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‘Melancholy and low spirits are  
half my disease’: physical and  
mental health in the life and works  
of Robert Burns

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Deposited March 2020  
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## Abstract

Robert Burns is celebrated the world over as Scotland's national bard, a prolific creative genius who produced over 700 poems and songs before his untimely death in 1796 at the age of only 37. Almost every area of his life has been subject to scrutiny and extensive commentary. However, one aspect which has been largely ignored is that of his mental health, despite many references in his letters to 'blue devilism', 'melancholia' and his 'diseased nervous system', and several poems seemingly pointing to a depressive state of mind. It has been suggested previously that Burns suffered from periods of clinical depression or was affected by bipolar disorder.

This thesis consists of three sections which address this question and its wider implications. The first section involves the close analysis of Burns's personal writing in conjunction with accounts and additional evidence from his friends and family to determine the degree to which a diagnosis of clinical depression or bipolar disorder can be supported. It also explores the interplay between Burns's disordered moods and the manifestation of physical symptoms. The second section examines how Burns understood and related to his mental state, particularly within the context of his relationship with Frances Dunlop. It then goes on to explore the impact of his mood state on key aspects of his life. The final section examines the impact of Burns's mood state on his creative output, exploring how episodes of elevated and depressed mood affected the quality, quantity and content of the poetry and songs produced. Case studies explore how Burns used his creativity as a means of expressing his extremes of emotion.

As a whole, the thesis offers a significantly improved understanding of Robert Burns's mental health and its role in shaping aspects of his life. It demonstrates that Burns was possibly affected by what would now be recognised as Type II bipolar disorder before going on to show that the periods of disordered mood associated with the condition had some influence on key events in his life. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that Burns's attempts to understand, reconcile and express his disordered mood states resulted in the recurrent use of particular features within his creative output, thus offering his poetry as a further source of material from which an understanding of the impact of his disordered moods can be drawn.

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## Acknowledgements

In my favourite Burns poem, you'll find probably the most famous lines he wrote: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men/ Gang aft agley." And undoubtedly they do. Sometimes though, unexpected things happen and they are wonderful. For me, this work has been one of those things. In May 2014, time, place and people converged in just the right combination and brought this project into my life, giving me an unexpected but very welcome opportunity to combine my backgrounds in life sciences and literary studies in the most wonderful way. More importantly though, it brought me the pleasure and privilege of working with some people whose passion has been inspirational, and whose knowledge and guidance has ensured this thesis now sees the light of day.

First thanks *must* go to my supervisors, Professor Gerard Carruthers (Scottish Literature) and Professor Daniel Smith (Psychiatry). With their boundless enthusiasm and energy as both teachers and learners as the work progressed, they have been infinite sources of support, guidance and inspiration throughout the project. They took a chance on an unknown quantity, and taught me to trust my abilities and myself. They pushed me to push myself, often without my even realising, making me a better and more confident researcher than I could have imagined. I genuinely could not have asked for better.

My thanks also go to the University of Glasgow's Lord Kelvin Adam Smith scholarship programme. The generous financial support of the scheme gave me the time and means to make more of the project and its output than would otherwise have been possible.

If Gerry and Danny are my academic parents, the team at the Centre for Robert Burns Studies are the aunts and uncles who have helped raise me as a new academic. They have given freely and generously of their time and advice to support my research and wider professional development. Special thanks to Professor Kirsteen McCue, Dr Rhona Brown, Dr Craig Lamont, Dr Pauline Mackay and Dr Ronnie Young for the coffees, the wisdom and the blethers.

Over the past four years, I have had the opportunity to visit various institutions and repositories. As well as adding to the success of the project, access to their

holdings provided many a squeal of excitement. Particular thanks to the staff of the University of Glasgow Library Special Collections; the Irvin Rare Books and Special Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina; the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Alloway; Robert Burns Ellisland Farm Heritage Centre, Ayrshire; the National Library of Scotland and the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh; and East Ayrshire Council at the Dick Institute, Kilmarnock.

Working in Burns Studies, I also have the privilege of access to the enthusiastic and knowledgeable lay Burns community, particularly the membership of the Burns clubs who so passionately curate the memory and legacy of the bard. Special thanks to the members of the Irvine Burns Club - Bill Nolan, Ian Wood, George Watson, Bill Cowan and Graham Hyslop - who gave freely of their time, local knowledge and resources, including access to Surgeon Fleeming's day-book, which formed the basis of the research for various sections of the thesis relating to Burns's time in Irvine.

While G. Ross Roy's excellent 2-volume edition of Burns's correspondence provided me with easy access to the poet's letters. I must thank Distinguished Professor Emeritus Patrick Scott and Joseph DuRant, both of University of South Carolina, for their work in compiling the return correspondence from a diverse range of sources. In sharing these files with me, they saved me countless hours of additional work. Professor Scott has also been generous in giving his time and the benefit of his experience in pointing me in new directions and ways of thinking.

Part of every PhD journey is the fellow students you share it with, who can relate to both the joys and the woes. Thank you all who have been there with me, but especially Natalie Finlayson whose friendship has led to a wonderful research collaboration and some boots on the bed.

And finally, my family who have been unwavering in their support of me and the project, who have lost many an hour listening to me witter on about the minutiae of Burns's life, and who have made this transition to academic life a much smoother journey than I ever expected it to be. Even the impossible is easy when we're together.

To my husband Richard, my constant and my guide, the one who encourages me when I'm uncertain and is the first to celebrate my successes. You have always believed in me more than I believe in myself, and I think you might be right. You are, and always have been, too good to be true. I could not have done this without you.

To my son Ben, you are my greatest achievement. You inspire me every day, make me a better person than I knew I could be and I am so proud of the person you are becoming. I know you'll go further than I ever can.

And not forgetting the hours of writing up that were made less lonely by the company of Darwin and Kepler. Always loved.

More thanks to you all than I can ever put into words.

For Sheena and Gordon.

I stuck in.

For Mum.

Who made sure I did.

“My talents they were not the  
worst; nor yet my  
education.”

## List of Abbreviations

- L* J. DeLancey Ferguson, *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. by G. Ross Roy, Second (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).  
Letters are referenced by the number allocated within the volume.  
Capitalisation and italicisation used to indicate Burns's own emphasis have been retained in quotation. Where italicisation is added for my own emphasis, this is clearly identified.
- K* James Kinsley, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).  
Poems are referenced by the number allocated within the volume.  
Capitalisation and italicisation used to indicate Burns's own emphasis have been retained in quotation.
- OEWRB1* Nigel Leask, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns: Volume I - Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, First (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

## List of Commonly Referenced Poems

To assist the reader, this table represents a list of the Kinsley numbers of those poems most frequently referenced within the thesis.

K10	'Winter, A Dirge'
K12	'To Ruin'
K13	'A Prayer, in the Prospect of Death'
K14	'Stanzas on the same Occasion'
K15	'A Prayer, Under the Pressure of Violent Anguish'
K16	'Though fickle Fortune has deceived me'
K17	'O raging Fortune's withering blast'
K18	'Extempore'
K19	'The First Psalm'
K20	'The First Six Verses of the Ninetieth Psalm'
K62	'The Vision. Duan First'
K64	'Man was Made to Mourn, A Dirge'
K69	'To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest'
K92	'To a Mountain-Daisy, On turning one down, with the Plough'
K130	'A Winter Night'
K139	'To Miss L-----'
K321	'Tam o' Shanter. A Tale'
K411B	'Extempore -- On being shown a beautiful Country seat belonging to the same'
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## List of Accompanying Material

The following files accompany the thesis as electronic appendices, stored on the CD enclosed in the back cover:

- Appendix 1 - annotated letters illustrating pilot methodology in application
- Appendix 3 - hi-resolution digital images of Charles Fleeming's daybook
  
- eAppendix 1 - Phase 1 pilot results spreadsheet
- eAppendix 2 - Complete timeline spreadsheet
- eAppendix 3 - Phase 3 letter-by-letter group commentaries
- eAppendix 4 - Phase 3 non-clinically significant group commentaries
- eAppendix 5 - Article published in *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, as referenced in FN91

## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree at this or any other institution. All work, unless otherwise stated, is my own original work. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks or indentation, and the sources of information specifically acknowledged by means of a reference.

Moira Hansen

1<sup>st</sup> March 2019

## General introduction

### Robert Burns – Scotland’s national poet

Few people are more synonymous with the land of their birth than Robert Burns is with Scotland. He is an integral figure in representations of Scotland, both at home and abroad, a mainstay of the tourist industry and, arguably, one of Scotland’s greatest exports, both in terms of revenue generation and in global awareness of Scottish culture.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, Burns has also come to be considered representative of the Scottish people too. The ordinary man who worked hard, played hard, lived fast and died young, yet possessed a sensitivity and poetic sensibility which underpinned an innate sense of fairness, inclusion and social justice can be seen to fit as well within the modern political and social landscape of Scotland as he might have appeared to stand out in his own eighteenth-century context. He, like his native country, is a complex combination of seemingly contradictory attitudes and behaviours which come together in a package which fascinates and intrigues millions of people the world over.

Celebrated as Scotland’s national poet, Burns’s rise from lowly farmer to lauded creative genius has been long-studied and well-documented in the literature, but the story is perhaps best told by the man himself.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1787, Burns would, in an attempt ‘[t]o divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of Ennui’, write an autobiographical letter to Dr John Moore (L125). He recounts his early years on the farms of Alloway, Mount Oliphant and Lochlea: his father’s commitment to ensuring he and his brothers received a good standard of education despite the financial burden it entailed for the family; the powerful memory of his early exposure to folk songs and tales, and the impact of his earliest reading on his imagination; the challenges of making a

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Parliament, ‘Meeting of the Parliament 17 January 2018’, *Parliamentary Business*, 2018 <<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11306&i=102919&c=0&s=robert%2520burns>> [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019]. Work is currently ongoing to assess the current and potential worth of Burns to Scotland’s economy ([https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/archiveofnews/2018/may/headline\\_585298\\_en.html](https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/archiveofnews/2018/may/headline_585298_en.html)).

living from the soil which resulted in Burns acting as chief labourer by the age of fifteen.

It was, he recalls, around the same time that he ‘first committed the sin of RHYME’, inspired by the ‘bonie, sweet, sonsie lass’ who was his harvest partner in the autumn of 1774 (L125). This act would open the door on a world of creative expression that was to bring Burns’s name to public attention. At the time of writing to Moore, Burns had published both the Kilmarnock and first Edinburgh editions of his volume *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*.<sup>2</sup> Its publication had brought him into correspondence and personal acquaintance with a wide range of individuals, including some of Scotland’s most prominent nobles, ablest thinkers and influential literati at the time. Labelled by Henry Mackenzie as the ‘heaven-taught ploughman’, Burns would become a universal figure: his humble origins making him a voice for the ordinary people, capable of talking to their experiences of hardship and inequality, of capturing their honest pleasures and earthy humour; his education, his autodidactic nature and his acute observational skills created a man of sensibility who could explore the most philosophical of issues with an eloquence and sensitivity rarely seen before, and which captured the interest of the most fashionable circles of society.<sup>3</sup> Within a year, *Poems* would be published in London, Ireland and in the USA; Burns would start working with James Johnson, and later George Thomson, to collect, edit and publish the folk songs of Scotland, particularly from Burns’s native Ayrshire, preserving what was at risk of being lost in the face of the upheavals of the advancing industrial revolution.<sup>4</sup> And yet, within ten years of

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Poems*.

<sup>3</sup> It is recognised that ‘sensibility’ is a term which has changed in meaning since the eighteenth century. Within its historical context, Janet Todd identifies it as denoting ‘the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering.’ (Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, Methuen & Co., London and New York, 1986, p.7.) Although initially a scientific description of the role of the nervous system in consciousness and awareness, sensibility took on more loaded connotations related to social standing and moral character, creating a complex and nuanced understanding of the term within eighteenth-century society which encapsulated aspects of class and gender. This ‘cult of sensibility’ was connected with ‘feeling’, ‘melancholy’, ‘distress’, ‘refined emotionalism’ and ‘benevolence’, the importance and moral value of these states magnified and promoted. (G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.xix; Todd, p.8.) Where ‘sensibility’ is used as a term within the thesis, it should be read within this definition of feeling and emotion unless otherwise indicated. Some aspects of the concept of sensibility are further explained as required throughout the thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Crawford, *The Bard* (London: Random House, 2009), pp.260, 265, 360.

writing that letter to Moore, aged only 37, Burns would be dead. Thousands would turn out onto the streets of Dumfries to watch his funeral procession.<sup>5</sup>

More than two hundred years on, the public perception of Robert Burns has been well-documented: an icon in his native Scotland whose legacy of more than 600 poems and songs are celebrated worldwide and never more visibly than in the thousands of Burns Suppers which take place annually around the anniversary of his birth on 25<sup>th</sup> January; a man with a tempestuous personal biography which includes at least 12 children by four different women, and an unknown number of other relationships before and after his marriage to Jean Armour in 1788; the man who was welcomed into the drawing rooms of the Edinburgh elite yet would drink himself into an early grave. One aspect of Burns's autobiographical letter to Dr Moore which is not generally part of the public perception is his reference to his 'constitutional hypochondriac taint', an indicator of him having struggled with some form of mental illness (L125). Within the biography of the poet, this condition has been intimately tied up in his relationship with alcohol; in writing the medical aspects of Burns's biography, misconceptions surrounding this relationship with alcohol has led to misconceptions around the nature of that hypochondriac taint.

## Medical biography of Robert Burns – an overview

What Burns would argue are misrepresentations of his relationship with alcohol begin to emerge even before his death. Writing to Samuel Clarke in February 1794, Burns vehemently protests:

Some of our folks about the Excise Office, Edin<sup>r</sup>, had & perhaps still have conceived a prejudice against me as being a drunken dissipated character. - I might be all this, you know, & yet be an honest fellow, but you know that I am an honest fellow and am nothing of this.

(L618)

That these stories would continue to circulate for the rest of Burns's life is evidenced by the obituary published anonymously in the *London Chronicle* little

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Crawford, p.403.

more than a week after Burns' death on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1796.<sup>6</sup> The author of the obituary built on Mackenzie's image of the 'heaven-taught ploughman', describing Burns as a man with the 'common education of a Scottish peasant', yet in possession of a 'spirit of independence [...] genius, starting beyond the obstacles of poverty, and which would have distinguished itself in any situation.'<sup>7</sup> Yet, the unknown identity of the author raises questions about whether they had actually known Burns in life, and whether they had attempted to test the reliability of the stories circulating about Burns. Thus, contrary to reliable extant evidence, the obituarist reports how the young Burns spent his 'nights devoted to books [...] except when they were wasted in those haunts of village festivity, and in the indulgences of the social bowl [...] too immoderately attached in every period of his life.'<sup>8</sup> He paints a picture of a young man already barely in control of himself, so it comes as little surprise that later in life 'his talents were often obscured and finally impaired by excess' and ultimately 'apprehensions of a distempered imagination concurred along with indigence and sickness to embitter the last moments of his life.'<sup>9</sup>

Less than a month after this first obituary, a character sketch of the poet was published in *The Dumfries Weekly Journal*. In contrast to the anonymous author of the obituary, the author of the piece - Maria Riddell - can be considered a far more reliable source by virtue of her close friendship with Burns, having corresponded extensively with the poet and hosted him in her home. A somewhat reluctant sketch-artist, Riddell reports she 'should have continued wholly silent, had misrepresentation and calumny been less industrious.'<sup>10</sup> Counter to the obituarist's claim of impairment by excess, Riddell emphatically

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<sup>6</sup> Although published anonymously, the obituary was later attributed to George Thomson (J. DeLancey Ferguson, 'The Earliest Obituary of Burns: Its Authorship and Influence', *Modern Philology*, 32.2 (1934), 179–84). Subsequent scholarship refutes this claim (Gerard Lee McKeever, "'Simplicity, Rightly Understood": Improvement in the Collaboration of Robert Burns and George Thomson', in *Cultures of Improvement in Scottish Romanticism, 1707-1840*, ed. by Alex Benchimol and Gerard Lee McKeever (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp.73-91 (p.89).

<sup>7</sup> Donald A. Low, *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1974), p.99.

<sup>8</sup> Low, p.99. Burns's autobiographical letter to Moore (*L* 125) makes clear that, during his teenage years, his personal reading went well beyond that of the education of a Scottish peasant, as well as mentioning the 'strictness and sobriety of Presbyterian country life' and that 'scenes of...roaring dissipation were as yet new to me'. Indeed, he goes on further to state that '*Vive l'amour et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action', not alcohol or socialising.

<sup>9</sup> Low, p.100.

