of folk music had began as a result of its increasing popularity. Some folk singers started to perform in concerts which could be attended by larger audiences than performances in folk pubs and clubs. Radio and television also contributed to the diffusion of folk music to a wider public. The market of folk records expanded thanks to the advertising campaigns and the popularity achieved by certain folk singers thanks to concerts, radio and TV performances.

Thus the folk scene was divided into two separate worlds. Certain folksingers became too well-known to perform for the clubs' small audiences and instead they gave concerts in bigger venues where they could be listened to by a larger public. They also became too expensive for the clubs to be able to afford them, so soon the world of folk clubs and commercial folk music became very much apart, with different performers and songs. Folk clubs continued to exist outside the folk record market. The music performed there did not try to appeal so much to the popular taste as commercial folk music. Encouraged by the Irish Folk Revival and the folk boom in

[122] ibid., p.38-45.

America during the 60s, the appeal to a larger audience had turned part of Scottish folk music into commercial pop-folk, which increased the number of records, radio and TV performances.

Those involved in the world of folk clubs rejected the commercialized side of folk music in favour of a more "authentic" folk tradition, still alive within certain sectors of society. In a letter to the *Scotsman* on 2 April 1964 Hamish Henderson claimed that:

> The essential difference between ethnic folksong and the commercialized folksong of the entertainers is that the former is creative and the latter is usually a dead-end.[123]

Hamish Henderson considered folk tradition to be constantly evolving, as it was handed down from generation to generation, whereas commercialized pop-folk did not allow the songs to be transformed in the same way, and therefore would mean the end of that tradition. For Henderson, the folk process was far more important than the origin of a song. Folk poets make use of traditional tunes or variants thereof and add "a line, an idea or even a whole verse from an earlier song."[124] Folksongs usually include certain elements from other songs, which makes them familiar to the audience that therefore regards them as their common property. They are not considered to belong to a certain author, so the new performers feel that they have the liberty to change them according to their own style.

During the revival a distinction was made between two different types of folksingers: "source" singers and "revival" singers. According to Ailie Munro:

> Singers were "revival" if they had learned most of their songs from recorded or printed sources, from other revival singers or from source singers (...) and "source" if the songs had been handed down in the oral tradition, or learned in

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[123] Finlay. L. 116, p.134.

[124] ibid. L. 120, p.140.

childhood. But the categories are not clear cut.[125]

Obviously there were revival singers who had learned their songs orally or during their childhood, as well as source singers using written texts to learn new songs or transmit their own. At the time of the revival much importance was given to the part played by oral transmission in popular culture, and those singers who had picked up their songs from the oral tradition were considered to be purer and more authentic than the others. Popular songs were still transmitted orally in certain rural areas of Scotland, and even in the cities. However, in recent years exclusively orally transmitted pieces had become extremely rare. Since the eighteenth century the written text has played an important role in the transmission of Scottish popular songs and ballads, and in the twentieth century it has become commonly used by all kinds of traditional singers. As Ailie Munro stated:

> With very few exceptions all singers now consult books and use pen and paper, and I have not come across a single verbally illiterate singer in Scotland, at least amongst those involved in the revival scenes. Yet although verbal literacy is now accepted, musical literacy is still comparatively rare and is often eschewed by choice in favour of repeated listening.[126]

Nowadays the influence of the written text, as well as recordings, is commonly accepted as a part of the folk tradition, and the difference between source and revival singers is not emphasized any more. But during the revival authentic source singers were more appreciated than those whose repertoire did not proceed exclusively from oral sources. At the time of the revival there was still in Scotland a community of travelling people who kept alive their oral tradition. Their itinerant way of life, separated from the rest of society had allowed them to maintain a large repertoire of folksongs and ballads that were still orally transmitted from generation to generation. And this repertoire was constantly enlarged by their contact with different settled communities, where they were able to pick up the local songs and ballads.

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[125] Munro, p.52.

[126] ibid., p.52.

However, during the 1960s the majority of the travelling people were forced to find definite settlements, at least during the winter months, as a result of the changes and norms of twentieth-century society, which no longer accepted their old way of life. Even if they still maintained their traditional songs and ballads, the travellers had to abandon many of their old customs and conform to a different way of life, not so appropriate for the development of their oral tradition. The younger generations, now in contact with a more "modern" life style, tended to reject the traditional habits and customs that represented the old travelling times that were not acceptable within the settled society. Thus the new way of life; the reduced contact with other settled and travelling communities, which had hitherto allowed them to enlarge their folk repertoire; as well as the influence of radio and television had an adverse effect and caused the loss of one of the last remnants of oral tradition in the country.

Despite the fact that folk tradition was not only restricted to those communities, such as the travelling people, where it was mainly orally transmitted; that it could be found in villages as well as towns and cities; and that its popularity was expanding, making its way into the protest song, recordings, concerts, pubs, clubs and festivals, during the 1960s folk music was still deeply associated with rural Scotland. That is mainly the reason why it continued being attacked by Hugh MacDiarmid, for whom it still represented the idealized image of Scottish rural life.

5.3 THE FOLKSONG FLYTING

The Folk Revival also had to face the attacks of Hugh MacDiarmid who, during his later years, continued his campaign against folk music. In the first years of the revival MacDiarmid was involved in the People's Festival, which celebrated his sixtieth birthday. However, his attitude radically changed some years later, and he started attacking the works of the revival. MacDiarmid considered that folk tradition did not have the same literary value as art poetry. He was surprised by the great popularity achieved by folk poetry during the revival and reacted strongly against it. He expressed his opposition in a series of letters to the *Scotsman*, where he tried to

establish the difference and higher position of art in relation to folk poetry. Although he had previously collaborated with Hamish Henderson and even published some of the latter's poems, in the early 60s he turned against him and his work for the revival. In a letter to the *Scotsman* on 19 January 1960 he wrote:

> Mr Henderson, on the contrary, seems to find his ideal man in the "muckle sumph", and to wish to scrap all learning and all literature as hitherto defined in favour of the boring doggerel of analphabetic and ineducable farm-labourers, tinkers and the like. He is presumably at home among beatniks and beatchiks. Personally, I continue to think Dante, for example, or Goethe greater poets - and more creditable specimens of homo sapiens - than McGonagall or the authors of any - and all - of the "folksongs" Mr Henderson and his colleagues so assiduously collect. I do not envy the task of whoever may ultimately have to go through the great mass of indiscriminate tape-recordings accumulated by the School of Scottish Studies in order to find any elements of real value.[127]

MacDiarmid not only considered popular literature much inferior to the art literature produced by great literary men, but also ignored the admiration that some of them felt for folk culture, and the influence that this had had on their works. He also despised the "illiterate" common people who produced and kept that tradition alive, and he even considered them incapable of being educated and of producing any valuable work of art.

MacDiarmid attacked the folk revival that he had previously supported taking part in the People's Festivals. In 1964 he initiated a public argument with the poet and Marxist critic David Craig, Hamish Henderson and others involved in the revival. The argument, consisting of a series of letters to the *Scotsman*, was called "the folksong flyting."

MacDiarmid claimed that the popularity of folk poetry "among the broad masses of people" was no proof of its artistic literary value. Due to his elitist perception of art,

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[127] Finlay. L. 88, p.97.

he considered that only the common people were able to enjoy folk poetry, as they could identify themselves with it "thanks to their minimal literacy and because it corresponds to their ignorant tastes and reflects the sorry condition of their lives."[128] However, this tradition had not enough quality to be thoroughly enjoyed by cultivated people, and he declared himself bored by all the folk tradition he had been lately exposed to:

> I for one have been bored to death listening to more of it, including the renderings of Jeannie Robertson, Jimmy MacBeath, and others, than I venture to suggest Dr Craig has ever suffered, and I certainly never want to hear any more of it.[129]

MacDiarmid's controversial position raised great criticism and a strong defence of those who maintained and transmitted the folk tradition. But the main reason for MacDiarmid's opposition to popular culture was that in Scotland it was deeply identified with a rural society, whose image had been idealized and sentimentalized during the last centuries. He thought that the cult of that past way of life was preventing any further intellectual and artistic development in Scotland:

> The hangover of our past rural life has had most deplorable effects in the vast body of post-Burnsian doggerel, and, in my experience, the present folksong cult plays into the hands of the great number of people who are hostile to all intellectual distinction and to experimental and *avant-garde* work generally, and I regard their attitude as a menace to the arts not less serious than, and closely connected with, the pressure to reduce all the arts to the level of mere entertainment.[130]

According to MacDiarmid, the cult of folksong encouraged by the revival was focusing the public's attention on a time that no longer existed, instead of looking at the future and supporting the development of new artistic tendencies. He claimed that

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[128] ibid. L. 104, p.118.

[129] ibid. L. 104, p.118.

[130] ibid. L. 90, p.100.

the old rural way of life was bound to disappear completely with the introduction of automation. More skilled workers would be needed, and they would no longer spend their leisure time listening to folksongs and ballads.

> The demand everywhere today is for higher and higher intellectual levels. Why should we be concerned then with songs which reflect the educational limitations, the narrow lives, the poor literary abilities, of a peasantry we have happily outgrown?[131]

That time was past and gone, and was "fortunately irrecoverable". In order to progress Scotland should stop looking back to the past, and allow the increasing number of cultivated people to work towards the further development of society. MacDiarmid saw the need to move on, and no place for the folk tradition in twentieth-century Scotland:

> At the present stage in human history, there are far more important things to do than bawl out folksongs, which, whatever function they may have had in the past, have little or no relevance to most people in advanced highly industrialized countries today.[132]

The Scottish folk revival had already spread the interest in folk tradition throughout the country, and MacDiarmid's opposition did not affect its increasing popularity. Folk music was no longer seen as the remains of a long-gone era, but rather as part of the present. The constant changes in the songs and their adaptation to certain current issues, such as the anti-Polaris campaign, had contributed to link them to the twentieth century. Therefore, when singing the old traditional Scottish songs and ballads, people were not trying to recover an idealized past, as MacDiarmid feared, but rather used that tradition they had in common as a kind of entertainment they could still share and enjoy together in the present.

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[131] ibid. L. 104, p.119.

[132] ibid. L. 115, p.134.

5.4 ROBERT BURNS AND THE REVIVAL

At the time of the revival, the figure of Robert Burns was still associated with the cult created in the nineteenth century. However, the continuous attacks by MacDiarmid had contributed to transform the image of the poet, presenting him just as another Scottish poet, whose work had been artificially mystified and whose figure had been altered to represent certain political ideas.

Burns suppers continued to be celebrated, and in 1958, following Hamish Henderson's suggestion, the Workers Music Association decided to record the Burns Supper at the Bowhill People's Burns Club, which, according to Henderson, was the only working-class Burns club in Scotland. It was formed by coal miners. MacDiarmid was invited to the event and, as suggested by Henderson, proposed a toast to the "Friends of the People", a radical political group with which Burns sympathized. In a letter to Hugh MacDiarmid, Hamish Henderson showed his contentment that "the first Burns Supper ever to be put on an L.P. should be one run by the Scottish miners".[133]

At the time of the revival the Burns cult had become less intense. The British patriotism Burns had come to represent was vanishing together with the Empire. However, the Burns cult continued and Burns Suppers were still highly popular at all levels of society. Even if they rejected the official Burns cult, some of the people involved in the revival still took part in some of the events concerning the poet. MacDiarmid's radical opposition to the cult had contributed to the partial destruction of the myth, presenting Burns as one of many Scottish poets. However, the influence of the cult could still be felt during the revival. In the middle of the twentieth century Burns's figure was still loaded with all the various connotations it had acquired during the previous century. Therefore he was not regarded as part of Scotland's popular tradition, but rather as an author of "art poetry". It was mainly his poems that were taught in the schools, and whenever his songs were included, often in the music class, they were taught in the arranged classical style of the nineteenth century. Therefore

[133] ibid. L. 67, p.74.

Robert Burns was not associated with folk music by the revival folksingers.

According to Sheila Douglas there were no Burns songs in the folk clubs in the 1960s.[134] However, the attitude towards the poet evolved during the following years. In *The Democratic Muse* Ailie Munro transcribes some of the songs recorded at the annual Blairgowrie, Kinross and Keith Festivals between 1970-78 and at some ceilidh concerts - the *Stampede* ceilidh at the Heriot-Watt University (1971), the Sir Walter Scott bicentenary ceilidh in Edinburgh (1971) and the Inverkeithing TMSA ceilidh (1970) -. The songs recorded include some of Burns's songs.