<sup>10</sup> Low, p.102.

asserts ‘none certainly ever outshone Burns in the charms [...] of fascinating conversation, the spontaneous eloquence of social argument, or the unstudied poignancy of brilliant repartee’ and ‘such was the irresistible power of attraction that encircled him [...] he never failed to delight, and to excel.’<sup>11</sup>

Riddell does not deny that Burns had his imperfections, that ‘his appearance and manners were always peculiar’ and that the ‘vivacity of his wishes and temper was indeed checked by almost habitual disappointments’.<sup>12</sup> However she insightfully highlights that it is only because of Burns’s fame and talent that so much is made of his shortcomings, that ‘the frailties that cast their shade over the splendour of superior merit, are more conspicuously glaring than where they are the attendants of mere mediocrity.’<sup>13</sup> She places these ‘frailties’ within the context of Burns’s talent, that ‘genius never was free from irregularities’ and asks that ‘where a recollection of the imprudencies that sullied his brighter qualifications interpose, let the imperfections of all human excellence be remembered at the same time.’<sup>14</sup>

Despite Riddell’s sketch being published in both *The Dumfries Weekly Journal* and the more widely read, London-published *Courier and Evening Gazette*, it seems to have had little impact on perceptions of Burns’s reputation as a drinker. Less than a year after the poet’s death, Burns’s earliest biographer, Robert Heron, would again be espousing the stories of dissipation. Having expounded on the piety of Burns’s upbringing and the impact of his early education, and effusively praised his talent for observing the world and expressing those observations in verse, Heron recounts the success of Burns’s first visit to Edinburgh - the reception he received, the universal acknowledgement that he was as eloquent in person as he was on the page.<sup>15</sup> This visit was, according to Heron, also the beginning of Burns’s slide into notoriety, as he was

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<sup>11</sup> Low, p.102.

<sup>12</sup> Low, pp.102–3.

<sup>13</sup> Low, p.106.

<sup>14</sup> Low, p.107.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Heron, *A Memoir of the Life of the Late Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: T. Brown, 1797).

insensibly led to associate less with the learned, the austere, and the rigorously temperate, than with the young, with the votaries of intemperate joys, with persons to whom he was recommended chiefly by licentious wit, and with whom he could not long associate without sharing in the excesses of their debauchery.<sup>16</sup>

Heron continues in this vein, commenting how

[t]oo many of his hours were now spent at the tables of persons who delighted to urge conviviality to drunkenness, in the tavern, in the brothel, on the lap of the woman of pleasure.<sup>17</sup>

And so, the damage was done. Burns was to continue in this way for the rest of his life. 'In Dumfries his dissipation became still more deeply habitual [...] to be solicited to share the riot of the dissolute and the idle [...] as dead drunk as ever Silenus was' until his death.<sup>18</sup>

Jane Darcy highlights how Heron 'invokes the idea of philosophical biography', by working to 'subsume the awkward details of the biographical subject's private life into a larger philosophical framework.'<sup>19</sup> He does so under the guise of tracing Burns's development from childhood to adulthood as an example of the formation of character. In reality, he reveals little about the poet that is new and attaches no moral teaching to his depiction, thus serving only to emphasise the alleged alcoholic excesses of the poet.

The cementing of this view in the mind of the public arguably came, however, in 1800 with the publication of James Currie's *The Life and Works of Robert Burns*. Currie had taken on the role of biographer somewhat reluctantly but resolved to write something 'on the plan of Johnsons lives of the poets [sic] - viz. a narrative of the life, and then an appreciation of the writings.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Heron, p.26.

<sup>17</sup> Heron, p.27.

<sup>18</sup> Heron, p.42.

<sup>19</sup> Jane Darcy, 'The Emergence of Literary Biography', in *A Companion to Literary Biography*, ed. by Richard Bradford (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), pp.9–24 (pp.19, 17).

<sup>20</sup> Letter from James Currie to John Syme, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1796, *The Letters of James Currie (1756-1805): Robert Burns's First Editor*, (2011) <<https://jamescurrie.gla.ac.uk/details.php?id=85>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018]. All subsequent references to letters from Currie are taken from this online edition unless otherwise indicated. A fuller examination of Currie's approach to Burns's

What resulted, according to Darcy, is the philosophical biography that Heron's volume failed to be.<sup>21</sup> A biography of this nature was only possible because of the confluence of contexts in which Currie was writing. Philosophical biography was 'a short-lived but significant experiment, self-consciously developed in response to a unique moment of political, social and scientific revolution.'<sup>22</sup>

With the genre having previously largely consisted of historical biography, the seventeenth century saw the emergence of literary biography - biographies of writers - as a new form, a form which relied on what a writer had revealed about himself in his published works.<sup>23</sup> Samuel Johnson, foremost proponent of the form at the time, had emphasised the importance of biography as a genre in two essays in *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, both highlighting the reader's experience, the reader's interest in the ordinary life of the subject, of the influences and factors that shaped the character of the individual responsible for the creative output.<sup>24</sup> In 1775, William Mason incorporated this approach in his biography of Thomas Gray, using personal correspondence as source material rather than a reliance on published work, an approach which revolutionised the form and, along with further incorporation of personal anecdote, became the norm for the literary biography.<sup>25</sup> It is this format which Currie uses in his biography of Burns, in which he aspired to emulate Johnson.

In this aspiration, Currie had set himself a lofty goal. In 1750, Johnson had argued that

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biography is undertaken in Gerard Carruthers and Pauline Mackay, 'Re-Reading James Currie: Robert Burns's First Editor', *John Clare Society Journal*, 32 (2013), 73–84.

<sup>21</sup> Darcy (2018), p.17.

<sup>22</sup> Darcy (2018), p.16.

<sup>23</sup> Darcy (2018), p.9. The gendering of pronouns in this section are reflective of the almost entirely male subjects and writers of these works. Darcy also notes that this mirrors the marginalisation of Riddell's own biography of Burns, as women were typically seen as too anecdotal in their accounts (Darcy (2018), p.15).

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Volume 3: The Rambler*, ed. by W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Publishing, 1969), pp.318–23; Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Volume II: Idler and Adventurer*, ed. by W.J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L.F. Powell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), pp.261–64; Darcy, 'The Emergence of Literary Biography', p.45.

<sup>25</sup> Darcy (2018), p.10.

no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.<sup>26</sup>

That is to say, in Johnson's opinion, a biography of an individual should develop a better understanding of the frail nature of humanity, and act as an instructional text to support others in avoiding similar pitfalls.

Thus, Currie was implicitly agreeing to approach Burns's biography with the same aims and by the same methods as his role model; that he did so can be demonstrated. Currie undertook *Life and Works* in a fashion which gave priority to primary sources - letters and contemporary accounts - collating materials from a range of people associated with Burns, and presenting a chronological account of the poet's life. This was, however, also undertaken in a manner which very much chimed with the mid-eighteenth century trend for writers to be driven by the same pursuit of verifiable explanation which had driven the rapid development of eighteenth-century scientific enquiry.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the century, when Currie was compiling his biography of Burns, the genre had not yet reached what would be the recognisably Romantic forms which were wholly concerned with the inner life of the subject and their creative genius, where there might also be a backdrop of that genius being augmented by the 'isolation caused by profound melancholic suffering.'<sup>28</sup> Instead, Currie was writing at that 'unique moment of political, social and scientific revolution' where biography can be seen to have a role in reform, using its subject's life as a model which can contribute lessons to society, where a writer will 'subsume the awkward details of the biographical subject's private life into a larger philosophical framework.'<sup>29</sup>

For Currie, that larger philosophical framework was the contemporary discourse around sensibility and melancholy, a discourse situated in both eighteenth-century literary and medical spheres. As the scientific revolution of the

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Volume 3: The Rambler*, p.319.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.14.

<sup>28</sup> Jane Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography, 1640-1816* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.106.

<sup>29</sup> Darcy (2018), p.16.

Enlightenment had sought to better understand human nature and the human experience from an objective viewpoint, literature responded with novels of sensibility such as Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, exploring the consequences of an excess of feeling and sensibility in an individual. Thus, Currie's biography, while following Johnson's argument that it was the private life of a literary individual in which the reader was interested and conveying the inner life of Robert Burns, also explored the consequences of an excess of sensibility in that life, using it as a means to engage with medical discourses about causes and treatments of melancholy which might also afford the reader a lesson applicable to their own life.

The primary driver for the biography was to raise funds for the continued support of Burns's widow, Jean Armour, and their children. With this in mind, and with an awareness that using letters and contemporaneous accounts would mean recounting events involving individuals still alive, Currie was aware that 'some delicacy will be required in touching his [Burns] faults & irregularities', rendering the need for 'omitting [...] a few particulars that might give pain to living characters', whether through Currie's own editorial decisions or at the behest of the parties involved.<sup>30</sup> Currie did, however, demonstrate awareness of his role as editor and censor, expressing a future wish

one day to go again over the manuscripts of Burns in my hands and to extract from them such parts hitherto unpublished as the circumstances of the times & the recent death of the Bard rendered it proper to withhold in the original publication, and which yet may deserve to see the light.<sup>31</sup>

It might be expected that part of this delicacy would lie in challenging the view that Burns essentially drank himself to death and, as a physician, Currie would be well-placed to handle this medical aspect of Burns's biography. Similarly, as a physician with a long-standing expertise in melancholy, Currie would have been perfectly placed to address the 'constitutional hypochondriac taint' to which Burns refers in his letter to Moore and which would re-emerge at various points

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from Currie to John Syme, dated 01/09/1796;  
<<http://jamescurrie.gla.ac.uk/details.php?id=85>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018].

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Currie to Cadell & Davies, dated 16/03/1803;  
<<http://jamescurrie.gla.ac.uk/details.php?id=62>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018].

in his life as his ‘incurable taint’, ‘diseased spirit’ and ‘blue devils’, and to its place and impact on the poet’s life (L616, L638, L619). Darcy argues, however, that Currie ‘attends to Burns’s nervous symptoms primarily because his interest in such symptoms had preoccupied him for most of his life.’<sup>32</sup> Burns’s biography, along with his experience of melancholy, allows Currie to engage with the contemporary medical discourse which most interested him, exemplifying the ongoing dialogue of the time between literary form and medicine. Leask agrees, describing Currie as bringing ‘considerable professional baggage to bear [...] by locating him [Burns] in terms of a medical theory [...] dubbed “the stimulant regime”.’<sup>33</sup> Drawing on Brunonian medical thinking that argues the balance between the human body’s need for stimulus to maintain equilibrium and the effects of the quantity of stimulus received, Leask identifies Currie’s rejection of this argument in favour of the teachings of his mentor William Cullen on the sedative effects of alcohol and its role in promoting melancholy.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, ‘discussion of the poet’s melancholy symptoms were largely replaced by the language of poetic sensibility, over-stimulation and weakness of volition’ and Burns’s melancholic episodes become intertwined with his drinking, merely symptoms of his excesses.<sup>35</sup>

This conflation of Burns’s moods as symptom of his excessive drinking and weakness of character is despite the fact that Currie actually brought evidence of Burns’s melancholy originating in his youth, which clearly argues that this was an indigenous aspect of the poet’s character, rather than a consequence of his habits in later life. Currie observes that Burns ‘was subject very early to those depressions of mind, which are perhaps not wholly separable from the sensibility of genius’, that he ‘displays the philosophic melancholy which so generally forms

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<sup>32</sup> Jane Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography, 1640-1816* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.150.

<sup>33</sup> Nigel Leask, ‘Robert Burns and the Stimulant Regime’, in *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. by Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2009), pp.145–59 (p.146).

<sup>34</sup> Leask (2009), pp.150, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Leask (2009), p.153. Wilson would also highlight Currie’s unbalanced treatment of Burns’s drinking habits in comparison to those of rank, illustrating Currie’s awareness of the need to avoid offending the very individuals who were expected to subscribe to his edition (John Wilson, ‘On the Genius and Character of Burns’, in *The Land of Burns* (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1840), pp.vii–clviii (p.lv)).

the poetical temperament.<sup>36</sup> This agrees with Maria Riddell's earlier sketch, explicitly tying together Burns's genius and his temperament.<sup>37</sup> However, where Riddell had argued that such genius excused other, less desirable aspects of the poet's character, Currie is less forgiving and offers what might be considered posthumous chastisement. He reports that Burns

knew his own failings; he predicted their consequence; the melancholy foreboding was never long absent from his mind; yet his passions carried him down the stream of error, & swept him over the precipice he saw directly in his course.<sup>38</sup>

For Currie, Burns had no-one to blame but himself; the 'fatal defect in his character lay in the comparative weakness of his volition.'<sup>39</sup> He highlights that Burns's constitution was unusual for one of his background, this drawing on the earlier writings of individuals such as George Cheyne, David Hume and Adam Smith who had argued for physiological differences between the labouring and leisured classes as an explanation for the latter's propensity to melancholy in contrast to the absence thereof in the former.<sup>40</sup> He also, however, further draws on Cullen's teachings to explain Burns as an apparent 'contradiction in terms', a man of the labouring classes clearly subject to the excess of sensibility that led to melancholy.<sup>41</sup> Cullen had argued that a life of physical work and simple diet, such as that of the labouring classes, was the best means by which to defend against the onset of melancholy; Currie had preceded his account of Burns's life with 'Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', thus providing a framework within which the reader could better understand Burns's origins but also, in combination with the reference to Cullen's teachings, could better understand Burns's melancholy not as an aberration for his class but as a natural-but-unwanted consequence of a man who had shown such an excess of sensibility from an early age leaving behind the

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<sup>36</sup> James Currie, *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of His Life, and a Criticism on His Writings*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn (Liverpool: M'Creery, 1800), pp.101, 104.

<sup>37</sup> Currie would include Riddell's sketch within his volume as a 'Memoir respecting Burns, by a Lady'.

<sup>38</sup> Currie, p.236.

<sup>39</sup> Currie, p.236.

<sup>40</sup> Darcy (2013), p.154.

<sup>41</sup> Darcy (2013), p.154.

rigours of farm life and useful learning for the stimulating indulgence of poetry, fashionable periodicals and the literary salon.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Currie's argument is that if Burns had taught himself some self-control, remained in the rigour and routine of farming life or applied himself to higher learning in areas such as philosophy rather than pursuing poetry, he would have placed himself in company and activity which would have led to far less exposure to dissipation and excess, and less aggravation of his naturally melancholic temperament.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, Currie's position is that, while Burns was predisposed to melancholy, the actual manifestation of the poet's melancholy is a result of increased drinking, not a cause. Currie draws on the contemporary medical discourse around melancholy to transform his volume from a straightforward account of Burns's life to that philosophical biography with a wider reforming purpose, the intention to promote moderation, even abstinence, from alcohol, especially for those of a particularly susceptible temperament.

Darcy, however, highlights the limitations of this philosophical approach to biography. While it is concerned with the inner life of the subject, but not to the extremes that would be seen in later Romantic biographies, it still draws heavily on Enlightenment approaches of objectivity and rationality, 'asking us to accept a set of theoretical rules by which to judge personal behaviour [...] It privileges general rules over chaotic, fragmentary narrative.'<sup>44</sup> Currie subjects Burns to these rules, measuring his behaviour against them. Consequently, Currie's biography ends not with a summary of the value of Burns's life and his work but with his 'Johnsonian instruction', the warning that

[i]t is more necessary that men of genius should be aware of the importance of self-command, and of exertion, because their indolence is peculiarly exposed [...] to diseases of mind, and to errors of conduct, which are generally fatal.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Darcy (2013), p.155.

<sup>43</sup> Darcy (2013), p.159.

<sup>44</sup> Darcy (2018), p.18.

<sup>45</sup> Currie, p.248.

He goes on to warn of the false relief afforded by alcohol, particularly for such individuals upon whom ‘its effects are, physically and morally, in an especial manner injurious’, and explain that it is ‘a duty [...] not to allow our admiration of great genius [...] to conceal or disguise its errors’.<sup>46</sup> In intending to situate his biography of Burns within a wider philosophical framework of objectivity and medical discourse, and to give instruction and guidance to his reader as per Johnson’s direction, Currie’s final sermon appears only to have principally succeeded in highlighting the flaws of Burns and further establishing excessive alcohol as the source of those flaws, flaws which arose from Burns’s foray beyond the life into which he was born.

Currie’s biography was hugely popular; a fourth edition was published in 1803 and by 1820, it had run to its eighth. Its influence on the public perception of Burns was evident, with one newspaper in 1801 reporting an anecdote from Burns’s deathbed with the introduction that ‘[t]his singular character, it is well known, was addicted to the bottle’.<sup>47</sup> Burns’s reputation as a dissolute individual was well-cemented. Nevertheless, there was ongoing interest in the poet, both with regards to his work but, arguably, more so in relation to his life. In 1808, Robert Cromek published his *Reliques of Robert Burns*. This volume consisted of letters, poems and songs, with corresponding notes and criticism, and included some previously unpublished materials. It drew notable attention by way of essays in the *Edinburgh Review* from Francis Jeffrey (January 1809) and Walter Scott (February 1809), the contents of which indicate the continued focus on Burns’s biography over his creative output.<sup>48</sup> The reviews also indicate the ongoing acceptance of Currie’s presentation of Burns as a victim of his own lack of self-control, the clear implication being that a man of better breeding and education would have had better control of himself.

Partly in response to such criticism, in 1815, Alexander Peterkin published Currie’s volume with additions of his own commentary, letters of support from friends of Burns, and further exposition of the poet’s character from his brother

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<sup>46</sup> Currie, pp.252–53.

<sup>47</sup> John Ingram, *Interesting and Characteristic Anecdotes of Burns* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison, 1893), p.101.

<sup>48</sup> Low, pp.178–95, 196–209.

Gilbert.<sup>49</sup> Peterkin argues that Burns should not be afforded undue censure simply because of his celebrity, that the many positive attributes of Burns's character should not be overshadowed by the flaws. Nevertheless, Currie's representation of Burns as a man of excessive passion and minimal control pervades the accepted understanding of Burns. The strengths of Burns's character become footnotes in a life of apparently drunken debauchery. Lockhart's 1828 *Life of Robert Burns* undertakes a streamlining of Currie's multi-volume biography into a single, more accessible text, noting that '[t]o whatever Burns's excesses amounted, they were, it is obvious, and that frequently, the subject of rebuke and remonstrance even from his own dear friends.'<sup>50</sup> Lockhart's depiction of Burns shows that his hot-headedness, which is rooted in his unrefined rural origins, runs counter to his possession of such genius, and works only to give further credence to the image of Burns as a disgraceful alcoholic who was a victim of his own excesses. Subsequent biographies through the nineteenth century drew on Currie, with some further embellishment and even fabrication as the Romantic idea of the tormented creative genius flourished. There are some attempts to link the weakness of character to his melancholy, where he becomes a case study within a wider examination of the condition and warning against the dangers of dissolute living and excessive sensibility in men of genius.<sup>51</sup> However, there is little examination of the impact of the condition on behaviour, even by those who were from a medical background as Currie was. Thus, the accepted view that the sufferer can choose to help themselves persisted, rather than a recognition of the difficulty a sufferer faces in escaping a melancholic episode.<sup>52</sup> Burns was repeatedly

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<sup>49</sup> Peterkin had also produced a biography of Burns's 'elder brother in the Muse', Robert Fergusson. Therein, Peterkin argued that Fergusson's madness and early death was the consequence of syphilis, rather than the disease and excess which Fergusson himself blamed. (R Houston, 'Madness, Morality, and Creativity: Robert Fergusson and the Social Context of Insanity in Eighteenth-century Scotland', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 22 (1999), 133–54 (p.139).

<sup>50</sup> John Gibson Lockhart, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Constable & Co., 1830), p.254.

<sup>51</sup> A good example of this is R.R. Madden, *The Infirmities of Genius, Illustrated by Referring to the Anomalies in the Literary Character to the Habits and Constitutional Peculiarities of Men of Genius* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1833).

<sup>52</sup> A detailed survey of Burns biographers from a medical background is found in William Findlay, *Robert Burns and the Medical Profession* (Paisley; London: Alexander Gardner, 1898). The summary of the biographies produced by such men demonstrate that their interests lie chiefly in Burns as a poet, not a professional interest in his health.

presented as a man who allowed himself to slide into dissolution and towards an untimely death.

That this view of Burns persisted into the twentieth century is sharply brought into focus by James Crichton-Browne. His *Burns From a New Point of View*, published in 1925, offers multiple examples of biographers all echoing the role of alcohol in Burns's death.<sup>53</sup> However, it is clear to the reader that this is only a small representation of the total body of work which espouse the same conclusion. Of this conclusion, Currie is accused of being the 'arch-calumniator' who 'has tainted the pages of all who have written about Burns since his time.'<sup>54</sup> Although Crichton-Browne holds true to his purpose, in that he presents an alternative view of the life of Burns, what he also produces is a detailed critique of Currie's account, highlighting flaws and contradictions in the evidence provided and conclusions drawn, and making explicit the personal motivations underpinning the approach of Currie, and those who acted as further sources of information. Perhaps taking his lead from the increasingly more systematic approach that medicine was taking to diagnosis and treatment, Crichton-Browne methodically picks apart Currie's argument that alcohol was the primary factor in Burns's ill health and death, and that this was down to a weakness of character and a lack of self-control. Crichton-Browne cites the reports of Burns's positive reception in Edinburgh society, his associations with many persons of high repute and his acceptance into the homes of the great and good around the country as evidence of a man who could enjoy himself without making a fool of himself.<sup>55</sup> By 1791, Crichton-Browne's Burns is 'too actively employed to have any time for dissipation', a stark contrast to Currie's depiction of Burns's drinking habits worsening during his time in the Excise.<sup>56</sup>

In further contrast to Currie, Crichton-Browne is to be commended for tackling the matter of Burns's melancholy. He highlights the highly self-critical nature of Burns, and Currie's propensity for taking these criticisms too literally, 'accepting

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<sup>53</sup> James Crichton-Browne, *Burns From a New Point of View* (London: William Hodge and Company, 1925), pp.14–15.

<sup>54</sup> Crichton-Browne, p.16.

<sup>55</sup> Crichton-Browne, p.25.

<sup>56</sup> Crichton-Browne, p.37.

as faults the self-reproaches which were in truth a creditable sign of real humility [...] groundless or grotesque amplifications of venial offences or more anguished exclamations.’<sup>57</sup> Crichton-Browne infers this as humility which is an aspect of the melancholy. For Crichton-Browne, Burns’s melancholy is not contemptible, as he labelled Robert Louis Stevenson’s description of the condition, but an unavoidable aspect of the poet’s character, ‘an expression of his intense sensibility activated by his broad sympathies and ardent affections.’<sup>58</sup> He details various events in the poet’s life which act as precipitating factors for melancholic episodes, and highlights Burns’s connection of his stomach complaints with his nervous complaints.<sup>59</sup> However, for Crichton-Browne, and surprisingly given his professional background in psychiatry, this melancholy is a consequence of the irregular heart brought on by Burns’s rheumatism. The melancholy arises from the headaches caused by an insufficient heart. There is no corresponding analysis of Burns’s mood outwith the melancholic episodes, while he proposes that Burns’s stomach complaints were actually referred pain from his diseased heart, damaged by rheumatic fever and subsequently overworked by the strain of life as a farmer and Excise officer.<sup>60</sup> Thus, there is nothing more than a very superficial consideration given to the impact of Burns’s melancholy in his life, and none to the possibility that it was a separate clinical condition in its own right.

Ultimately Crichton-Browne’s aim was to rehabilitate Burns’s reputation, to set right the misconceptions surrounding Burns’s habits, especially in relation to alcohol. He is as thorough and detailed in the presentation of his case as Currie was originally, and presents a compelling contrast. He vehemently defends the poet’s drinking habits as no worse than the norms of the time, aiming to remove the stigma of alcoholism which has tainted Burns’s public representation. His approach does have impact - the hypothesis that Burns’s death resulted from a bacterial endocarditis attacking a heart already weakened by rheumatic fever is now generally accepted. Nevertheless, there is little impact on the perception that Burns’s melancholy is connected to his alcohol consumption, despite

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<sup>57</sup> Crichton-Browne, p.43.

<sup>58</sup> Crichton-Browne, pp.44–45.

<sup>59</sup> Crichton-Browne, pp.65–66.

<sup>60</sup> Crichton-Browne, pp.65–66.

Crichton-Browne arguing it to be a consequence of physical illness. The glossing of Burns's melancholy as an artefact of a physical illness, rather than what might be perceived as a mental defect, could be argued to be a deliberate avoidance of labelling the poet with another stigma, another fault for which he might be criticised. However, in doing so, Crichton-Browne's Burns becomes too well-behaved, too clean. The truth of the poet's character almost certainly lies somewhere between the two.

Consideration of Burns's mental health was also undertaken by Sir James Purves-Stewart, another physician and near-contemporary of Crichton-Browne. Discussing Burns's mental history, Purves-Stewart lays out a summary of various episodes of melancholy in the poet's life, as well as episodes of what seem to be unusually elevated mood. He concludes 'Burns suffered from a characteristic form of recurrent nervous and emotional instability [...] belonging to the so-called cyclothymic type'.<sup>61</sup> While an informed medical opinion, this discussion was limited by its context as an *Immortal Memory* delivered to a Burns Supper; sitting outside traditional academic literature, Purves-Stewart's conclusion has had no perceptible impact in the study of Burns's mental health. Currie's presentation of a man who fell afoul of his character flaws and bad habits *still* prevails in the wider public consciousness.

This paucity of real consideration afforded to Burns's mental health by his various biographers has also persisted. Very little extant criticism exists; when not repeating Currie's erroneous claims of alcohol addiction (although, now with the acknowledgement that Burns's didn't drink himself to death), most commentary goes no further than to acknowledge Burns's temperamentality or susceptibility to melancholy and 'dourness', either in acceptance of Currie's authority as a source or perhaps as a means of avoiding tarnishing Burns's name with a taint that might be seen as worse than that of dissipation. One paper goes so far as to acknowledge the poet was affected by 'alternating moods of exaltation associated with intense energy, followed by depression and inactivity' - a hint perhaps of psychiatric morbidity - but then dismisses it as

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<sup>61</sup> James Purves-Stewart, *The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns: A Medical Aspect* (London: Matthews Drew & Co., 1935), pp.37–38.

‘psychoneurosis’.<sup>62</sup> There was certainly no clinically based systematic review of available evidence akin to the forensic approach which Crichton-Browne undertook in relation to Burns’s physical health and final illness.

A turning point in the study of Burns’s mental health appears to have come in 1993 with the publication of Kay Redfield Jamison’s *Touched with Fire*. This wide-ranging study explores the connections between creative genius and the occurrence of mood disorders, particularly bipolar disorder (then termed manic depression). It also outlines Jamison’s examination of the ‘autobiographical, biographical and medical records (where available) for all major British and Irish poets born between 1705 and 1805’, totalling 36 individuals.<sup>63</sup> On the basis of these examinations, she drew conclusions regarding the likelihood of each individual suffering recurrent depression or manic-depressive illness.<sup>64</sup> Among Jamison’s subjects was Robert Burns, listed as likely to have been affected by clinical depression and possibly by bipolar disorder.<sup>65</sup>

Although Jamison’s comments represent a significant shift in the thinking about the potential nature of Burns’s melancholy and its impact on his life, the book was published for a general audience so there is limited detail of methodological approaches and analytical findings. Burns’s inclusion is predominated by biographical background, with no detailing of symptoms experienced, how evidence of these manifested themselves in the evidence reviewed, nor examples of episodes from the poet’s life which illustrate what may have been episodes of the abnormally depressed or elevated moods. It is, therefore, challenging to discern the evidence which underpins Jamison’s conclusions with regards to Burns. Nevertheless, Jamison’s claims have subsequently been included in major biographies of the poet, such as those by McIntyre and

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<sup>62</sup> W.W. Buchanan and W.F. Kean, ‘Robert Burns’s Final Illness Revisited’, *Burns Chronicle*, 100 (1991), 60–71 (p.68).

<sup>63</sup> Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p.61.

<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that Jamison uses the earlier terms ‘manic depression’ and ‘manic-depressive illness’ interchangeably with bipolar disorder. These have now fallen out of clinical use as not all individuals affected by bipolar disorder will have experienced episodes of full mania. Throughout this thesis, ‘bipolar disorder’ will be used as the preferred term.

<sup>65</sup> Jamison, (1993), p.66.

Crawford.<sup>66</sup> Such biographies adhere to modern academic practices of using primary materials and reliable secondary sources, but this means they are only as robust as the material which underpins them. Thus, citing Jamison's hypothesis spreads the idea within the public consciousness but adds nothing to the evidence base on which such a conclusion stands, nor develops any greater understanding of the impact of such a condition on the life or work of the individual in question. Consequently, space has been created where Burns's biography can be reviewed in an objective manner, where a detailed and systematic analysis of the evidence available within the specific realm of Burns's physical and mental health can be undertaken. This allows for an assessment of the validity of Jamison's hypothesis, an examination of the implications this has for understanding Burns's wider biography and creative process, and possibly to overcome more than 200 years of well-established but potentially erroneous opinion on the connection between Burns's mental health and his alcohol consumption.

## **Aims and structure of the thesis**

Taking Jamison's proposed diagnosis as a starting point, this thesis lays out the re-examination of Burns's medical biography, particularly focusing on his mental health. Initially, it seeks to assess the confidence which can be attached to Jamison's proposal by careful examination of the existing evidence base against the current diagnostic criteria for mood disorders. In doing so, and almost regardless of any clinical label which may or may not be applicable, it creates a detailed picture of the nature and extent of Burns's disordered moods through his life. This then allows for a close examination of these moods in relation to key aspects of his life, asking how they might have influenced decisions and shaped behaviours. Furthermore, it seeks to understand the interrelation with Burns's creativity - the impact on volume and rate of output, and how creative

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<sup>66</sup> Ian McIntyre, *Robert Burns: A Life* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2009); Robert Crawford (2009).

acts might operate as a means by which Burns seeks to explore and understand the nature of his moods.

This examination is undertaken within a tripartite structure; each section will begin with a consideration of the issues pertinent to its particular focus before seeking to address, in turn, the following research questions:

1. What evidence exists to support the theory that Burns suffered from what would be recognised as a mood disorder - recurrent depression, bipolar disorder or cyclothymia - as defined by modern diagnostic criteria?
2. What evidence exists to demonstrate the way in which Burns understood his disordered mood, and the extent to which these episodes may have affected aspects of his life, specifically his decision making, his drinking habits, and his relationships with women?
3. What evidence exists to demonstrate an impact of affective state on the quantity, quality and content of Burns's creative output, and how does this reflect or add to what is known about the links between affective disorders and creativity?

The sum of research exploring each of these questions will combine to provide a far more fully developed understanding of the nature of Burns's disordered moods and their impact on his life and work than has previously been available.

Section 1 addresses the first research question by exploring the extent of the evidence present within Burns's correspondence and personal writing, and the additional evidence from friends and family which would support Jamison's suggestion of the presence of a mood disorder. It achieves this by application of a novel methodology which combines literary and clinical approaches to assess the validity of potential evidence in relation to the contexts in which Burns was writing and the current clinical diagnostic criteria for mood disorders. In doing so, it engages with the issues around the practice of retrospective diagnosis, particularly the viability and ethics of such practice.

Section 2 seeks to contextualise discussion of Burns's health, and particularly his melancholy, within the eighteenth-century context in which he lived to explore its impact on his life. This allows the second research question to be addressed

by focusing on how Burns's understanding of his mental health developed through his life, with particular attention paid to how this was mediated through and affected his relationship with Frances Dunlop. It then moves on to explore the potential impact his mental health may have had on key aspects of his biography, particularly those areas which have come to be significant components of the public perception of Burns. Thus, this includes critical assessment of the evidence relating to Burns's decision-making in relation to domestic and professional matters, his relationships with various women, and the allegations of alcohol dependency which have dogged him since his final years.

Finally, Section 3 moves into that realm of the creative for which Burns is best known. Against the background of an overview of the historical connections made between mood disorder and creativity, and previous commentary on the part Burns's temperament played in his own creativity, this section will respond to the third research question by exploring the nature of Burns's creative output during periods of abnormally elevated and lowered mood. Using the same time period divisions of previous chapters, Burns's creativity will be examined from the perspective of quantifying the rate and describing the patterns of his output at various points in his life, and their correlations to his episodes of disordered mood. This exploration will be augmented by case studies of particular work produced at various stages of Burns's creative life which illustrate the impact of his mental health on the content of his output. These case studies are predicated on the conclusions drawn in the previous two sections regarding the nature of Burns's disordered moods and the timings of those episodes, representing a culmination of the work of the thesis. As such, they offer alternative readings of some of Burns's creative works through the lens of his mental health which sit alongside those already in existence.

The thesis seeks to use a range of sources as its evidentiary base, but with a constant eye to the significant degree of hearsay and mythology which has arisen posthumously around Burns as his image was manipulated for the various purposes already discussed. Thus, a conservative approach is taken which focuses on evidence originating from sources where reliability can be confidently determined. Consequently, the predominant sources utilised are Burns himself

and people who knew him in life. For evidence gleaned from these sources, particularly where anecdotes or reports appear after Burns' death, consideration is given to the purpose and intended audience of the accounts. Where possible, corroboration of information from independent sources is sought. This does introduce limitations in the degree of trust that can be placed in some information, and this is acknowledged throughout the thesis as appropriate.

In combination, all three sections of the thesis undertake a wide-ranging and in-depth analysis of a neglected and consequently misunderstood aspect of Burns's character. By presenting this reinterpretation of Burns now, it will show that viewing Burns's biography through the lens of his mental health offers a new dimension for understanding and connecting with the life and work of the man. It provides an alternative approach to studying the life of Burns which is particularly pertinent in addressing the misconceptions which have arisen around aspects of his life, especially relating to his use of alcohol and its connection with his melancholy, and the degree to which his creative output relating to his mood can be read autobiographically.

An additional consequence of the work is that it situates him within the modern-day understanding of mental health, its connection with creativity, and with the problems of stigmatisation that still affect individuals living with mental health issues in the modern day. Burns represents an example of an individual who is both celebrated for his successes yet not defined by his mental health. It is, in short, another aspect of the complexity and contradiction of the man who is admired both at home and abroad.