"Sic a parcel o' rogues in a nation", sung by Allan Morris at the Kinross Festival in 1973, is presented as one of the "popular" songs at the time. The use of Burns in defence of nationalist intereses determined the wide popularity of this song since the nineteenth century. The version performed followed Burns's almost exactly. The tune and lyrics were basically the same, although some of the words were even more Scots than in Burns's version, eg. "oor" instead of "our" or "sic" for "such", etc. The song was considered a traditional song by its performer, Allan Morris, who introduced it saying:

> I regard it as the first folksong I ever learned. It's a protest against the Anglo-Scottish union of 1707... and still remains to my mind one of the finest national songs we have.[135]

Undoubtedly the song was considered to be part of Scotland's popular tradition. Morris heard it for the first time in the mid or late 60s, probably performed by the Dubliners or the Corries.

The other song transcribed, and classified as "moderately popular" by Munro, is "What can a young lassie dae wi' an auld man?", performed by Heather Heywood at

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[134] Douglas, Sheila; "Burns and the Folksinger" in Simpson, Kenneth (ed.); *Love and Liberty*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1997, p.299.

[135] Munro, p.97.

Kinross in 1975. She learned it from the singing of Janice Clark and of Jane Turriff, and said that the song was usually a favourite of the local Folk Club in Kilmarnock. Once again the words are basically those of Burns, as appear in James Kinley's *Burns: Complete Poems and Songs* (1971), although the order of the verses is changed. Here the words are also more Scots than Burns's, which, according to Munro, shows "signs of oral tradition at work."[136]

Obviously Burns's songs had began to circulate amongst folksingers during the revival, who learned them from each other's singing and adapted them to their own style. Some of the songs could also be heard in folk clubs around the country. These included "To the weavers gin ye go", "The Highland widow's lament", "Lord Gregory", the internationally famous "Auld Lang Syne" or "Scots wha hae", sung at the end of every SNP conference.

It might be thought that some of the songs may have survived in the oral tradition since the poet's time, but the use of Burns's words makes it quite clear that most folksingers were familiar with the poet's texts.

Parallel to the Burns cult, more traditional versions of Burns's songs had found their way into folk clubs and festivals. They were included in the repertoires of more and more folksingers, eg. Archie Fisher, Tich Frier, Dich Gaughan, Dougie McLean, The Calmans, Tommy Blackhall, etc. Jean Redpath recorded volume VI of the American series of *The Songs of Robert Burns*. The original tunes had been researched and arranged with instrumental and vocal accompaniment by the American composer Serge Hovey, who had projected the recording of the entire corpus of Burns's songs.

As a result of the new interest in traditional music raised by the revival, folksingers tried to recover the original tunes Burns intended for his songs, ignoring the more concert-oriented arrangements made during the nineteenth century. This allowed them to stop perceiving the songs as art music, which had happened during the first years of the revival, and to start seeing them as traditional pieces. Folksingers found out the

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[136] ibid., p.94.

traditional element in Burns's songs and the similarities between the poet's songs and those immersed in the popular tradition. This caused a radical change of attitude towards the poet, and soon folksingers started performing some of his songs. They rejected the nineteenth-century drawing-room and concert arrangements and tended to adopt more traditional versions, without establishing any difference between Burns's songs and any other folk pieces.

Burns was soon considered just another step in the evolution of Scottish popular tradition by many revival artists. He had taken traditional songs and, like any performer from the oral tradition, had transformed them to create new ones to traditional tunes. And the new versions he created had eventually been transformed by later performers. His reworkings of the songs followed popular tradition so closely, that it was not always easy to determine his own contribution. As Hamish Henderson expressed it in *Alias MacAlias*:

> When re-patching his fragments, he [Burns] was able with marvellous sureness to counterfeit the anonymous folk-voice - so expertly, that in many cases it is impossible to tell where the old song ends and the poet's work begins. Not infrequently his versions were in their turn taken up and remoulded by the people, so that they can today be collected as real folk-songs.[137]

Hamish Henderson, as well as many others involved in the revival, considered Burns a "recreator and reshaper"[138], whose role in Scotland's folk tradition was similar to that of other folk performers, who also transformed the songs in each performance, sometimes changing them completely and creating new songs.

The fact that Burns was also a collector of popular songs and put them into print does not seem to alter Henderson's perception of the poet. In Scotland oral tradition and the written text had constantly mixed and fed each other. The use of the written word - in the form of printed collections, street broadsheets and chapbooks, or private notes -

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[137] Henderson, p.46-47.

[138] ibid., p.46.

for the transmission of popular songs and ballads, has come to be considered part of the natural development of folk tradition, which also has to adapt itself to the changing times. Songs belonging to the oral tradition have been collected and published in Scotland since the early eighteenth century. However, their publication has helped their transmission and preservation, and has not prevented them from entering the oral tradition again.

Since the eighteenth century the gradual disappearance of exclusively oral transmitted pieces was seen as a symptom of the end of Scotland's folk tradition. However, during the revival, folk tradition was considered to be inherent to human communities. It was no longer regarded as a remnant of the past, but rather as a live element of culture which was constantly evolving and adapting itself to new environments and different ways of life. As Hamish Henderson maintained:

> It is not to decry the collectors of earlier years who did work of tremendous value, to suggest that their attitudes were based on the fundamentally mistaken idea of the nature of folk-song. They thought of it as something lingering on into the present, tolerated barely in the changed conditions of modern society. They did not conceive of it as (in my view) it actually is: a permanent aspect of human culture, which will go on persisting whatever social and technological changes take place, and will certainly adapt itself, as it has always done, to changing circumstances.[139]

This new perception of folksong put an end to the antiquarian approach hitherto so common in Scotland. Even if it had encouraged the work of the School of Scottish Studies, the aim of collecting and preserving Scottish songs and ballads was no longer the main purpose of those involved in the revival, but rather to revive and keep alive a tradition which still was part of Scottish life. Thanks to the work of the folk revival, many Scottish people had the opportunity of becoming familiar with a folk tradition which was not so popular any more. Thus Scotland's songs and ballads became known to a wide public again. They identified themselves with that tradition and kept

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[139] ibid., p.20.

on performing the songs, thus contributing not only to their preservation, but also to their evolution.

Scottish performers and their audiences also identified themselves with the songs of Robert Burns. During the revival, they had found out in them those elements that related them to the folk tradition of Scotland. The popular tunes and style, as well as the local subjects and universal messages, led Scottish performers to rediscover the original versions of the songs published by Robert Burns as part of Scotland's folk tradition. Thus his songs began to be performed in folk clubs and festivals, and included in the performances and recordings of many folksingers.