## Section 1 – ‘Miserable victim of hypochondriac imagination and bedlam passions’?

### Retrospective diagnosis

This section of the thesis sets out the identification and interrogation of potential evidence relating to Jamison’s retrospective diagnosis of a mood disorder in Burns’s life. As a practice, retrospective diagnosis sits at the interface between medicine and the humanities, drawing on the skills from both disciplines to interrogate historical sources of evidence. It is, however, a practice which attracts some debate, the crux of which boils down to two questions: “Can we?” and “Should we?”

### Can we?

This is perhaps the more divisive of the two questions - is it possible to posthumously diagnose an individual on the basis of evidence solely from historical sources? The issues surrounding this question largely fall into two areas of concern - the ontological and the epistemic.

The ontological concerns relate to the persistence of disease entities over time; Arrizabalaga cites the example of ‘typhus’, a term used historically to describe a particular group of symptoms but which is different in its modern definition.<sup>67</sup> Such difference in definitions of disease are rooted in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century shifts from humoral models to pathological anatomy and germ theory as explanations for disease aetiology.<sup>68</sup> Thus, scholars face the challenge of discerning whether a historical instance of ‘typhus’ might refer to the same symptoms recognised today as arising from epidemic typhus or from another physical illness which presents with similar symptoms.

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<sup>67</sup> Jon Arrizabalaga, ‘Problematizing Retrospective Diagnosis in the History of Disease’, *Asclepio*, 54.1 (2002), 51–70 (p.59).

<sup>68</sup> Charles E. Rosenberg, ‘Introduction - Framing Disease: Illness, Society, and History’, in *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History*, ed. by Charles E. Rosenberg and Janet Golden (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp.xiii–xxvi (p.xvii).

Cunningham argues that the main error committed by those working in retrospective diagnosis, particularly those who have been termed ‘hobbyist historians’ from a clinical background, is that they ‘assume the continuous identity of past diseases with modern diseases [...] that disease identity has been pretty constant over time’.<sup>69</sup> Arrizabalaga further describes it as

the assumption that such representations are the culmination of a historical process through which modern medical science gradually achieved a better understanding of these phenomena.<sup>70</sup>

Such critics further argue that such assumptions are fundamentally flawed because of the impossibility of testing a historical subject as a modern clinician would do to confirm a diagnosis.<sup>71</sup>

Karenberg, however, goes on to suggest that retrospective diagnosis is possible with a ‘comprehensive collection of all available statements on the patient [...] as well as the diverse methodologies of the natural and social sciences’.<sup>72</sup> This highlights that various previous studies have used different forms of autobiographical material or relied on extracts from biographies, clinical records or posthumous accounts.<sup>73</sup> There is, however, no standardised approach to retrospective diagnosis which uses autobiographical, biographical and medical evidence which accounts for the contexts within which their production is situated and how these understandings may have shifted to reach modern modes of thinking. Thus, this call for the skills of the humanities scholar to sit alongside that of the medic introduces the epistemic aspect of the ‘Can we?’ question - assuming that the persistence of the disease entity can be argued, can it be

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<sup>69</sup> Andrew Cunningham, ‘Identifying Disease in the Past: Cutting the Gordian Knot’, *Asclepio*, 54.1 (2002), 13–34 (pp.13–14).

<sup>70</sup> Arrizabalaga, p.51.

<sup>71</sup> Cunningham, p.15; Axel Karenberg and Ferdinand Peter Moog, ‘Next Emperor, Please! No End to Retrospective Diagnosis’, *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, 13.2 (2004), 143–49 (p.145).

<sup>72</sup> Karenberg and Moog, p.147.

<sup>73</sup> Rainer M. Holm-Hadulla, Martin Roussel, and Frank Hagen Hofmann, ‘Depression and Creativity - The Case of the German Poet, Scientist and Statesman J. W. v. Goethe’, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 127.1–3 (2010), 43–49; K. Koutsantoni, ‘Manic Depression in Literature: The Case of Virginia Woolf’, *Medical Humanities*, 38.1 (2012), 7–14; Timothy Peters and Allan Beveridge, ‘The Madness of King George III: A Psychiatric Re-Assessment’, *History of Psychiatry*, 21.1 (2010), 20–37; Jonathan R T Davidson, Kathryn M Connor, and Marvin Swartz, ‘Mental Illness in U.S. Presidents between 1776 and 1974: A Review of Biographical Sources.’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 194.1 (2006), 47–51.

known that the human experience of a particular disease has also persisted through time?

This question is underpinned by the socio-constructionist model of disease. Rosenberg argues that simply diagnosing a historical individual with a ‘specific disease entity’ is medicalisation of their experience and, as such ‘is reductionist and subject to boundary conflicts of disease vs deviance, feeling vs symptom [...] deviance is hardly a discrete and objective thing: it is time-, place-, and even class-specific’, particularly with regards to psychiatric conditions where there are no laboratory-based diagnostic parameters.<sup>74</sup> Arguing this constructionist approach that ‘disease is primarily a social phenomenon and therefore can only be fully understood in the precise sociocultural context where it has been perceived as so’ renders it impossible to retrospectively diagnose an individual with a modern disease because the changes in socio-cultural conditions and attitudes to illness and disease mean the human experience of the condition historically cannot be replicated in the modern day.<sup>75</sup>

Muramoto, however, highlights that such arguments equate the act of disease identification with the act of providing a diagnosis. Disease identification is about hypothesis-making and adjustment in the face of the evidence available at the time. It may be constituted by several methodological practices - clinical diagnosis by matching signs and symptoms to diagnostic criteria may be complemented by diagnostic laboratory testing, genetic screening or pathological examination of specimens, for example. It is, however, only one step in the process of providing a diagnosis which is, as a whole, a social act - it provides a framework for the patient and their doctor to discuss prognosis, treatments and outcomes, and for the patient and their families to manage their emotions and expectations.<sup>76</sup> The disease identification may not fully represent the experience of the patient but it provides a useful construction, particularly

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<sup>74</sup> Charles E. Rosenberg, ‘Contested Boundaries: Psychiatry, Disease, and Diagnosis’, *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 58.1 (2015), 120–37 (p.122).

<sup>75</sup> Arrizabalaga, p.53.

<sup>76</sup> Osamu Muramoto, ‘Retrospective Diagnosis of a Famous Historical Figure: Ontological, Epistemic, and Ethical Considerations.’, *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* : PEHM, 9.1 (2014), 10–25 (pp.15–16).

with regards to syndromic conditions.<sup>77</sup> Thus, bound up in a diagnosis are both the physical experience of the illness itself, and the cultural experience associated with the identified condition. In siting the act of disease identification within the act of diagnosis rather than equating it, Muramoto demonstrates what Arrizabalaga termed the ‘post-relativist consensus [where there is] room *not only* for biological factors *but also* for cultural ones.’<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, in relation to this first issue - ‘Can we posthumously diagnose an individual on the basis of evidence solely from historical sources?’ - it is arguable that it *is* possible with the appropriate caveats. Any attempt to retrospectively diagnose a historical individual must employ methodologies taken from both medical and humanities disciplines, interrogating as many contemporary primary sources as possible for both clinical evidence and for the reliability of the sources, taking into account the contexts of intended purposes and audiences, and the socio-cultural standards of the time in which they were written. Subsequently, Muramoto argues, it must be explicitly recognised that any diagnosis is purely clinical in nature, a disease identification best qualified as ‘a clinical syndrome consistent with or similar to...’, thus acknowledging that although it may not be possible to directly equate a historical disease with a modern disease, the modern disease identification remains useful as a framework for facilitating a modern understanding of the experience of the historical individual.<sup>79</sup>

## Should we?

Muramoto’s suggestion that retrospective diagnosis can be undertaken as a means of providing a framework for modern understanding leads neatly into the

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<sup>77</sup> In medical terms, a syndrome is a collection of symptoms and/or findings which correlate with each other but without necessarily being connected to the same or any identifiable pathogenesis. Many psychiatric diagnoses, including mood disorders, would be classed as syndromes.

<sup>78</sup> Arrizabalaga, p.56. Italicised emphases are my own.

<sup>79</sup> Muramoto, p.22.

second half of the debate around the practice - should retrospective diagnosis be undertaken?

In a modern clinical setting, the act of providing a diagnosis is beneficial to the individual; as previously discussed, it creates a space in which symptoms can be understood, treatments can be planned, and experiences clarified for family and friends. It is obvious that no such benefit can be derived by a historical figure. Thus, whether or not retrospective diagnosis should be explored has to be grounded in something other than simply generating a label which achieves nothing more than satisfying intellectual curiosity.

It is at this point that the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to retrospective diagnosis comes to the forefront. Rosenberg argues ‘we need to know more about the individual experience of disease in time and place, the influence of culture on definitions of disease, and of disease in the creation of culture’, recognising that ‘conditions such as melancholy or hysteria were as much flexible descriptions of individual life-course outcomes as diseases conceived in terms of modern notions of specificity.’<sup>80</sup> This corresponds with Arrizabalaga’s ‘post-relativist consensus’ - modern diagnostic labels providing a point of reference for clinical signs and symptoms combined with examinations which ‘use primary sources extensively [and] focus on historical context’ to create an understanding of the lived experience of the condition and how this may vary from modern experiences.<sup>81</sup> Karenberg further acknowledges that ‘done properly, it can be a valuable historical method.’<sup>82</sup>

Thus, combining the approaches of medical and humanities scholars in exploring historical disease in specific individuals should only be undertaken if it serves at least one of the three scholarly purposes identified by Muramoto:

- (i) to understand the influence of an illness on the works and behaviours of the individual;

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<sup>80</sup> Muramoto, p.22.

<sup>81</sup> Axel Karenberg, ‘Retrospective Diagnosis: Use and Abuse in Medical Historiography’, *Prague Medical Report*, 110.2 (2009), 140–45 (p.140).

<sup>82</sup> Karenberg, p.140.

- (ii) to better understand the experience of living with a particular illness in a particular historical period;
- (iii) to learn more about the life-long course of a condition through a medically reconstructed biography of an individual.<sup>83</sup>

Addressing one or more of these purposes ensures the retrospective diagnosis has more meaning than simply a novelty label, that it generates additional benefit, albeit not for the individual under examination.

## **Robert Burns – can we and should we?**

Having considered the broad issues surrounding retrospective diagnosis, they must be considered with direct reference to Robert Burns, asking whether it is both possible and desirable to explore the poet's biography for evidence relating to the potential presence of a mood disorder.

In the case of Burns, the more straightforward of the two questions is whether such an examination should be undertaken since labels of likely recurrent depression and possible bipolar disorder have already been suggested.<sup>84</sup> As previously discussed, the evidence for these labels has not been fully elucidated. Thus, the examination is necessary to assess whether there is sufficient evidence to underpin this hypothesis with confidence. This also moves towards satisfying the third of Muramoto's functions of retrospective diagnosis, in that the analysis will construct a fuller picture of Burns's medical biography by establishing those points in his life where he may have been more or less influenced by disordered mood, thus offering additional understanding of the life-course of a mood disorder. There is also a broader argument that this is responsible practice in that unsubstantiated application of these labels to an individual as media-attractive as Robert Burns does a dis-service to those individuals currently living with such conditions and the associated social stigma.

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<sup>83</sup> Muramoto, p.18.

<sup>84</sup> Jamison, (1993), p.66.

In accepting that the potential presence of a mood disorder in Burns's life should be explored, it is necessary to reflect on whether such a study is realistically possible within the context of the ontological and epistemic debates around the practice.

In identifying Burns's melancholy with depression, Jamison seems to equate the two conditions, following Jackson who draws a line directly through history from melancholy to depression, considering them two different labels for the same condition associated with the same core group of symptoms.<sup>85</sup> Drawing on the previously-discussed position of Cunningham and Arrizabalaga, Radden argues that the differences in descriptions of the two conditions outweigh the similarities too much for them to be considered the same disease entity.<sup>86</sup> Radden's differences focus on the socially constructed aspects of melancholy as a condition, aspects also well documented by critics such as Lawlor and, with specific reference to Burns, by Costa and Dickson.<sup>87</sup> This, however, moves away from the descriptivist approach of detailing signs and symptoms pertinent to this section of the thesis. More appropriate is Varga's position of 'modest continuity' which recognises the high degree of consistency in the affective aspects of melancholy and depression but with acknowledgement of the disparity in underlying causes.<sup>88</sup> This builds on Muramoto's argument that retrospective disease identification is possible but requires a clear statement that any such label is purely clinical in its derivation, with no corresponding laboratory- or pathology-generated evidence.<sup>89</sup> A fuller discussion of the similarities and

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<sup>85</sup> Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p.27.

<sup>86</sup> Jennifer Radden, 'Is This Dame Melancholy? Equating Today's Depression and Past Melancholia', *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*, 10.1 (2003), 37–52 (p.40).

<sup>87</sup> Clark Lawlor, 'It Is a Path I Have Prayed to Follow': The Paradoxical Pleasures of Romantic Disease', in *Romanticism and Pleasure: Nineteenth-Century Major Lives and Letters*, ed. by Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.109–32; Clark Lawlor, 'Fashionable Melancholy', in *Voice and Context in Eighteenth-Century Verse: Order in Variety*, ed. by Joanna Fowler and Allan Ingram (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.25–53; Karyn Costa, 'The Poetry of Robert Burns: "A Melancholy Not Unallied to Mirth"', *E-Rea*, 4.1 (2006), 1–7; Leigh Wetherall Dickson, "'What A Creature Is Man": The Melancholia, Literary Ambition and Manly Fortitude of Robert Burns', in *Voice and Context in Eighteenth-Century Verse: Order in Variety*, ed. by Joanna Fowler and Allan Ingram (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.248–68.

<sup>88</sup> Somogy Varga, 'From Melancholia to Depression: Ideas on a Possible Continuity', *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 20.2 (2013), 141–55 (p.141).

<sup>89</sup> Muramoto, p.22.

differences between melancholy and depression in relation to their social constructions, and their relevance in exploring the mental health of Robert Burns, will be undertaken in Section 2.

In terms of the practicalities of retrospective diagnosis, Karenberg calls for the use of extensive contemporary primary sources, assessed within the context of their time of writing for their reliability.<sup>90</sup> With regards to Burns, there exists a considerable body of evidence - more than 800 letters written by him, a little over 400 letters written to him, two commonplace books which collect together thoughts and items of interest to Burns, two journals recording his tours of the Highlands and Border regions of Scotland respectively, and further miscellaneous items of prose writing. The majority of this evidence comes from 1786-1796 - the final decade of the poet's life - meaning that while retrospective diagnosis is possible, any conclusions drawn will be far more confident for this period than that which may be related to his earlier life. Taking an approach which combines the literary and the medical to tease out possible evidence of signs and symptoms which correlate with the modern diagnostic criteria for mood disorders, accounting for Burns's eighteenth-century context - to whom and for what purpose he wrote, the social proprieties of that time, and evidence of activity and behaviour reported by Burns and/or his correspondents - it is possible to assess whether these sources contain sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that Robert Burns was affected by what would now be recognised as a mood disorder.

## **Aims of the section**

Chapter 1 describes the application of a novel interdisciplinary methodology designed and tested for the purpose of combining clinical approaches to diagnosis with literary approaches to textual analysis to explore the potential presence of features symptomatic of mood disorder within Burns's correspondence and personal writing. The patterns of occurrence of these features - quantity, severity and duration of symptoms - are then compared to

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<sup>90</sup> Karenberg and Moog, p.144.

the current clinical diagnostic criteria for mood disorders to test the validity of Jamison's conclusions.

Chapter 2 then draws on additional evidence relating to Burns's mood state, correlating to the wider consultation a modern clinician would undertake with family and friends. Consideration is given to what can be learned, both generally and in relation to specific points in time, about Burns's demeanour and behaviour in public as reported by those who knew him in life; to the occurrence of physical symptoms which may point to somatic manifestation of mental disturbance; and to the evidence of any family history of disordered mood reported in Burns's first-degree relatives.

In utilising a holistic approach which engages with primary materials, contemporaneous sources, family history and modern objective diagnostic criteria in a systematic manner, this section makes clear the degree of correlation between the clinical diagnostic criteria for mood disorder and the evidence in Burns's biography which supports the presence of such a condition, addressing the first research question:

What evidence exists to support the theory that Burns suffered from what would be recognised as a mood disorder - recurrent depression, bipolar disorder or cyclothymia - as defined by modern diagnostic criteria?

## Chapter 1 - Assessment of clinical evidence

This chapter lays out the assessment of the clinical evidence relating to signs of a mood disorder in the personal writing of Robert Burns. This assessment employed a three-phase approach, with each phase introducing a new aspect of analysis. Broadly, each phase consisted of:

- Phase 1: design, testing, refinement and implementation of a descriptive analysis of Burns's personal writing for evidence of symptoms of mood disorder as described by the current clinical standards, creating an initial cohort of items of interest;
- Phase 2: a subjective analysis of the items within this cohort of interest which adjusted the initial scoring by taking account of the various contexts influencing Burns's writing - the intended audience of items, the purposes for which he writes, eighteenth-century writing practices. In relation to letters included as items of interest, this analysis was undertaken on a correspondent-by-correspondent basis, including return correspondence, where available, to provide additional context regarding Burns's relationship with individual addressees, and the on-going epistolary dialogue formed by complete sequences of letters. Initial scoring was adjusted as required, further narrowing the range of items of interest which entered the final phase of analysis;
- Phase 3: a diagnostic assessment of the items indicated by Phase 2 to still be of interest. This analysis involved clustering items of interest on the basis of the proximity of their dates, and included all known writing to and from Burns generated within the bounds of each cluster. This chronological approach to analysis allowed for assessment of the duration of symptoms, and the identification of possible episodes of abnormal mood.

Each phase of the analysis assessed a different aspect of any symptomatic profile within any given item of evidence - presence of symptoms, congruence of symptoms with context, duration of symptoms within a period of interest - and

created several opportunities for features to be designated not of diagnostic relevance (Figure 1).

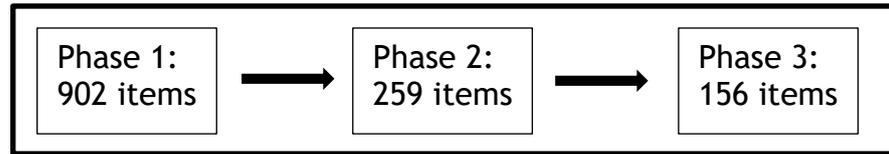


Figure 1: Number of items reviewed at each stage of analysis

Thus, this conservative approach established a high degree of confidence that the features identified in those items entering Phase 3 analysis were genuinely symptomatic and accurate markers of the potential presence of episodes indicative of a clinical diagnosis.

## Phase 1 Analysis – assessing for evidence of symptoms<sup>91</sup>

As previously described, earlier studies in retrospective diagnosis have taken varying approaches to the types of evidence analysed, the context in which they are analysed and the degree to which standardised clinical criteria are employed. As a result, no existing methodology mimicked the diagnostic approach of modern clinical psychiatrists, particularly with regards to the use of personal writing *in lieu* of the face-to-face consultation phase of diagnosis. Thus, any new methodology applying standard diagnostic criteria to this evidence base required initial testing to assess the viability of personal writing as a source of symptomatic evidence, and to assess the usefulness of the scoring system in differentiating between melancholy and clinical depression.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> The pilot testing of this phase of the analysis was published as M. Hansen, D. J. Smith, and G. Carruthers, 'Mood Disorder in the Personal Correspondence of Robert Burns: Testing a Novel Interdisciplinary Approach', *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 48.2 (2018), 165–74. A copy is included in the accompanying material as electronic appendix 5.

<sup>92</sup> The degree of comparability between melancholy and clinical depression is addressed more fully in the introduction to Section 2.

## Methodological design

### Diagnostic criteria

Diagnostic criteria for recurrent depression and bipolar disorder were constructed using the two main systems of classification of mental disorder - the International Classification of Diseases Volume 10 (ICD-10) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Version 5 (DSM-5).<sup>93</sup> Diagnostic criteria are predominantly those of ICD-10, particularly in the requirement for bipolar disorder to present as a minimum of two episodes, one of which must be elevated; however, inclusion of aspects of the DSM-5 description allowed for differentiation between Type I and Type II bipolar disorders and application of minimum thresholds of symptomatic duration for episodes. This combined approach is standard in the UK, as embodied by the current clinical guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).<sup>94</sup>

Bipolar disorder is characterised by at least two episodes of abnormal mood, one of which must be abnormally elevated. There is usually complete recovery between episodes. Episodes of abnormal deviation may be classified by severity (Table 1).

**Table 1: Criteria for clinically significant abnormal elevation of mood**

	<b>Manic episode</b>	<b>Hypomanic episode</b>
<b>Minimum no. of symptoms</b>	3 manic symptoms	3 hypomanic symptoms
<b>Minimum duration</b>	4 days	4 days
<b>Social and occupational impairment</b>	Severe impairment of both	Minor impairment of either

<sup>93</sup> World Health Organisation, *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10<sup>th</sup> Revision* (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1994), Ch.5; American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Arlington*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), pp.123-188. ICD-11 was released on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2018, during the writing of the thesis, but shows no significant variation from ICD-10 in its clinical descriptors of recurrent depression and bipolar disorder.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Morriss and others, 'The NICE Guideline on the Assessment and Management of Bipolar Disorder in Adults, Children and Young People in Primary and Secondary Care', *The British Psychological Society and The Royal College of Psychiatrists*, 2014, 1–389 (p.22).

Episodes of depression within bipolar disorder follow the clinical criteria for episodes present within recurrent depressive disorder.

Recurrent depressive disorder is characterised by at least two clinically significant depressive episodes. Episodes may be classified by severity (Table 2).

**Table 2: Criteria for clinically significant abnormal lowering of mood**

	<b>Mild depression</b>	<b>Moderate depression</b>	<b>Severe depression</b>
<b>Minimum no. of symptoms</b>	4	5	7
<b>Required symptoms</b>	Depressed mood or anhedonia	Depressed mood or anhedonia	Depressed mood, anhedonia and fatigue
<b>Minimum duration</b>	14 days	14 days	14 days
<b>Social and occupational impairment</b>	Minor impairment of either	Some impairment of either	Significant impairment of both

Symptomatic descriptors for depressed, hypomanic and manic mood states across three domains of mood, cognition and perception, and activity and behaviour were also derived from ICD-10 and DSM-5, additionally functioning to exclude those aspects of melancholy not present in depression. The twelve areas identified by the symptomatic descriptors also supported assessment for symptoms of an elevated mood state, allowing for the evaluation of both Jamison's suggestions of recurrent depression and bipolar disorder. Table 3 details the range of symptoms across these domains and their means of manifestation in textual evidence.

**Table 3: Diagnostic criteria and their means of identification**

	<b>Symptom</b>	<b>Mania</b>	<b>Hypomania</b>	<b>Depression</b>	<b>Presence Evidenced</b>
<b>Mood</b>	Mood level	Elevated, incongruent to circumstance	Mildly elevated	Lowered, little change in response to circumstance	Tone (word choice, descriptive detail), context for assessment of appropriateness of mood, explicit discussion
	Pleasure	Elevated	Mildly elevated	Anhedonia	Explicit discussion, descriptive language
	Attitude	Irritable, aggressive	Mildly irritable	Anxious	Explicit discussion, tone
<b>Cognition and perception</b>	Self-esteem	Increased to grandiosity	Sense of well-being, some grandiosity	Guilty and worthless	Explicit discussion, tone, descriptive language
	Outlook	Overly optimistic	Optimistic	Pervasively gloomy, fearful, morbid and/or suicidal	Tone, descriptive language, figurative language, allusion
	Thought processes	Pressured, flight of ideas, incoherence of ideas, impulsive	Mentally efficient, fluency of ideas, distractible	Struggle to keep train of thought, inefficient, indecisive	Coherence of flow, range of content, development of thoughts and nature of those thoughts

	Speech	Pressured, incoherent	Talkative with fluency	Reduced, stilted	May be mirrored by thought processes but likely only assessable if specifically referenced by third parties
<b>Activity and behaviour</b>	Energy and activity levels	Overactive and increased energy, restlessness	Increased activity and energy, degree of restlessness	Fatigue, psychomotor agitation or retardation	Output - number and length of letters within a given period, biographical details for range of activities, creative output - balance between creation of original material and adaptation of existing material
	Sleep	Reduced need but feels refreshed	Reduced need, feels refreshed	Disturbed (insomnia, hypersomnia, disturbing dreams), doesn't feel rested regardless of duration	Explicit discussion, inference from description of activities but likely evidenced by third parties
	Social skills	Reduced inhibitions, possibly improper, over-familiar	Sociable, pushing limits of propriety, overly familiar	Socially withdrawn	Some implicit discussion depending on degree of insight, evidence from third party sources

	Participation and risk	Extravagant schemes, reckless and/or risky activities	Multiple tasks started but not all completed, some risky and/or reckless behaviour	Withdrawal from regular activities, reluctance to participate	Explicit discussion, inferred from descriptive language, biographical details, evidence from third party sources
	Libido	Greatly increased, inappropriate encounters	Increased, inappropriate encounters	Reduced, even lost	Explicit discussion, implicit discussion, third party evidence, biographical details

## Scoring

Each piece of writing was assessed for the presence or absence of evidence relating to each symptom, with each symptom allocated a score (Table 4):

**Table 4: Scoring of individual symptom expression**

Score	Expression of symptom
2	Symptom expressed indicative of manic state
1	Symptom expressed indicative of hypomanic state
0	No evidence of symptom expressed
-1	Symptom expressed indicative of depressed state

The values assigned to these scores were indicative only of the mood state expressed by that symptom. The total number of symptoms indicative of each mood state present in a piece of evidence was then considered within the terms of the diagnostic criteria (Tables Table 1 and Table 2) and converted to a global score indicating the affective state evident in that piece of writing (Table 5):

**Table 5: Global scoring of affective state indicated by individual items**

Global score	Affective state
2	Evidence meets criteria for manic state
1	Evidence meets criteria for hypomanic state
0	Evidence does not meet criteria for manic, hypomanic or depressive state, i.e. euthymia <sup>95</sup>
-1	Evidence meets criteria for mildly depressive state
-2	Evidence meets criteria for moderately depressive state
-3	Evidence meets criteria for severely depressive state

The total number and polarity of symptoms exhibited in any one item were also recorded. This allowed identification of the clinical significance or otherwise of periods highlighted by previous studies as episodes of melancholy. It was also intended to assist in later analysis of the patterns of onset, natural course and resolution of any episodes detected.

## Sample selection for testing

A primary aim of testing was to assess the viability of using personal correspondence as an evidence source for indicating mood state. Thus, four

<sup>95</sup> This is not equivalent to displaying no evidence of a particular affective state, only that the degree of evidence displayed is not sufficient to define it as clinically significant as per diagnostic characterisations, i.e. it would be considered a euthymic, or normal, mood state.

sample selections of letters written by Burns were chosen, ranging over four separate time periods:

- Block 1 was selected to specifically cover November 1793 to January 1794, with December 1793 being a period previously identified by critics as a known episode of melancholy.<sup>96</sup> This was chosen to verify the scoring system would generate results indicative of a lowered mood where one is expected, thus acting as proof of concept.
- Blocks 2, 3 and 4 were chosen at random by an individual unconnected to the study to cover three other separate time periods, acting as pilot testing of the methodology.

The numerical ordering of letters followed the sequence presented in G. Ross Roy's edition of *The Letters of Robert Burns*. For the purposes of creating a timeline, a letter which has an incomplete date was allocated the same date as the most immediately preceding letter with a complete date. The exceptions to this were letters which are placed before any others in the corresponding month; in such instances, these letters are allocated a date of the 1<sup>st</sup> of that month.

Where a poem was included as part of a letter text, rather than as a separate enclosure, the text of the poem was considered part of the letter and examined as such.

Each time period was checked against *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns: Volume 1* for any corresponding entries in Burns's commonplace books, travel journals or other prose writings. None were found, although had there been, these would have been included in the analysis.

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<sup>96</sup> Allan Beveridge, "Groaning under the Miseries of a Diseased Nervous System": Robert Burns and Melancholy', in *Scottish Medicine and Literary Culture, 1726-1832*, ed. by Megan J. Coyer and David E. Shuttleton (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), pp.145–71 (p.150).

## Validation

A 10% sample (11 letters) drawn from across all four blocks was randomly selected using a computer-generated number list. These letters underwent independent validation by a postgraduate research colleague with experience in both clinical psychiatry and literary studies to assess for any observer bias inherent in the analysis. These letters had information pertaining to dating removed, were randomly ordered and assigned an identifier between 1 and 11. This blinded the validator to the chronological sequence of the letters and to any influence arising from knowledge of concurrent biographical events, promoting the scoring of the letters as isolated texts.

## Results of methodological testing

Appendix 1 includes examples of two letters, colour-coded and annotated to illustrate the analysis in practice.

All tables referenced in this section are located in Appendix 2.

Electronic appendix 1 includes spreadsheets for each sample block, showing the breakdown of the scoring on a symptom-by-symptom basis for each letter in the block, as per the scoring system outlined above.

## Results for Block 1 letters

The first block to be tested consisted of 25 letters covering the period 29<sup>th</sup> October 1793 (*L593*) to around 12<sup>th</sup> January 1794 (*L613*). During this time, Burns was resident in Dumfries and working as an Excise officer. The second Edinburgh edition of *Poems* had been published in February 1793.

As noted, December 1793 had previously been identified by critics and by Burns himself as a period of melancholy. It starts ‘altogether Novemberish, a damn’d melange of Fretfulness and melancholy [...] my soul flouncing & fluttering’ with the clearly pessimistic outlook that ‘on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper’ (*L600A*). As the episode continues, Burns confides in Frances

Dunlop that ‘I am in a compleat [*sic*] Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid’ morbidly reflecting on the illness of his daughter ‘that everyday, a week or less threatened to terminate her existence’ leading to the realisation that ‘on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang!’ (*L605*).

Table 17 shows this was a period dominated by normal mood, punctuated by two letters - *L600A* and *L605* - which demonstrated a sufficient number of depressive symptoms to meet the criteria for mild depression. Two of the four letters which lie between these points - *L602* and *L603* - were symptomatic for a sub-threshold lowering of mood. Both of these intermediate letters also included poems within their text which are dark and troubled in tone, hinting at concerns about the loss of a partner through death or abandonment (*K441* ('Husband, husband, cease your strife'), *K409* ('O Logan, sweetly didst thou glide')).

Table 17 also shows that a significant point of note for this group of letters was the large number of putative dates. Following the dating convention outlined above created several points of multiple letters with the same date and gaps in the timeline where no letters are recorded, including a gap between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December. It is possible that *L600A* to *L603A* were all written within two or three days of each other and that Burns wrote no other letters during this time; social withdrawal is an acknowledged feature of clinical depression. It is, however, equally likely that the letters are spread across this period, perhaps with other letters now lost; in *L605*, Burns reports ‘I have indeed, of late, written a good many things in that way’ (referring to writing new song lyrics), suggesting that he is still creatively active. This indicates that his lowering of mood has little impact on his creative functioning but may be driving some social withdrawal.

Furthermore, Burns starts *L605* on the 15<sup>th</sup> but continues to add to it over the next ten days, producing a text of notable variation in tone; while the entry for the 15<sup>th</sup> demonstrates sufficient evidence to be considered indicative of mild depression, the subsequent entries - on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of the month - are significantly lighter, making repeated reference to his creative output including the patriotic exhortations of ‘Scots Wha Hae’, and his attending the ‘brilliant Theatre here, this season.’ This suggests Burns’s mood significantly lifted in the week following the 15<sup>th</sup>.

## Results for Block 2 letters

This sample included 23 letters covering the period 29<sup>th</sup> November 1786 (*L60*) to 5<sup>th</sup> February 1787 (*L80*). Burns had recently arrived in Edinburgh; the Kilmarnock edition of his *Poems* having been published in July 1786, Burns had been persuaded to seek patronage for an Edinburgh edition, rather than emigration to seek his fortune in the West Indies.

Unlike the first sample selection, only five letters in this block had incomplete dates, giving a fairly even spread of letters across the whole period with accurate dating (Table 18). Two letters early in this period, *L61* and *L62*, written almost a week apart, indicated moments of hypomania. Burns tends to exaggeration and grandiosity, describing himself as a man of ‘independent fortune at the plough-tail’, above all other ‘needy, sharpening authors’ who are subject to the ‘modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, that will ever keep [them] out of the way of those windfalls of fortune’ (*L61*). He claims to be ‘in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas a Kempis or John Bunyan’ and ‘shall soon be the tenth Worthy, and the eighth Wise Man, of the World’, predicting the inclusion of his birthday in almanacs alongside other significant events such as the Battle of Bothwell Bridge (*L62*).

In contrast, *L63-L65* exhibited symptoms of a lowering of mood, although insufficient in number to reach clinical significance; within *L63*, Burns also reports having suffered the physical symptoms of headache and stomach upset in the previous week. There were no letters recorded for the week of these physical symptoms. *L63* was particularly notable in its contrast to *L61*; having spoken positively of being ‘introduced to a great many of the Noblesse’, Burns now fears ‘I should be ruined by being dragged to [*sic*] suddenly into the glare of polite & learned observation’ (*L63*).

*L66* exhibited sufficient symptoms to register as mild depression. In conjunction with the incomplete date and the evidence of *L63-L65*, this letter may have been written at some point during the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December.

The month following this episode was more settled with little evidence of abnormal mood, with the exception of *L68* (27<sup>th</sup> December 1786) and *L72* (7<sup>th</sup> January 1787). Both letters presented enough evidence to be considered indicative of hypomania. There were no intervening letters to indicate this was an on-going state for the duration of the period between *L68* and *L72*.

*L76* to *L79* exhibited evidence of lowered mood, with *L78* and *L78A* classed as mild depression and followed by a period of three weeks before the next definitively dated letter, *L80*. This letter also exhibited symptoms of depression but not enough to reach clinical significance.