6. ROBERT BURNS TODAY

Undoubtedly, the role of Robert Burns in today's Scotland is the result of the perception of the poet since his death at the end of the eighteenth century. Nowadays the poet is still a symbol of the country, and is being used, together with the tartan pattern, whisky, bagpipes, shortbread, and the Loch Ness monster, to provide the rest of the world with a series of features by which Scotland is represented and redefined in opposition to its neighbour nations. Burns, as well as the rest of these elements, has become a bait for tourists. We find tartan editions of his poems, his image can be seen in tea boxes, and some of his songs are included in most of the collections of Scottish traditional music. The places where he lived, and especially his birth place in Alloway, have become one of Scotland's tourist attractions, and the gold-mine is exploited with related activities such as the Tam O'Shanter Experience, where a film depicting the events narrated in the famous poem intends to take the audience to eighteenth-century Alloway.

The use of Burns as a tourist attraction has discouraged many people from approaching his work. However, some of his songs have taken root in the community and are still well-known and sung at gatherings and social events.

One of the main areas where the presence of Burns's songs can be currently felt is the world of Scottish folksingers. Ever since the Folk Revival of the fifties, an increasing number of Burns's songs have found their way onto Scottish traditional LP's and into performances. On the other hand, the Burns Cult is still alive, still counting numerous Burns Clubs all over the world. In this chapter, four interviews with the folksingers Gill Bowman and Christine Kydd; Hamish Henderson and Mr. Brian McKirgan, treasurer of the Burns Federation, will help us determine the situation of Burns's figure and work in the last years of the twentieth century.

6.1 BURNS AND THE FOLK SCENE

During the years of the Folk Revival, many Scottish folk singers turned back to

Burns's work and started including some of his pieces in their repertoires. This tendency has continued ever since, and nowadays a great number of folk groups and individual singers perform the songs of Burns.

Amongst the folk groups that include some of the songs of Robert Burns in their albums we find Ceolbeg, Heritage, Highland Connection, The McCalmans, Mac Umba, Sangsters, The Whistlebinkies, Chantan, The Cast, The Corries, Dalriada, Ossian, Indigenous Tribes, The Barra MacNeils, Wild Conserves etc. His songs have been recorded by singers such as Moira Anderson, Alex Beaton, Blackeyed Biddy, Isobel Buchanan, Gill Bowman, Joe Campbell, Heather Heywood, Hamish Imlach, Alastair McDonald, Kenneth McKellar, John MacLeod, Ed Miller, Peter Morrison, Rod Paterson, Janet Russell and Christine Kydd, or Sheena Wellington.

They can also be found in many collections of Scottish traditional songs, whereas several albums are exclusively dedicated to him. In 1987 Jean Redpath recorded six volumes of *The Songs of Robert Burns*, researched and arranged by Serge Hovey. The seventh one appeared in 1990. The volumes, containing between twelve (vols. 4, 5, 6 and 7) and 14 tracks (vol.1), were re-released in 1996 by Greentrax Records. Lismor Recordings has edited *The Robert Burns Collection*, consisting of four volumes containing *The Burns Supper*, with music and poems from a Burns Night; *The Songs*; *The Music*, performed by the Gaelforce Orchestra; and *The Words*, with poems recited by Tom Fleming. The same company has produced *The Merry Muses*, containing some of Burns's bawdy songs performed by various artists: Davy Steele, Robin Laing, Gill Bowman, Scott Murray, Fiona Forbes and Tich Frier.

In 1991 Elfrida Scott recorded *Orain le Raibeart Burns*, containing eleven of Burns's songs in Gaelic, and in 1994 Gill Bowman recorded *Toasting the Lassies*, including 12 Burns songs from her "Toasting the Lassies" show at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe of 1994.

In order to celebrate the Burns bicentennial, Linn Records began to produce in 1996 a collection of *The Complete Songs of Robert Burns*. The songs are performed by

various artists, and so far four of the intended twelve volumes have been released.

However big the presence of Robert Burns in the folk scene may seem, the number of songs performed and recorded by Scottish artists is quite limited. Compared to Burns's whole song production, only a small number of songs can be found in the albums[140].

The songs of Robert Burns included in the repertoires of contemporary folksingers tend to be the more popular pieces, despite the large number of songs produced by the poet. This is often caused by the public's expectations, who will require the songs that have become familiar to them as a result of the traditional approach to Burns' songs. However, some of his less popular songs are currently starting to be included in concerts and records, while the collections of his complete songs are also contributing to bring some of his less well-known pieces to the general public.

The interview with the folk song singers and writers Christine Kydd, Gill Bowman and Hamish Henderson will allow us to see the singers' attitude to Burns and the way they perceive his role in the current folk scene.

6.1.1 CHRISTINE KYDD

I met Christine Kydd in an Edinburgh Café on 19 February 1998. She is a singer,

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[140] Some of the most recurrent pieces found in Scottish recordings are "Ae fond kiss", "Afton Water", "A man's a man for a' that", "A rosebud by my early walk", "Auld Lang Syne", "Ay waukin O", "Birks of Aberfeldy", "Bonnie Dundee", "Bonnie lass of Ballochmyle", "Bonnie wee thing", "Ca' the ewes", "Ca' the yowes", "Charlie is my darling", "Corn Rigs", "Comin' thro' the rye", "Dainty Davy", "Duncan Gray", "Green grow the rashes", "Highland Laddie", "Highland Widow's Lament", "I'm ower young to marry yet", "John Anderson my Jo", "Johnnie Cope", "Kenmure's on and awa", "Killiecrankie", "Lea Rig", "MacPherson's Farewell", "My bonnie Mary", "My heart is in the Highlands", "My heart is sair", "My Luv is like a red, red rose", "My Nannie O", "My tocher's the jewel", "Of a' the airts", "Ower the water to Charlie", "Parcel o' rogues", "Rantin' Dog", "Rattlin' Roarin' Willie", "Reel O'Stumpie O", "Scots wha hae", "Sweet Tibbie Dunbar", "There was a lad", "Ye Banks and Braes", "The Deil's awa wi' the Exciseman", "The Muckin' O'Geordie's", "The Slave's Lament", "The White Cockade", "To the weavers gin ye gang", "Wha'll mow me now?", "Whistle ower the lave o't", "Ye Jacobites by name", etc.

songwriter and guitarist who has produced albums and taken part in folk clubs and festivals in the United Kingdom and the States. She has worked as a soloist and as a duo with Janet Russell, and more recently in the folk group Chantan, together with Corrina Hewat and Elspeth Cowie. She has also collaborated with musicians such as Alasdair Fraser and Sileas, worked with members of Mouth Music, Shooglenifty and the Cauld Blast Orchestra, and has supported Christy Moore and Capercaillie.

Christine Kydd started singing at the age of eleven. She could play the piano, and as a friend of hers had taken up playing the guitar, she began to learn how to play it herself. Coming from a family of singers and piano players, she played and sang in concerts from the age of eleven, but only became a professional singer in 1980.

The main sources for the traditional material used in her repertoire and compositions are recordings by other artists, as well as listening to other singers in clubs and concerts. She hardly ever takes songs from printed books as a single source. Whenever she performs traditional pieces, she may change the words of a song if she feels there is something missing, always according to her own style, and avoiding imitating other singers' performances. She considers the printed text as a mere support for the transmission of traditional songs, but by no means the main source. She admits she would not sing a song she had just found in a book.

Christine reckons nowadays traditional songs are mainly transmitted and performed in recordings, concerts, festivals, etc., folk clubs being one of the few places where songs are performed in an informal way. The number of folk clubs has decreased in recent years and they no longer play an important role in the transmission of folk music. She thinks they will eventually disappear, or change their aim, allowing the participation of more people. Thanks to the record market and concerts, folk music is more available nowadays, and not so much restricted to the world of folk clubs, as it was during the sixties.

Christine Kydd became interested in the Scottish tradition when she was young. She found recordings by Jean Redpath and Archie Fisher in the local library, and their

performances of traditional songs nurtured her interest in folk music. She soon started including some of their songs in her repertoire.

Christine started working for the Edinburgh Folk Festival in 1981. According to her, Scottish popular tradition has a healthy situation nowadays. Years ago many Scottish songs were accompanied by the pianoforte and sung in "polite" meetings. However, there have been recent efforts to promote Scottish traditional music. The influence of the Folk Music Revival in the States and Ireland caused an increasing interest in Scotland's folk music, leading to the creation of many folk clubs and festivals. Nowadays folksingers have become the main performers and transmitters of folk songs, while popular transmission has adopted a secondary role. There is still a difference between the Gaelic and the Lowland tradition. While most Lowland music was performed by professional singers in folk clubs and festivals, Gaelic music mainly continued being orally transmitted.

Christine Kydd's repertoire includes songs of Robert Burns. She became familiar with the poet at school, but the main sources she resorted to were versions by Jean Redpath and Archie Fisher.

She finds it hard to determine the real popularity of Burns's songs in Scotland and the way that publication has affected their evolution. She considers that their publication may have helped their diffusion, but it may also have taken them away from the popular tradition, as they soon became regarded as the property of a single author, and not of the whole community. Burns's songs have only become part of Scotland's popular culture up to a certain point, as they are mainly restricted to certain circles. There are not many informal situations in which Burns's songs are sung, as opposed to Burns Suppers, folk concerts, records, festivals, etc.

The Burns Cult has somehow helped to keep Burns's songs alive. However, its effect works both ways. Whereas it helps to spread the songs of the poet amongst a bigger public, it also creates a certain sense of *property*, presenting them as the heritage of certain people, mainly those involved in Burns Clubs. While the creation of the Burns

myth in the nineteenth century has had many disadvantages, due to the distortion of the poet's image, it has also been beneficial to Burns's work, preserving his songs and bringing them to new audiences. In Christine's opinion, the myth is always better than nothing.

Christine Kydd pointed out the importance that, still nowadays, orality has in the transmission of traditional music. The written text is a mere support, and songs are often transmitted by listening to other performers. After the Folk Revival, traditional music has began to be taken more seriously, and folk performances have become more formal events. Folk Clubs are one of the few situations were informal performances still take place. However, they are restricted to those people strongly involved in the folk tradition. Nowadays their popularity has decreased, and folk music, in a less spontaneous form, has become available to a bigger public.

6.1.2 GILL BOWMAN

I had the opportunity of interviewing Gill Bowman at her Edinburgh home on 20 February 1998. She is a folksong writer and singer whose repertoire also includes many songs of Robert Burns. She comes from a family of amateur singers, and her parents used to sing in musicals and plays. She learned how to play the guitar and started singing at the age of twelve, although she only started playing professionally in 1990.

During the 1960s Scotland's music was greatly influenced by the American Folk Revival. American music had become very popular in Scotland, but the increasing interest in folk music also made some singers become aware of their own culture. Scottish music was not particularly fashionable at the time, but many people were familiar with it and tried to re-launch it, following the American example. Most of the repertoire of Gill Bowman's parents, singing at that time, consisted of American songs, but it also included an important range of Scottish and Irish songs.

As a result of the widespread interest in traditional music Gill Bowman decided to start singing Scottish songs. She began to play some of Burns's songs, arranging them in a different way, following the trend of artists such as Dougie MacLean, who had

started including newly arranged Burns songs in his repertoire. Not being a great music reader or writer, Gill Bowman mainly learned the songs from the performances and recordings of other singers. As we have seen, orality still plays an important role in the transmission of folk music, despite the existence of the written text. However, the possibility of resorting to recordings, which can be listened to repeatedly, has replaced memorization, an important part of traditional oral transmission.

Gill Bowman tried to introduce some of Burns's less popular songs, such as "The Slave's Lament", but she soon found out that audiences always asked for those songs that were already familiar to them. However, when she started playing songs that other singers were not doing, others soon included those same songs in their repertoires.

She had become familiar with Burns at school, where she was taught the pianoforte versions of some of the songs, and even won a prize at the annual Burns competition. When she was young Robert Burns was taught at school. However, she considers that sometimes children are not taught the real meaning of the poems and songs, but rather given a simplistic view of them, therefore not being able to understand them and appreciate their value. Language can be a handicap for the diffusion of Burns's songs, and she thinks that efforts should be made in order to maintain the Scots language, much of which has been lost, as for many years children were forced to speak proper English at school and at home. She considers that Scots is a very diverse language and therefore not so easy to teach. Besides, it is not being promoted nowadays the way Gaelic is. Burns used Scots and English in his compositions, but according to her, when he used Scots "he was more himself".