### **Results for Block 3 letters**

This sample originally included *L410-L430*, covering the period 30<sup>th</sup> July 1790 to 17<sup>th</sup> January 1791. Post-analysis review of Burns's biography for this period highlighted that, assuming deliveries of full-term babies (38 to 40 weeks gestation), both Jean Armour and Anna Park conceived in late June or early July 1790. It was, therefore, decided to expand the sample to include *L398A* to *L409*, thus extending the time period back to 28 May 1790, with the aim of capturing any evidence of abnormal mood which may have been present around the times of these conceptions. As a result, this sample included 36 letters, seven of which are incompletely dated. As the next phase of analysis will apply the methodology to the entire body of Burns's correspondence, this expansion of Block 3 was not deemed to be an inappropriate adjustment of the sampling process.

By this point in his life, Burns was married to Jean and they had two surviving children. He was farming the difficult site of Ellisland, as well as undertaking his duties as a government Excise officer, responsible for ten parishes.

Table 19 shows that the most immediately notable feature of this block is that there were considerably fewer letters in this sample than might be expected for the time period covered. Blocks 1 and 2 were similar sizes, having covered similar periods of ten and eight weeks respectively; Block 3 covered a period around 30 weeks yet only included around 50% more letters. This represented a reduction in average letter count from 2.5 and 2.9 letters per week for Blocks 1 and 2 to 1.2 letters per week for Block 3. Significant gaps with no letters

covered the second half of August, the second half of September and the entirety of November. This may indicate a loss of letters written during this time or a lack of letters written as a consequence of the demands placed on Burns's time by farming and concurrent fulfilment of his Excise duties.

Table 19 shows that no letters in this sample exhibited features of abnormally low mood but nine displayed sufficient symptoms to meet the criteria for hypomania. Although there were fewer letters in total, it was still appreciable that this was a period of great physical and creative activity for Burns, particularly demonstrated in the hypomanic letters. One week towards the end of August involved the poet riding all ten parishes in his Excise division - around 200 miles - in four days as well as attending a court case in Dumfries and preparing a lengthy report in relation to the events being examined (*L416-L419*). Yet, the poet still finds time to spend his summer evenings with friends and, having 'dined & supped', to sit up past midnight to transcribe a poem for a good friend (although the resulting letter is 'a shocking scrawl') or wander on the banks of the River Nith producing extempore verses, finding that 'to keep within the bounds of Prose was impossible' (*L399* and *L427*).

On the whole though, the gaps in the timeline created an absence of evidence which made it difficult to confirm the presence or absence of an on-going period of abnormally elevated mood during this time.

Perhaps the most notable letter in this selection, however, was one which exhibited no abnormality of mood. *L413* is a balanced and considered piece of writing where Burns muses on 'the characters and fates of the Rhyming tribe. He tempers description of the 'miserable' poet with memory of 'the fairy pleasures [that] the Muse[...]bestows on her Votaries.' It is arguable that this letter captures Burns demonstrating insight into the character of his own moods.

#### **Results for Block 4 letters**

This sample included 20 letters covering the period 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1794 (*L640*) to 8<sup>th</sup> March 1795 (*L660*). By this point in his life, Burns was living in Dumfries with Jean and their five surviving children, and was working solely as an Excise officer. December 1794 saw him receive a temporary promotion while his senior

officer was ill. Burns was also heavily involved in writing, collecting and editing songs for the Edinburgh publisher George Thomson.

As with Block 3, there was low average letter count of 0.9 letters per week. Again, this sparsity is likely due to letters having been lost and, particularly, the increased workload Burns was experiencing as a result of his temporary promotion, something which he comments on directly (*L649*). Within this block, however, were some letters of considerable length, particularly those to George Thomson where Burns addresses the editing of many different lyrics and includes new pieces of his own composition.

Within this sample, *L646-L651* were of particular interest, as shown in Table 20. Each letter in this sequence was indicative of hypomania, suggesting a possible episode during the period covered. Dating of the bounds of this episode was problematic, in that *L646*, *L650* and *L651* are incompletely dated. Consideration was also given to these six letters covering a potential period of two months and that all letters in this sequence are addressed to Frances Dunlop, George Thomson or Maria Riddell, all established correspondents and close friends of the poet. This may be indicative of Burns favouring particular correspondents during periods of abnormal mood, assuming that contextual assessment of the items confirms them as indicative of abnormal mood.

Outwith this short sequence of letters, there were few indicators of abnormal mood state in the sample. Three letters were indicative of hypomania but not placed in the overall sequence in such a way that it would confidently indicate the presence of a true episode.

### **Validation**

Validation of scoring by sampling the pilot data set demonstrated a high level of agreement (90.91%) between the principal scorer and the validator. This indicates that a reasonable degree of confidence can be placed in the scoring of the principal scorer when undertaken in line with the symptomatic descriptors outlined in the methodology.

## Discussion of testing and refinement of methodology

### Testing the methodology

As the timeframe for Block 1 was specifically selected as a known period of melancholy, the results generated by the analysis of this group of letters act as proof of concept by testing the methodology's fitness and need for refinement.

Analysis of this group generated results consistent with the presence of symptoms associated with a lowered mood, including the identification of two letters which would meet the criteria for clinical depression. Post-analysis correlation of the results for Blocks 2, 3 and 4 showed that the possible episode of depression occurring in December 1786 (Block 2) also coincided with one of those known periods of melancholy detailed by Beveridge.<sup>97</sup> While this may indicate a further period of depression during Burns's stay in Edinburgh, further evidence to fill the gap is required to confirm this. The results of Blocks 3 and 4 demonstrated that the methodology will also indicate abnormally elevated mood. This suggested that Burns's correspondence and personal writing were appropriate sources of evidence for symptoms of mood disorder, and that the use of a methodology based on modern clinical criteria to analyse these was a fit basis for a retrospective assessment for both depression and bipolar disorder. In indicating potential episodes of both depression and hypomania, it also provided a preliminary indication that there may be a sound basis to the hypothesis that Burns was affected by a mood disorder. Inclusions of a count of the total number of symptoms exhibited within any given item of evidence was also highlighted as being particularly useful in drawing out the nuance of Burns's mood state, allowing discrimination between episodes of melancholy which do and do not meet the criteria for clinical significance, and indicating possible patterns in onset and resolution of such periods.

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<sup>97</sup> Beveridge, p.150.

## Refining the methodology in face of limitations

Although the data generated by this testing process provided a positive indication of the viability of the methodology, it also highlighted several limitations which must be acknowledged and, where possible, compensated for.

While the scoring for the letters effectively discriminated between euthymic and potentially clinically significant items, it did not account for the variation in symptomatic expression within those letters classed as euthymic. This group, included items which exhibit no symptoms and those which exhibit several but narrowly miss the threshold of significance. This latter group can offer further insight into the nature of those melancholic episodes which do not reach the criteria for clinical significance, so the scoring system was adjusted to capture these. Where a letter exhibits two symptoms of hypomania or three symptoms of depression, i.e. one fewer than is required for clinical significance, it would be designated a sub-threshold elevation or sub-threshold lowering of mood respectively in further analyses, scored as 0.5 and -0.5 respectively.

With regards to the letters themselves, the most significant issue raised was that of dating. Firstly, as can be seen from the test samples, there were a significant number of Burns's letters which are incompletely dated. While the method of date allocation used in this pilot preserves the sequencing used by Roy, it did result in several letters being allocated to single date and the emergence in gaps in the timeline between two fully dated letters. Uncertain dating of a letter also had an impact on the dating of events recorded within a letter; for example, reference to an episode of inactivity due to melancholy in the week prior to a letter being written cannot be accurately dated and recorded when the source letter itself cannot be accurately dated. These issues may, to an extent, be addressed by work undertaken subsequent to the publication of Roy's volumes, where additional evidence has been uncovered which clarifies or corrects the proposed dating of Roy.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> As an example, *L600*, dated by Roy to 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 1793, is cited in Lindsay (p.275) with a date of 5<sup>th</sup> Dec 1793. This shift in date would place it two or three days after *L603* where Burns is exhibiting signs which only narrowly fall outside the definition of clinical significance, demonstrating the lack of social or occupational impairment associated with a moderate

The issues may also be addressed by clarification or corroboration existing in third-party evidence such as return correspondence, as included in Phase 2 analysis, or personal accounts and character sketches of Burns's friends and family, as will be considered in Ch.2. Where additional evidence is limited or not available, there must be a degree of caution acknowledged in any conclusions drawn on the basis of evidence from incompletely dated letters.

A second issue relating to dating arose with those items such as *L605* which contain multiple sections written on different days. This letter in particular demonstrated the variation of affective state which may be exhibited within an item being considered as a single text attached to a single date, variation which is lost when the text is considered within the framework of the current methodology. Since, as was demonstrated with this particular letter, such a letter may offer evidence of the limits of an episode of abnormal mood, future application of the methodology should involve treatment of each section of such a letter as a separate text to be scored separately. Such an approach may also work towards filling gaps in the timeline, and this would certainly be the case with this amended approach to *L605*.

The final aspect highlighted by the pilot testing is the limitation of the descriptive approach taken by this first phase of analysis. It serves as a reminder that the data generated by this phase can be nothing more than indicative of items of potential clinical interest. Consideration must still be given to the purposes, audiences and contexts which influenced Burns's writing, and to the role they play in determining the degree to which any given item of evidence can be argued to be performative or representative of the 'real' Burns. This is undertaken in Phase 2.

## **Results of Phase 1 analysis**

Following post-testing refinement of the methodology, Phase 1 analysis was undertaken on all items of personal writing produced by Burns as contained in

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depression. Dating of *L600* to the 5<sup>th</sup> December may also suggest that *L600A*, with a greater number of symptoms evident, was written after *L603*, contrary to Roy's sequencing.

Roy's volumes of *The Letter of Robert Burns* and Leask's volume of *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, a total of 902 individual records (822 letters, 34 commonplace book entries and 46 tour journal entries)<sup>99</sup>. Electronic appendix 2 includes a spreadsheet covering Burns's time line from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1780 to 21<sup>st</sup> July 1796, with Column F showing the Phase 1 score of each item analysed.

Of the 902 items analysed, 125 reached the threshold for affective abnormality (13.9% of all items). A further 134 items exhibited sufficient symptoms to be indicative of a sub-threshold variation in mood. Table 6 shows the distribution of the direction and severity of abnormality across the items analysed.

**Table 6: Mood states detected following Phase 1 analysis**

Mood state	Letters	Commonplace book entries	Tour journal entries
Manic	0	0	0
Hypomanic	100	0	1
Sub-threshold elevation	87	3	5
Euthymic	575	29	39
Sub-threshold lowering	37	1	1
Mild depression	21	1	0
Moderate depression	2	0	0
Severe depression	0	0	0

## Discussion of Phase 1 analysis

The primary aim of this phase of the analysis was to identify those items of Burns's personal writing which demonstrated features consistent with the clinical description of a mood disorder. Use of the current standard psychiatric diagnostic tools to construct a symptomatic profile allowed exclusion of those features of eighteenth-century melancholy which do not correlate with modern definitions of clinical depression. As will be discussed in the introduction to Section 2 of the thesis, hypomania has a less clear correlation with any

<sup>99</sup> L711-715 were not included in the analysis as their dating is entirely unclear, indicated only as ?1796 (L711), 1787-1796 (L712), and 1791-1796 (L713-715).

eighteenth-century condition due to the significantly differing definitions of abnormally elevated moods at the time.

From an initial body of 902 items, this analysis identified 125 items which exhibit sufficient symptoms to meet the quantitative threshold for significance, and will be taken forward to Phase 2 analysis for consideration of the congruence of symptoms with the contexts in which they were written.

A further 134 items exhibit a sub-threshold disturbance of mood, offering additional insight into the variability of Burns's moods; this may include evidence of patterns in the onset and resolution of episodes, or in seasonal variability. Such sub-threshold episodes may also prove diagnostically important should Phase 2 and 3 analyses result in no evidence of episodes of depression or hypomania; prolonged sub-threshold episodes may point to a diagnosis of cyclothymia, as suggested by Purves-Stewart.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, those items with symptoms of lowered mood, along with the clinically significant items, may be found to correlate with episodes of melancholy, allowing for a fuller assessment of the nature and natural course of Burns's variations in mood.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the data generated by Phase 1, however, was the relatively small proportion of items which are clinically significant. Even allowing for gaps in the timeline, arising from material being lost or destroyed, this indicated that Burns spent the majority of his time in what would be considered a normal (euthymic) or sub-threshold mood state, even if a diagnosis of recurrent depression or bipolar disorder is supported by subsequent analysis. This would be in keeping with studies of the natural course of mood disorders.<sup>101</sup> This raises interesting questions about the frequency and duration of potential episodes, and the extent to which Burns's life and creativity were affected by his mood, questions to be addressed in Sections 2 and 3 of this thesis.

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<sup>100</sup> Purves-Stewart, pp.37–38.

<sup>101</sup> Robert M. Post, Peter. P Roy-Byrne and Thomas W. Uhde, 'Graphic Representations of the Life Course of Illness in Patients With Affective Disorder', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 145 (1988), 844–48 (p.847); Morriss and others, p.43.

## **Phase 2 analysis – assessing congruence of context**

### **Moving from a descriptive to subjective approach in assessing symptoms in Burns's personal writing**

The descriptivist approach taken in Phase 1 allowed aspects of eighteenth-century melancholy to be equated with twenty-first-century depression by assessing potential symptoms present within the modern diagnostic criteria. This approach also allowed the evidence base of 902 items to be whittled to a more manageable 259 items for subsequent analysis: 125 scored as clinically significant and 134 as sub-threshold.

It is, however, unrealistic to assess such texts outwith their contexts of creation. The intended recipient and purpose of each letter, as well as the letter-writing practices of the late eighteenth century all play a part in shaping the content, style and tone of each of Burns's letters. Shifts in writing practices and social conventions mean that features which may now be considered evidence of grandiosity or exaggerated self-esteem, for example, are typical of their time and not aspects which should be considered evidence of mood disorder.

Thus, a review of factors which would have shaped Burns's letter writing provided a basis for a reassessment of letters of interest. Potential symptoms identified by Phase 1 analysis were reconsidered within the context of purpose, audience and writing practices, including the dialogue created by return correspondence, where available. If considered congruent with these circumstances, a symptom was discounted as evidence of a mood disorder. This yielded a refined data set which is more truly representative of the presence of symptoms of mood disorder in Burns's correspondence, providing a clearer picture of the fluctuations in the poet's mood and adding to the degree of confidence associated with the hypothesis that Burns suffered from a clinically-recognisable mood disorder.

## Influences on Burns's letter writing

Burns was a prolific letter writer, corresponding with a wide variety of people for a wide variety of reasons. In this respect, Burns was no different to many other people of his time, in that letter-writing was an everyday activity and essential for the maintenance of personal, social and professional relationships. What is perhaps more unusual is that a man of rural labouring class origins regularly corresponded with individuals of far higher social status than himself. Many of the 180 or so letters published by Currie illustrate this, including addressees such as the Earls of Eglinton, Glencairn and Buchan, various clergymen and Doctors, as well as several upper class ladies. Francis Jeffrey, somewhat scathing of Burns's background, criticises the letters as being 'nearly all composed as exercises, and for display [...] generally very strained and elaborate in the expression.'<sup>102</sup> That Currie chose letters directed to elevated personages is, perhaps, to be expected; they demonstrate the wide reach brought by Burns's fame. Burns was writing many of these letters to put himself on show, so it is unsurprising that there is an element of artifice in their composition. They certainly employ a tone and language quite different to the more natural flow found in letters to familiar friends and family members. Ferguson agrees with Jeffrey in that there is an awkwardness, identifying it as an artefact of Burns's attempts to emulate those he was corresponding with. Ferguson, however, points out that Jeffrey provided critique having only seen the limited evidence as published by Currie. Exploring Burns's wider correspondence reveals that '[h]e became a good letter writer when he forgot his models and wrote because he had something to say.'<sup>103</sup> While it is evident that Burns does not write with the same style or effortlessness at all times, it must also be remembered that he is writing to people far above his own station in life; therefore, it must be asked how he learned to write letters suitable for such people, as stiff and as awkward as they might seem.

One possible source of epistolary education would be letter-writing manuals - collected exemplars of letters for various purposes and to people of various

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<sup>102</sup> Low, p.185.

<sup>103</sup> J. DeLancey Ferguson, *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. by G. Ross Roy, Second (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.xlvi.

statuses. Although Whyman states that letter writing manuals 'may have had less impact on lower- and middling sorts than publishers admitted', she acknowledges that they may have been 'purchased by the socially ambitious to help with patronage letters'.<sup>104</sup> Instead, Whyman identifies early letter-writing education as a fundamental influence, that 'those written as a child set indelible patterns of epistolary composition for the rest of one's life.'<sup>105</sup> Brant goes on to argue that 'manuals had some influence on correct forms of address and discourses of politeness, but epistolary proprieties were learnt more from fellow-correspondents.'<sup>106</sup> Thus, three influences on epistolary practice are identified - manuals, education and correspondents - and evidence for all three can be seen in the letter-writing of Burns.