Gill Bowman presents language as one of the elements that have prevented the diffusion of Burns's work, sharing the traditionally accepted view that Burns was more "authentic" when he wrote in Scots, opinion no longer shared by many scholars.

Gill Bowman claims that nowadays many efforts are being made to promote Scottish folk music, and she reckons that Burns's songs are very influential for Scottish folk singers. These songs are still very popular due to their subject matter, dealing with

patriotism, personal feelings, etc.

She included four Burns songs in her album *Perfect Lover*, released in 1994: "Sweet Tibbie Dunbar" / "Rantin' Dog", "Comin' thro' the rye", and "Ae fond kiss". That same year she was asked to take part in a show for the Edinburgh International Festival Fringe. She had to perform some of Burns's songs together with two other folksingers, during an evening on the topic "Burns from the lassies' point of view". Due to last minute changes the other two artists were not able to take part in the event and she ended up performing all the songs herself. For the performance she pretended to be at a high-society party in eighteenth-century Edinburgh to which Robert Burns has been invited. As they wait for the acclaimed bard, the hostess entertains her early guests by telling them the story of the poet, from what she has heard about him at the Edinburgh parties and drawing-rooms, while including some of the poet's songs in her narrative. These songs were later recorded by Gill Bowman in *Toasting the Lassies*, an album released in 1996 in celebration of the bicentenary of the poet's death.

Gill Bowman performed a similar show at a Burns Supper on 23 July 1996, two hundred years after the news of Burns's death arrived in Edinburgh. After having told the story of the poet to her guests, the hostess reads the poet's "Obituary" in the paper, thus finding out that her expected guest will not be able to come to her party.

According to Gill Bowman, there have been many recent efforts to spread the works of Robert Burns through the recordings of his songs by many Scottish folksingers. Burns scholarship has become more academic, producing well-researched biographies, such as James MacKay's, and editions of his work. She considers that the Burns myth shows how popular Burns is, but it has also contributed to make everyone feel quite *territorial* about him.

6.1.3 HAMISH HENDERSON

Having met Hamish Henderson after his talk at the Glasgow Celtic Connections Festival in January 1998, I had the opportunity of spending an enjoyable rainy Sunday afternoon with him at his Edinburgh home on 12 July. My interest in Hamish Henderson was determined by the prominent role he played in the events leading to

the Folk music Revival in Scotland, and his active participation in the organisation of the Edinburgh People's Festival, as well as many other activities of the Edinburgh folk scene. His whole life has been involved with poetry and the folksong tradition. His participation in World War II, his visits to England, Italy and Germany, as well as his trips around his native land, introduced him to the popular tradition of different countries, provoking an interest that has continued throughout his life.

He became familiar with folk music in his childhood, as he started picking up traditional songs from the singing of his mother and grandmother. It is hard for him to tell the exact date when he started writing folk songs, as he thinks he has always been interested in the things of the past, and especially his country's popular traditions. But he was already writing new words for songs when he was at school.

He claims to have found the source for many of his compositions in the popular tradition of many different countries (Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Spain, etc.), and to have often made use of traditional tunes he had heard, writing new words for them. He has sometimes been said to have composed even the tunes of some songs, but he is not aware of it, and claims that he usually made use of traditional ones.

In his compositions, Henderson has sometimes used some of the tunes of the songs of Robert Burns. He became familiar with the poet when he was a child. His songs and poems were taught at school, and Henderson was able to learn some of Burns's songs in the music class. However, he was also able to learn some of the songs outside school, and even in his own house, as people knew and sang many of Burns's songs.

According to Henderson, Burns songs are still considered part of Scotland's traditional music, despite having been published and often transmitted through the printed text. Their publication has contributed to spread the songs amongst a wider public, but they are still sung and changed in every performance. The songs underwent an evolution during the Folk Revival of the 1950s. Folksingers started including Burns's songs in their repertoires as part of Scotland's popular tradition, which caused a change in the general attitude towards the poet's songs. These had hitherto often

been regarded as the exclusive property of the Burns clubs and polite Scottish celebrations, but during the years of the Revival, they began to be regarded as part of Scotland's traditional culture again.

Henderson considers that nowadays there is a "healthier" approach to the poet and his work. Some of his songs have become popular at all levels of society, and are not only known by Burnsians, professional folksingers or university scholars. However, the poet's popularity still varies according to the different areas of Scotland. His Ayrshire origin is inextricably linked to him, and Ayrshire people deeply identify themselves with the poet, whereas in other areas of the country he is seen as "somebody from Ayr".

Henderson also considers language to be an additional handicap for the popularity of Burns songs, as many Scottish people have current difficulties in understanding some of the Scots terms used by the poet. He thinks it is hard to determine when and where Burns songs are sung nowadays, but the general attitude towards Burns has evolved since the Folk Revival, leading to the disappearance of many of the myths concerning the poet.

The work of Burns Clubs and their popularity vary according to the different areas. Despite having criticized in previous years the bourgeois element of Burns Clubs, Hamish Henderson admits that the Burns Cult has contributed to the diffusion of the poet's work and helped to spread the songs amongst a bigger public. However, it has also damaged Burns's popularity, leading to a rejection of the myth and the poet himself by a large sector of the population. Robert Burns has often been presented as Scotland's greatest poet, which has turned many people against him. Even great authors such as Hugh MacDiarmid were scared of Burns, and rejected him because he was "too big a figure".

The myth created around Burns has often blurred his real value as a poet, as well as his contribution to Scotland's popular tradition. According to Hamish Henderson, Burns was a "very good poet" but nobody dared to go beyond the myth and the cult

built around him. Only in recent years have some people realised it and made the effort to find out the "good poet" beyond his greatness.

6.2 THE BURNS FEDERATION

The cult around the poet has continued to the present day and still nowadays Burns Clubs can be found all over the world. The Burns Federation is the link that keeps them in contact with each other and informs them of academic progress and world events concerning the poet.

The Burns Federation was founded on 17 July 1885 after a meeting of the Kilmarnock Burns Club, attended by fourteen gentlemen from Kilmarnock, two from Glasgow, and Mr.Colin Rae Brown, President of the London Burns Club. Every club with a Burns or more general Scottish interest was notified, and by 1890 around 49 clubs had become affiliated. In 1892 the *Burns Chronicle* was launched, providing a way of facilitating communication between the clubs. From its early years the Federation became an international organisation, with affiliated clubs scattered all around the world. Amongst the early members there could be found the Sydney Burns Club, Adelaide Caledonian Society and the St. Andrew Societies of Winnipeg and San Francisco.

Throughout its history, more than a thousand clubs and societies have been affiliated, but only about a third of them are currently active. Still today the Federation includes clubs in every continent, and plays a relevant role in the organisation of Burns events all over the world, including numerous Burns Suppers and the celebration of an Annual Conference. The main aims of the Burns Federation are:

a.- To encourage Burns Clubs and kindred Societies who honour the memory of Robert Burns and his works.

b.- To strengthen the bond of fellowship among members of Burns Clubs and kindred societies throughout the world.

c.- To keep alive the old Scottish Tongue.

d.- To encourage and arrange School Children's Competitions to stimulate the

teaching and study of Scottish Literature, History, Art and Music.

e.- To stimulate the development of Scottish Literature, Art and Music.

f.- To conserve buildings and places associated with Robert Burns and his contemporaries.[141]

The Federation has worked to accomplish those aims. In its early years it took part in the campaign to save the Auld Brig of Ayr and the establishment of a Chair of Scottish History and Literature at Glasgow University. Thereafter it has continued working for the preservation and restoration of Burns memorials, giving "constant moral support and financial help" to those undertakings intended to promote the Scots language, the works and the memory of Robert Burns. It helped raise money for the compilation of *The Scottish National Dictionary*, published in 10 volumes in 1976, and has continued to support other "worthwhile publications in the field of Scottish literature".[142]

6.2.1 BRIAN McKIRGAN

Mr. Brian McKirgan is the current treasurer of the Burns Federation, and a member of the Bridgeton Burns Club. He received me on 30 July 1998 at his house in Burnside, some miles south of Glasgow.

Mr. McKirgan became familiar with Burns's work at school. At the age of 16 he attended a Burns Supper and he has been involved in the Burns movement ever since. He considers that not many classic authors are taught in Scottish schools nowadays. In order to promote the work of Robert Burns, children should become acquainted with him from an early age. Therefore the Burns Federation tries to encourage the teaching of Burns as well as his inclusion in the Standard and Higher Grade examinations.

According to Mr. McKirgan, Burns's songs are not really regarded as traditional songs, but rather as his own songs. They are well-known in certain specific circles, but the vast majority of the Scottish population is only familiar with a few lines of some

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[141] http://www.robertburns.org/federation/mainframe.shtml

[142] ibid.

of his poems and songs. The songs are generally better known than the poems, as they are often sung at Burns Suppers and other social gatherings. Language is a handicap for the diffusion of the poet's work, even if the Scots language is still spoken in the countryside. There are editions of some of the most famous poems, such as "Tam O'Shanter", translated into English, but much of the poetry is lost in the process.

Nowadays Burns's songs are mainly sung at Burns Suppers, even if the Folk Revival and the inclusion of Burns's songs in folk festivals and many folksingers' repertoires led to the popularisation of the songs. The commercialisation of folk music has brought Burns to the attention of the general public, but still only a limited number of songs are widely known.

The role of Burns Clubs is to spread the works of Burns, and contribute to the development of Scottish language and literature in general. Burns Clubs from all over the world are currently affiliated to the Burns Federation, including clubs from the States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, etc. The number of affiliated clubs has somehow decreased in the last half of the century, but still there are newly affiliated clubs, as well as schools, and individual membership. The number of members per club varies according to the area where they are placed, although Mr. McKirgan estimates an approximate average number of 100 members per club.

The Federation holds regular meetings with representatives of the different District associations, formed by 1-3 representatives from each club in the area. Thus the Federation is able to control and co-ordinate the activities of the clubs and these can have contact with each other. This is also possible through the *Burns Chronicle*, published annually, and the *Burnsian*, a quarterly journal chronicling the main social events on the Burns scene, which first appeared in 1986.

Burns Suppers are the main event organised by the clubs, apart from regular meetings with guest speakers and singers, who perform poems and songs by Burns and other authors. The clubs also work on the organisation of a National School competition in

Scotland, in order to promote the teaching of Burns in Scottish schools. The competition is directed to primary and secondary school pupils and includes singing, poetry, musical groups, choral groups and diary competition.

Some Scottish institutions, such as Historic Scotland and the National Trust of Scotland, support the Federation, providing it with funding, free advertising in their publications, etc. On the other hand, the Federation itself supports publications on Burns and the restoration of Burns monuments. However, Mr. McKirgan admits that most of the emphasis is put on Burns, his life and work, and not so much attention is given to other Scottish authors.

He considers that the Burns myth has damaged the poet's reputation. For many years he has been presented as a drunkard and womanizer, and even though some people have become interested in his work and know more about him, many never go beyond the distorted image traditionally associated with the poet. Nevertheless, the Burns Cult has contributed to the diffusion of Burns's work, which is becoming more and more popular, even if it is still the older generations who show a greater interest in his work. The organisation of Burns Suppers by many hotels, bowling and tennis clubs, and many other establishments not related to the clubs, is helping to bring Burns to a younger audience, which is the only way of keeping alive the memory of the poet and his work.

6.3 TODAY'S APPROACH TO THE POET

Nowadays Robert Burns is still very much present in Scottish life. During the latter half of the twentieth century his songs have made their way into commercial folk music. Whereas the number of songs in Scottish folksingers' repertoires has constantly increased since the Folk Revival, a small number of his songs are still part of the country's popular tradition. According to Hamish Henderson, Burns's songs belonged to Scotland's popular tradition during his childhood. He could hear them at home, sung by his mother and grandmother. Nowadays the majority of the Scottish population, except those directly related to the world of folk music or the Burns cult,

only know a few lines of some of his poems and songs. And not only do they often admit not knowing anything about the poet, but are also unable to understand his works in Scots. However, Burns's songs can still be heard at many social gatherings whenever Scottish traditional music is performed, and the famous "Auld Lang Syne" has become one of the most characteristic Scottish tunes. Such songs are adopted by the majority of the population to represent their own Scottishness in front of other nations. Traditional songs make the community feel closer together, identifying themselves with a shared tradition, even if in the case of "Auld Lang Syne" the song has crossed the Scottish borders and become a well-known song all over the world.