Burns writes himself about his earliest exposure to letters, Masson's *Collection of Prose and Verse* which included several of Mrs. Rowe's 'Letters Moral and Entertaining'.<sup>107</sup> In addition, his brother Gilbert comments on the importance Burns placed on a 'collection of letters by the Wits of Queen Ann's reign'; although the precise volume is unidentified, it is highly likely to have contained examples of writing from Swift and Pope (*L125*). Alongside Burns's enthusiastic reading of the sentimental literature of Sterne and Mackenzie, these volumes would all have acted as models for the teenage writer as he developed and honed his epistolary skills. Building on this, Burns would be exposed to further real-life exemplars, particularly those addressed to those of a superior social station and for the purposes of introduction and/or soliciting patronage, initially as others wrote on his behalf and ultimately as he corresponded directly with such individuals. Thus, Burns would develop his letter-writing by means of the emulation identified by Ferguson, arguably to the detriment of his own natural voice as he mimicked that of others to conform to expected norms.

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<sup>104</sup> Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.29–30.

<sup>105</sup> Whyman, p.30.

<sup>106</sup> Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.10.

<sup>107</sup> Arthur Masson, *A Collection of English Prose and Verse for the Use of Schools*, ed. by John Bell, 9<sup>th</sup> edn (Edinburgh, 1773).

That is not to say, however, Burns simply copied blindly. As a creative and increasingly well-read individual, Burns was only too aware of the capabilities of the written word; he 'was aware of the range of 'languages' available to him' and 'his epistles were carefully crafted to suit the occasion'.<sup>108</sup> Mackay explains how Burns 'often used his letters as a means of striking a pose, especially when writing to those whom he regarded as his social or intellectual superiors.'<sup>109</sup> This gives rise to the range of voices to be heard within the poet's correspondence as the intended purpose and audience of each letter varies.

Although Simpson argues that this 'chameleon capacity of Burns the writer exacerbates the problems of identity of Burns the man', it can be alternatively argued that these shifts offer insight into the different ways that the author related to various correspondents.<sup>110</sup> Against an awareness of the varying influences at play within Burns's letters and the role each correspondent played in his life, it is possible to assess each piece for evidence of a mood disorder and account for points at which the chameleon is attempting to blend in, in contrast to displaying his true colours.

## Phase 2 re-assessment of items of interest

Accounting for factors known to have influenced Burns's writing practices, each of the 259 items of interest identified in Phase 1 were re-assessed. The aim was to discount as many potential symptoms as was justifiably possible. By taking such a conservative approach and attempting to return each letter to a zero-score, i.e. to assess it as within normal range, a greater degree of confidence can be attached to the positive identification of those symptoms which are incongruent with context and thus represent abnormality.

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<sup>108</sup> Grace Egan, 'The Letters of Robert Burns', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 43.2 (2014), 97–119 (pp.99–100).

<sup>109</sup> James Mackay, 'Beyond the Letters of Burns', *Burns Chronicle*, 2001, 44–50 (p.46).

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth Simpson, "Epistolary Performances": Burns and the Arts of the Letter', in *Robert Burns & Friends*, ed. by Patrick Scott and Kenneth Simpson (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Libraries, 2012), pp.58–67 (p.58); Egan, p.105.

With regards to the letters, rather than undertaking a chronological approach, re-assessment was undertaken in batches by correspondent. This allowed the nature of Burns's relationship with any given person at a particular time to be more easily appreciated, including consideration of evidence from the return letters written to Burns, where these are available. Thus, features which, decontextualised, may have been argued as evidence of abnormal mood, particularly grandiosity, exaggerated self-esteem or flight of thought, can be properly assessed within their complete context and accurately scored.

## Results of Phase 2 analysis

Of the 259 items of interest identified by Phase 1 analysis, 125 exhibited sufficient symptoms of abnormal mood to be considered clinically significant and 134 showed sub-threshold variations in mood.

Following re-assessment of this group of 259 to allow for the context of purpose and audience, a total of 156 items of interest remain. Table 7 shows the distribution of the direction and severity of abnormality across the items analysed. The bracketed numbers show the size and direction of difference from the number of items in each category after Phase 1 analysis.

**Table 7: Mood states detected following Phase 2 analysis**

Mood state	Letters detected	Commonplace book entries	Tour journal entries
Manic	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hypomanic	43 (-57)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Sub-threshold elevation	53 (-34)	4 (+1)	5 (0)
Euthymic	678 (+103)	28 (-1)	45 (0)
Sub-threshold lowering	34 (-3)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Mild depression	12 (-9)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Moderate depression	2 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Severe depression	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Column G of the timeline spreadsheet (electronic appendix 2) shows the global score generated by Phase 2 for each item analysed.

These 156 items are now considered to confidently represent the manifestation of symptoms fitting with criteria for a sub-threshold or clinically significant elevation or lowering of mood.

As this phase of the analysis involved assessment of the letters on a correspondent-by-correspondent basis, a breakdown of the individuals to whom Burns addressed letters of elevated or lowered mood was considered worthwhile (Table 21, located in Appendix 2).

## **Discussion of results of Phase 2 analysis**

The most obvious outcome of Phase 2 analysis was the reduction in the number of items which remain of clinical interest. 40% of all items assessed in Phase 2 were re-scored as being indicative of a euthymic state; 25% of items indicative of a lowered mood state were re-scored for euthymia while 48.6% of items indicative of an elevated mood state were similarly re-scored.

It was anticipated that some features identified in Phase 1, particularly grandiose language and flight of thought, would be accounted for within a contextualised analysis. Consideration of the dialogue emerging from those letters written by Burns in conjunction with those written to him show orderly responses to letters received rather than an incoherent jumping around of ideas, and grandiose language being employed in a performative manner as Burns corresponds with new acquaintances, social superiors, and potential patrons in his quests for employment or publication. Consequently, these were considered congruent with circumstance, rather than clinically significant, and re-scored. Such re-scoring of individual symptoms affected the overall mood state allocated to a letter, and thus the overall number of items still considered of interest.

Also of note was the proportional distribution of the items of interest between elevated and lowered mood states. There were twice as many items indicative of an elevated mood as there are of a lowered mood. This is in keeping with expectations that an elevated mood would include increased sociability, a wider range of contacts made and increased levels of energy and activity leading to

increased output. Conversely, the smaller number of letters indicative of a lowered mood state correlates with the reduced range of contacts, reduced activity and social withdrawal that would be expected of a lowered mood state.

Although Burns writes to a range of individuals during unsettled mood states, Table 21 highlights a small number of individuals - Agnes McLehose, Frances Dunlop and George Thomson - who feature prominently in Burns's choices of correspondents during these times. McLehose received 16 letters, predominated by those exhibiting features of elevated mood. While McLehose and Burns shared some degree of romantic attachment, McLehose was a married woman of superior social status; the combination of risky behaviour and the sentimental outpouring of Burns's letters to McLehose may point to more than a meeting of minds underlying Burns's attraction to McLehose but this could not be discerned until Phase 3 analysis was undertaken. Like McLehose, George Thomson also receives 16 letters dominated by those of elevated mood. The huge volume of editing work Burns was undertaking for Thomson's *Select Scottish Airs* and the appreciable pleasure he was deriving from this goes some way to explain the volume - both in number and length - of letters to Thomson. Even in some of his darkest moments, Burns would distract himself with work for Thomson, right up until only days before his death.<sup>111</sup>

Arguably the most interesting correspondent, however, is Frances Dunlop, recipient of 25 letters of interest ranging across the spectrum of mood states, almost as many as those sent to McLehose and Thomson combined. This mirrors the situation with Burns's entire correspondence where Dunlop received more letters than any of the other 200+ people to whom Burns writes in his life. As a woman nearly 30 years Burns's senior, Dunlop was neither a romantic focus nor a business acquaintance of Burns; instead, what started as formal correspondence between a poet and an admirer of his work became a close and confidential platonic relationship which was equally valued by both parties.<sup>112</sup> That so many of Burns's letters of abnormal mood were sent to Dunlop suggests an emotional outlet for Burns. This epistolary relationship and the insight it offers into Burns's

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<sup>111</sup> The correspondence with Agnes McLehose and editing activities for George Thomson in relation to Burns's mood is considered more closely in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

<sup>112</sup> In compliment to the 77 extant letters from Burns to Dunlop, there are a corresponding 101 letters in the opposite direction.

own understanding of and relationship with his mental health is given closer consideration in Ch.3.

Phase 2 analysis consolidated the data relating to the evidence of mood disorders in Burns's correspondence, creating a smaller group of items of interest. These 156 items were considered to confidently represent the manifestation of symptoms fitting with notable elevation or lowering of mood. Having thus far considered each item either separately from the others or in relation to other items to or from the same correspondent, analysis now shifted to assess the wider picture - the occurrence of these letters in temporal relation to each other, the indications they might offer of the duration of any episodes of abnormal mood and any correlation their timing may have with significant biographical events in the life of Burns.

### **Phase 3 analysis – assessing the timing of symptoms**

The final phase of analysis involves assessment of items of interest with reference to the chronological aspects of the clinical diagnostic criteria, specifically the minimum duration at which an abnormal mood state becomes clinically significant (4 days for hypomania, 14 days for depression).

#### **Grouping and analysis of the remaining letters of interest**

To facilitate this assessment, the remaining 156 items were grouped into clusters according to their dates. Letters which fell within four days of each other, as per the minimum duration of a hypomanic episode, were considered together as a discrete group. The dating bounds of each group were taken to be four days prior to the earliest non-zero scored letter and four days after the latest non-zero scored letter. This created 103 distinct clusters, the non-zero scored contents of which are detailed in electronic appendix 3.

Any known personal writing by or correspondence to Burns which fell within the dating bounds of a cluster was included in the analysis. Each cluster was assessed as a whole on the basis of the included items of evidence, concurrent

biographical events, and previously discussed influences of purpose and audience within the context of the late eighteenth century.

Some clusters were immediately designated as not clinically significant as a result of a lack of supporting evidence. For letters written prior to Summer 1786 (Clusters 1-16), this absence is explained by the lack of extant correspondence - Burns would have been writing less in those early, pre-publication, years of his life and much of what was written would not have been considered significant and worth preserving, possibly being destroyed as Burns prepared to emigrate to Jamaica in that year. For later clusters, the clinical insignificance may be similarly due to the absence of concurrent correspondence to allow any meaningful assessment of the pervasiveness or duration of any potentially abnormal mood; it may alternatively be due to the presence of several concurrent zero-scored letters, indicating that the non-zero scored letter is likely representative of a single day where Burns was feeling high or low, but that the mood state was not persistent. In addition, it was deemed appropriate that some clusters be considered together, either due to the proximity of dating or by indication of the contents of one or more letters within the group. The need for analysis and the direction of that analysis is noted on the table in electronic appendix 3.

This screening identified 19 groups, some consisting of a single cluster and some multi-cluster, in need of closer examination as potential indicators of episodes of clinically abnormal mood. Along with all items of correspondence whose dates fell within the bounds of a group, any known concurrent biographical events were also noted to allow for consideration of factors which may influence mood state.

## **Phase 3 Analysis Results**

### **Summary of results of cluster analysis**

Table 8 summarises the diagnoses indicated following the fully contextualised analysis of the 19 groups.

**Table 8: Overview of results of Phase 3 analysis**

Group	Cluster(s)	Start date	End date	Diagnosis	Additional Notes
1	17-19	13 Nov 1786	7 Dec 1786	Not clinically significant	
2	19-20	7 Dec 1786	22 Dec 1786	Mild depression	
3	22-23	11 Jan 1787	7 Feb 1787	Sub-clinical lowered mood	
4	31	29 Jul 1787	2 Aug 1787	Not clinically significant	Low mood, duration unclear
5	35-38	9 Dec 1787	7 Feb 1788	Mild to moderate depression	Severity masked by tone of McLehose letters
6	39	12 Feb 1788	22 Feb 1788	Hypomania	Possibly mixed state as depressive symptoms resolve
7	41	29 Feb 1788	7 Mar 1788	Hypomania	
8	42	14 Mar 1788	21 Mar 1788	Not clinically significant	
9	45	25 May 1788	1 Jun 1788	Not clinically significant	
10	60-61	9 Dec 1789	14 Jan 1790	Mild to moderate depression	
11	63-65	9 Jul 1790	11 Sep 1790	Hypomania	Persistently elevated, at least one episode of hypomania
12	66	1 Nov 1790	1 Nov 1790	Not clinically significant	
13	70	1 Nov 1791	1 Nov 1791	Not clinically significant	
14	83-84	13 Jun 1793	16 Jul 1793	Not clinically significant	Elevated mood, insufficient evidence of severity or duration
15	85-86	1 Dec 1793	25 Dec 1793	Mild to moderate depression	
16	88	18 Jun 1794	1 Jul 1794	Not clinically significant	
17	89	30 Aug 1794	1 Sep 1794	Sub-clinical elevated mood	Mixed state with some evidence of lowered mood
18	90-92	19 Oct 1794	19 Nov 1794	Hypomania	
19	104-106	18 May 1796	17 Jul 1796	Sub-clinical lowered mood	

Of these 19 groups, eight have been identified as containing periods which meet the threshold criteria for clinically significant abnormal mood - four depressive episodes and four hypomanic episodes.

All four depressive episodes occur in the winter months, typically starting in December. The hypomanic episodes are split in their seasonal clustering, with two occurring as Spring approaches and two autumnal episodes.

A further three groups have been identified as sub-clinical episodes - pervasively elevated or depressed mood but without meeting the thresholds for severity or duration for clinical abnormality - groups 3 and 19 for lowered mood and group 17 for elevated mood.

A detailed letter-by-letter analysis of those groups designated non-clinically significant is included in electronic appendix 4 for completeness.

## **Detailed results of clinically significant episodes**

### **Group 2 (7<sup>th</sup> Dec 1786 – 22 Dec 1786)**

The period covered by this group represents a crucial time for Burns. It has been a tumultuous year for him: the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems* had been published in July; Jean Armour conceived and gave birth to twins in September, yet her father refused permission for her to marry the poet; Burns had planned to emigrate to Jamaica, possibly accompanied by Mary Campbell, but subsequently discarded these plans when he was encouraged to head to Edinburgh instead, to secure subscriptions for publication of a further expanded volume of his work.<sup>113</sup>

Burns arrives in Edinburgh on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1786. Table 22 shows that, to begin with, things seem to be going well. On 7<sup>th</sup> December, he describes to Gavin Hamilton the various notables he has been introduced to and the great success he is having in securing subscriptions; his somewhat tongue-in-cheek, although

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<sup>113</sup> These plans may also have been cut short by his failure to actually secure employment, as laid out in Clark McGinn, 'The Scotch Bard and 'The Planting Line': New Documents on Burns and Jamaica', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 43.2 (2017), 255–66.

arguably grandiose, claim that he is ‘becoming as eminent as Thomas a Kempis or John Bunyan’ and that his birthday will be included in almanacs alongside such notable events as the battle of Bothwell Bridge gives a very clear idea of this being a poet whose star was in the ascendancy, and a man who was enjoying his experience (L62).

But this may not be as it seems. Burns appears to fall silent for a week. No letters written by the poet during this week are known to exist. It may be that such letters have been lost or destroyed in the intervening years since his death; it is as equally likely that there were no letters written.

That the latter may be the case can be argued in the face of the next four letters which are known. Three of the four are known to have been written within three days of each other and all four, each addressed to a different correspondents, are significantly less optimistic in tone in comparison to the letter to Hamilton. Burns apologises to John Ballantine for his ‘stupid matter-of-fact epistle’, and to Robert Muir for delaying writing until he could give a ‘rational account’ (L63, L64). To Ballantine, Robert Aiken and William Greenfield, he expresses his anxiety that, as a result of his new-found fame, he has been ‘dragged into the full glare of learned and polite observation’ where ‘with all [his] imperfections on his head’, ‘the stroke of envious calumny [...] should dash it to the ground’ (L63, L65, L66). He also comments to Ballantine that since arriving in Edinburgh, he had suffered with a ‘miserable head-ach & stomach complaint’ (L63).

Ballantine replies on the 30<sup>th</sup> December, a letter now lost and known only through Currie’s list of correspondence.<sup>114</sup> Tantalisingly, the notes on the content of the letter include ‘...for the consequences of a sudden chang...’; this may relate to the physical and mental symptoms reported by Burns, attributing them to his change in circumstances, but this cannot be absolutely known without discovery of the lost manuscript.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> This list is reproduced in J.C. Ewing, *Robert Burns’s Literary Correspondents 1786-1796* (Alloway: Burns Monument Trustees, 1938). The list is a compilation of the correspondence held and used by Currie during his writing of his biography of Burns.

<sup>115</sup> Ewing (1938), p.1.

Such anxiety is compounded by a lack of self-esteem - he feels his merits as a poet are insufficient to support the heights to which his fame is being raised, he is certain that he will be found wanting and consequently socially ruined. He is overtly pessimistic, convinced that such a fate will befall him, and looking to the future with same sense of despair as he would look into a 'bottomless pit' (L65).