Even if some of Burns's songs are widely known by the majority of Scottish people, younger generations seem to be less familiar with the Burns tradition, and often show a complete lack of interest in and even a rejection of the ubiquitous Scottish poet. Nevertheless, whereas Burns's popularity is slowly decreasing amongst a certain sector of Scottish society, he is becoming more popular in the folk scene. Professional singers are increasingly interested in his songs.

As we have seen, orality still plays an important role in the transmission of the songs, as many folksingers learn them by listening to other singers' recordings and performances, and they continue transforming and adapting them according to their own style. The so called *popular* culture was restricted to a minority, but folksingers made it available to a bigger public, rescuing it from the world of folk clubs, to which it had been confined during the Folk Revival.

Technical progress, together with a change in life style during the twentieth century, has changed the concept of traditional music, transforming the orally-transmitted songs and ballads performed at community gatherings into one of many different twentieth-century types of music, which can be bought in record shops and listened to in concerts and festivals. However, this tradition is still alive in Scotland, and nowadays enjoys a very *healthy* situation.

Burns clubs are also playing a relevant role in the diffusion of the poet's work. The

sense of property developed from the cult has caused the rejection of Burns by many people unrelated to it. But despite the counterproductive effect it has produced, the cult has also contributed to keep alive the interest in Burns's work inside as well as outside Scotland.

7. CONCLUSION

The perception of the songs of Robert Burns in Scotland as well as abroad has been determined by the general perception of the poet himself. At the same time, the image of the poet has also been affected by the public's approach to his work, and has evolved with it since his death in 1796. Robert Burns contributed to the preservation of Scotland's traditional music through his collaboration, as a collector, reviser and writer of folksongs, in the publication of the *Scots Musical Museum* and *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs.* As a result of their publication, his songs underwent a different evolution from those traditional songs transmitted mainly by word of mouth.

The popularity of the poet increased soon after his death, and his songs started being performed in London and Edinburgh concert halls and drawing-rooms. Following the European trend of popular art-songs, the simple accompaniments to Burns's songs was soon replaced by polite versions, arranged by well-known European composers. These versions became very fashionable amongst the higher classes during the nineteenth century, thus spreading the poet's popularity, but also taking him away from the world of traditional music.

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of the Burns cult. The poet was adopted by various sectors of society to represent their own ideology. During his lifetime he had become Scotland's national poet, and in the nineteenth century he was adopted by the upper and middle classes to represent Scotland as part of the thriving British Empire. His exaltation of humanitarianism and egalitarianism was cherished, and he was annually celebrated in Burns Suppers and other commemorative events.

Numerous Burns Clubs appeared throughout the country and many others were eventually created by Scottish colonists all over the British Empire. The poet was soon identified with Scotland as part of the British Empire, but he was also used to represent totally opposite ideologies. His work was interpreted in many different ways, and his image soon overshadowed his poetic work. All prejudices against his

dissolute way of living were kindly excused and he became Scotland's most popular literary figure, even if his works were never so well-known as his name, and most of his followers were only familiar with a limited number of his songs and poems.

During the first half of the twentieth century another Scottish poet, Hugh MacDiarmid, helped to change the general perception of Burns in Scotland. His continued criticism of the poet throughout his life contributed to the destruction of the myth created around Burns. Not only did he undermine the value of the poet and his work, but he also blamed the Burns cult for preventing the development of Scotland's language and literature, by focusing attention exclusively on the Ayrshire poet and showing no interest in any other aspect or figure of Scottish letters. MacDiarmid's attacks did not succeed in putting an end to the Burns cult, but they undoubtedly contributed to change the general perception of Burns, who began to be seen as just one of many Scottish literary figures.

Still only a few of his songs were widely known, and they were often strongly associated with the cult created around him. A sense of property surrounded every approach to the poet, which caused the rejection of Burns by those opposed to his cult and what it represented. However, this situation changed during the 1950s and 60s due to the influence of the Scottish Folk Music Revival. Following the example of the Irish and American Revivals, there was also in Scotland a proliferation of folk clubs and concerts which brought traditional music to larger rural and city audiences.

Professional folksingers transformed the image of a rural orally-transmitted folk tradition, presenting it not as an old relic from the past, but rather as the music of the community, which could still be used to express people's social concerns and individual feelings, and be transmitted through records and public performances as well as social gatherings. Renewed interest in Scottish folk music also attracted the folksingers' attention to Burns's songs, some of which were already popular amongst the Scottish public. Their polite versions were soon rejected and the traditional airs Burns intended for them were recovered. Eventually more of Burns's songs were included in folksingers' repertoires, as he was regarded as part of Scottish popular

tradition, belonging not only to Burns club members, but to the whole of Scotland.

It is hard to determine to what extent his songs have survived in popular tradition. Popular songs are considered to be those performed in informal social gatherings, being transmitted mainly by word of mouth, despite the influence of the written text at some point of their transmission. Some Burns songs followed this evolution, but most of them were strongly associated with the world of Burns clubs and Suppers, until they were introduced to a larger audience during the Folk Revival.

Nowadays Burns's songs are very popular amongst Scottish folksingers, who continue including the less popular pieces in their repertoires. Burns is widely regarded as part of Scotland's traditional music by those involved in the folk scene and his popularity has increased during the second half of the century. The Burns cult is still alive, even if Burns clubs find it hard to attract the younger generations.

The flowering of Scottish nationalism has also affected the approach to the poet, and Burns is still being used as a symbol of Scotland. The Scottish Tourist Board has adopted the image of Burns as one of the country's symbols. He is now used to attract visitors to the places where he was born and lived, and his image and work are sold in a wide variety of forms.

Once again the poet's image overshadows his work, even though many efforts are being made to introduce his less well-known songs to the general public. However, nowadays Burns is as much a symbol for Scotland as he was in the nineteenth century, although the world he has come to represent is a very different one. The constant use of the poet as a symbol of Scotland in the British Empire, of Communism, Scottish nationalism, as a tourist attraction, etc., has strongly affected Scottish people's approach to him. Even if some are able to go beyond the artificially created image and appreciate his songs and poems, regardless of the myth attached to them, many can only see the poet as the figure he has become, and often reject his ubiquitous image, without ever showing any interest in his work. Even if the work of Scottish folksingers is helping to transform the general attitude to the poet, transmitting the

songs without the myth, the real value of Robert Burns as a poet and song writer and his contribution to Scottish popular tradition will never be fully appreciated in Scotland, until he is no longer used to represent it.

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