These letters all exhibit, in varying combinations, signs of anxiety, lowered mood, lowered self-esteem, and a pessimistic outlook. The physical symptoms of headache and stomach upset would be consistent with somatic manifestation of psychological disorder, arguably a result of Burns's efforts to maintain a positive public persona in the face of his worsening depressive symptoms. That he can maintain such a persona is evidenced in the reply of Robert Muir on the 17<sup>th</sup> December and George Lawrie's letter of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Both comment on Burns's success in Edinburgh, with Lawrie 'rejoice[ing] to hear, from all corners, of your [Burns's] rising fame'.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, after the positivity of the letter to Gavin Hamilton, it is entirely possible that Burns no longer felt able to sustain the pretence of normality, to mask the symptoms of depression clouding his mind for more than the few hours of a public appearance. The gap created by the lack of letters becomes evidence of his lack of energy and desire to engage socially any more than was absolutely necessary, ensuring he could reserve the energy needed to disguise his impairment when on public display.

Thus, this group of letters becomes evidence of a period of pervasively lowered mood following Burns's arrival in the capital, reaching sufficient symptomatic severity and duration to fit the clinical criteria for mild depression.

### **Group 5 (9<sup>th</sup> Dec 1787 – 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 1788)**

As 1786 saw Burns launched as a poet of talent, so 1787 saw his continued success. The first Edinburgh edition of *Poems* was published in April. He undertook tours of the Borders and the Highlands during the summer where he was welcomed to the homes of many notable figures of Scottish society. He

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<sup>116</sup> Ewing (1938), p.1; William Scott Douglas, *The Works of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1877), pp.180–81.

continued to write new poems and songs, many inspired by his travels. He had also taken up the role of song collector and editor for the *Scots Musical Museum*, published by James Johnson. A brief stop in Ayrshire between the tours would see Jean Armour conceive again. Burns returned to Edinburgh in September. In early December, he was introduced to Mrs Agnes McLehose, with whom he formed an immediate connection. Within days of them meeting, however, Burns would be involved in a serious carriage accident. He would be confined to his lodgings, immobilised by a patellar dislocation.

December 1787 through February 1788 (Table 23) is a challenging period to analyse in respect of Burns's correspondence. It is dominated by letters written to Agnes McLehose as part of their ongoing epistolary romance. Burns generally employs a sentimental style not found to any great degree in letters to any other individual. Thus, there is an element of artifice in much of the correspondence considered here, with the 'real Burns' breaking through only occasionally. This, however, would indicate such instances being points of particularly extreme emotion and warrant serious consideration.

Early December 1787 certainly sees a lowering of mood, although there is insufficient evidence to designate this an episode of abnormal mood. Coinciding with Burns's immobilisation, it is not surprising that a man of his usual activity and energy should suffer a lowered mood as a result of his confinement. Writing to McLehose on the 12<sup>th</sup> December, he indicates that he is suffering from disturbed sleep; McLehose's reply points to his use of laudanum, perhaps as both sedative and pain relief.<sup>117</sup> This may also be exacerbating his tendency to melancholy at this time, writing to Margaret Chalmers, also on the 12<sup>th</sup>, that 'the tints of my mind [are] vying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm' (L160).

Although Burns's mood lifts as his recovery progresses, an underlying tension remains. Writing again to Margaret Chalmers the following week, he declares

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<sup>117</sup> L161; W.C. McLehose, *The Correspondence between Burns and Clarinda* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), p.86.

‘[t]he atmosphere of my soul is vastly clearer than when I wrote you last’, but he remains anxious that

I lie so miserably open to the inroads and incursions of a mischievous, light-armed, well-mounted banditti, under the banners of imagination, whim caprice, and passion; and the heavy armed veteran regulars of wisdom, prudence and fore-thought, move so very, very slow, that I am almost in a state of perpetual warfare, and alas! frequent defeat.

(L162)

That his mood remains unstable during this time is further indicated in his letter to Richard Brown on the 30<sup>th</sup> December. Burns comments how he is ‘just the same will-o’-wisp being I used to be’, adding to the argument that Burns was prone to periods of a mixed mood state within episodes of abnormal mood (L168). He goes on to offer evidence of a wider awareness of his vagaries of mood, describing how

About the first, and fourth quarters of the moon, I generally set in for the trade-winds of wisdom; but about the full, and change, I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes, which blow me into chaos.

(L168)

Although recovering well and able to make social calls, Burns’s regained freedom does not soothe his troubled spirits. His struggle with his pervasive melancholy during this period is significantly masked by the sentiment of his many letters to McLehose, perhaps evidence of his own denial of the approaching ‘midnight thunder-storm’, but the full extent of its impact becomes evident between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1788 when his letters show sufficient evidence of him having been in a clinical depression. He admits to Frances Dunlop that the six weeks previous, i.e. from the time of his accident and confinement, he has experienced ‘anguish and low spirits [which have] made me unfit to read, write or think’ (L184). He goes on to make the disturbing admission that ‘I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer resigns a commission’ (L184). The grip of his depression is such that the change in mood also breaks through in the letters to McLehose, a direct contrast to the tone of the rest of the letters in their correspondence. He refers to ‘pensive hours of “Philosophic Melancholy”’ and the ‘return of an old indisposition to make me good for nothing today’, a ‘horrid languor on my spirits’ which manifests itself as anxiety about retaining McLehose’s

friendship and his value as a friend, as well as musings on death (*L182, L183*). Writing to Margaret Chalmers, he chastises himself as

a poor d-mned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim, of rebellious pride; hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!

(*L185*)

These days of depression appear to resolve themselves, returning to the pervasive but less severe lowering of mood seen in December and early January. Burns remains anxious and refers to disturbed sleep but the sentimental and grandiose tone of his letters to McLehose returns, and he refers to social visits made on various evenings.

Overall consideration of these factors would point to Burns experiencing a pervasive lowering of mood during the period December 1787-January 1788. The dip into a clinically significant lowered mood during January would suggest that this represents an episode of mild to moderate depression, some of which is masked by the artifice of the sentimentalism of the letters addressed to McLehose, an aspect of his correspondence which will be given further consideration in Chapters 2 and 4.

#### **Group 6 (12<sup>th</sup> Feb 1788 – 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1788)**

Picking up only days after the previous group, this group of letters is a stark contrast in tone and in mood state. During this ten-day period, Burns was preparing to return to Mauchline, leaving Edinburgh around the 17<sup>th</sup> February. It is also likely that it is during this period that Jenny Clow conceived, delivering a son in November.

A significant number of letters in this period demonstrate the poet in the midst of elevated mood, with several indicating a severity consistent with hypomania between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February (Table 24). Particularly prominent is the pleasure he takes in his relationship with McLehose, evidenced in language more grandiose than that seen in the letters of December 1787, and the irritability he expresses towards those who might dare to judge the appropriateness or otherwise of the friendship he has with McLehose. Also notable, however, is the tone of the letters written to McLehose in the period immediately following his

departure from Edinburgh and from McLehose. Her letter to Burns on the 19<sup>th</sup> indicates she is far more forlorn at their separation than he is; by the 22<sup>nd</sup>, she is writing again to complain that she has received no letters from him, enquiring as to whether this might be a result of the return of his ‘nervous ailment’.<sup>118</sup> Burns replies that day, clearly indicating that he has been well and active, and not at all affected by his ‘nervous ailment’; on the contrary, he admits to spending a ‘two bottle’ evening with a friend the previous day (*L209*). He is clearly far less preoccupied by thoughts of McLehose than she would seem to be with him. Letters to others such as William Dunbar and Richard Brown exhibit a corresponding elevation of mood that would indicate this mood state is pervasive (*L199A, L205, L211*).

Although scoring indicates the duration of hypomanic symptoms are confined to 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> February, i.e. three days’ duration, the volume of letters written during this period, even though Burns is preparing to leave Edinburgh, testifies to elevated activity levels. Furthermore, his unexpected lack of concern at being separated from McLehose adds weight to the argument that this is likely to be an episode of hypomania within a period of pervasively elevated mood.

### **Group 7 (29<sup>th</sup> Feb 1788 – 7<sup>th</sup> Mar 1788)**

Although this group follows only one week after the previous group, there is sufficient time elapsed that it should be considered as a separate event.

Burns has now returned to Mossgiel farm in Ayrshire, although he is in negotiations with Patrick Miller for the lease at Ellisland farm, near Dumfries. He has also taken on lodgings for Jean Armour who has been cast out of her family home, and is due to give birth to Burns’s second set of twins within weeks.<sup>119</sup>

Although Burns’s mood appears to have generally normalised, although with some features of a mixed mood state, in the period between this and the previous group, by the 2<sup>nd</sup> March he is entering a new phase of elevated mood

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<sup>118</sup> McLehose, pp.223-227; 231-233.

<sup>119</sup> Twin girls would be born around the 7<sup>th</sup> March but both would die within weeks. There is no clear indication whether this might be the result of a premature delivery, congenital defect, or illness contracted in the early days of life.

(Table 25). He has been active in travelling locally for business and social calls, and he is optimistic about his future in farming. Writing to William Cruikshank on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March, he demonstrates irritation at the ‘savage hospitality’ experienced on his recent travels, intended ‘to send every guest to bed drunk’, pointing to increased drinking in the weeks since his return to Ayrshire (L214). This is further supported by Burns’s report on the 6<sup>th</sup> March of the previous night’s socialising leaving him ‘sick - head-ach - low spirits - miserable - fasting, except for a draught of water or small-beer’ (L217).<sup>120</sup>

A letter also written on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March, to Robert Ainslie, also indicates the manifestation of further symptoms of abnormally elevated mood. The letter initially echoes the optimism of others in the group, but then goes much further. Although this is a letter to a very good friend, Burns pushes the boundaries of propriety, describing his passionate reunion with Jean in terms both gleeful and coarse, demonstrating both his libido and the pleasure he derived from his sexual activity (L215). However, in the very same paragraph he describes how he swears Jean to secrecy over their relationship, having her pledge not to make any matrimonial claim on him. He then continues on to discuss how often he has written to Agnes McLehose with no sense of his conduct towards either woman being inappropriate. Indeed, subsequent letters to McLehose demonstrate irritation with the relative dearth of correspondence from her in contrast to the regularity of his writing, even though he has been extremely busy since his return to Mauchline and in light of her own previous complaints that he does not write regularly.

Such accumulation of symptoms over the days between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March are indicative of a further episode of hypomania.

### **Group 10 (9<sup>th</sup> Dec 1789 – 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 1790)**

By the winter of 1789, life has moved on for Burns. He has, by now, married Jean Armour and the couple have had three more children (the twin girls born in 1788 died within weeks); he has also fathered one, possibly two further children

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<sup>120</sup> A closer examination of Burns’s moods in relation to his alcohol intake will be undertaken in Ch.4

with other women.<sup>121</sup> The family are still living and working at Ellisland but financial strains have led Burns to secure a position with the government Excise service. He is assigned a division covering ten parishes, around 200 miles of riding for a single round. Thus, life is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding as he balances the rigours of farm life and life on the road, Excise responsibilities and ensuring the security and well-being of his young family.

This is a complex group of letters, the scoring showing no obviously discernible pattern or concurrence of clinically significant scoring upon first glance (Table 26). The more subjective approach which considers the group as a whole and the various contexts which may influence the contents is, however, more revealing. In particular, attention must be paid to whom Burns is writing and the nature of the relationship he has with each of the individual correspondents within this group.

Of the thirteen correspondents, six can be identified as having a more formal relationship with Burns: Robert Graham of Fintry as his ultimate superior in the Excise service; David Blair as Burns's gunmaker; Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable as a new acquaintance and social superior; Elizabeth Cunningham, unmarried younger sister of the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Glencairn, Burns's valued patron; George Sutherland, actor and manager of the newly opened Dumfries theatre; and James Mundell, a local doctor who had previously prescribed for Burns (this letter is also problematic in being entirely undated).

Of these, only the letter to Elizabeth Cunningham exhibits any disordered mood, its tone reflecting Burns's complaints of 'the cheerless gloom and sinking despondency of December weather and diseased nerves' (L379). That no other letters exhibit features of mood disturbance is not unusual within the context of the more formal relationship Burns has with each of the recipients. As has already been shown from the previous reports of Burns's time in Edinburgh, he is adept at publicly masking private turmoil.

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<sup>121</sup> Burns certainly fathered a son by Jenny Clow, Agnes McLehose's maid. There is uncertainty over the claim of fatherhood asserted by May Cameron. This is further discussed in Ch.4.

This leaves the letters to Frances Dunlop, William Nicol, Robert Maxwell, Alexander Cunningham, Alexander Findlater, Gilbert Burns and William Dunbar. The letter to Alexander Findlater is problematic in being only partially dated and, as a poetic epistle, offers no internal evidence as to possible dating. Thus, it is reasonable to disregard this within this analysis. Similarly, the sequencing of the letter to Alexander Cunningham, where the section dated Dec 1789 (this incomplete date a further issue in itself) is sandwiched between two other sections dated 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> February 1790. Although Burns indicates that this section was written previously with the intention of an earlier posting, there is no evidence by way of surviving additional manuscript to indicate that this section is a direct transcription of a previously written letter, thus giving no support to the contents of this letter being a reliable and unedited reflection of Burns's mood at the purported time of writing. As such, it is reasonable to also exclude this from this analysis.

This leaves the letters to Dunlop, Nicol, Maxwell and Burns. The most immediately notable feature is that these letters all exhibit some features of depressed mood. All four of these correspondents are close to Burns, from the long-distance but convivial friendship of fellow Crochallan Fencible William Dunbar to the brotherly love of Gilbert Burns. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect Burns to be more open and honest in his dealings with these individuals, laying bare the emotional disorder he experiences during this time.

The first of these four letters, to Dunlop, find Burns 'groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous System [...] for near three weeks [...] so ill with a nervous head-ach, that I have been obliged to give up for a time my Excise-books, being scarce able to life my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir Parishes' (L374). The letter is a dark and troubled outpouring to a close confidante, dwelling on his death and the afterlife, and the loss of 'my ever-dear Mary' (L374).<sup>122</sup> The severity of symptoms expressed in this letter point to a moderate depression. The reference to three weeks of being so affected that he

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<sup>122</sup> Burns does not make clear who 'Mary' is, and writes as if Dunlop would know. He had previously sent her his poem *K257* ('Afton Water') with *L310*, where 'Mary' is also mentioned, so one might assume Dunlop would read *L374* as referring to the same woman, but it is unclear if she would have had any additional knowledge of Mary's identity. Burnsian tradition holds it to be a reference to Mary Campbell with whom Burns allegedly planned to emigrate to the West Indies, but this is by no means certain.

is unable to work also corresponds to the absence of letters written since the 10<sup>th</sup> November. As with the previous group from December 1786, this may be a result of letters being lost over time; perhaps even more likely in this instance though, given his inability to lift his hand to his paid employment, Burns was incapable of undertaking even the shortest of correspondences. This letter also responds to one from Dunlop, dated 11<sup>th</sup> December, where she comments on the lack of correspondence from Burns in the previous weeks, the most recent letter from the poet being written on the 11<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>123</sup>

In his letter to William Nicol, written the same day, Burns echoes aspects of the Dunlop letter, commenting that 'I have been so ill, my ever dear friend, I have not been able to go over the threshold of my door since I saw you' (L375). Somewhat pathetically, he signs off the short letter 'I can no more.' Although he does not identify the illness as being of a nervous type, the closing salutation from 'your miserable humble obliged friend' indicates a lowered mood, matching the overall low tone of the letter. The letter, however, is not as severe in its expression of lowered mood as that found in the letter to Dunlop. It is more akin to that of the letter to Robert Maxwell, written a week later.

On first reading, the letter to Maxwell appears to show Burns to be in a humorous mood but such humour, it becomes apparent, may be a marker of a mixed mood state. On one hand the poet is humorous, verging on inappropriate as he sends Maxwell a transcription of a bawdy song, 'I'll tell you a tale of a wife'; on the other he reveals inefficient thinking and financial anxiety

I might write to you on farming, on building, on marketing, on planning,  
&c. but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked &  
bedevil'd with the task of the superlatively Damn'd - MAKING ONE GUINEA  
DO THE BUSINESS OF THREE.

(L378)

This letter seems to portray a man either teetering between depression and hypomania, or attempting to use his humour to mask his depression but finding himself unable to sustain it.

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<sup>123</sup> William Wallace, Robert Burns and Frances Anna Dunlop, *Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), p.224.

The truth of this may be the latter in light of the final of the four letters under consideration in this group. This letter, written to his brother Gilbert, shows Burns to continue his struggle with lowered mood, that his 'nerves are in a damnable State' and are accompanied by a 'horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body & Soul' (L381). This echoes both the earlier letter to Dunlop and the letter to John Ballantine in the previous group in which Burns complains of physical symptoms connected to his mood state. Having opened with the statement that 'I have not in my present frame of mind much appetite for exertion in writing', again he signs off 'I can no more', finishing a letter indicative of a mild depression.

In taking into consideration the accuracy of dating and Burns's relationships with the various correspondents found within this group, it is undeniable that this is an intriguing group. It certainly points to Burns experiencing some sort of episode of lowered mood. The early letters, particularly those to Dunlop and Nicol suggest a significant period of depression preceding this grouping; the lack of letters existing for November 1789 would certainly support Burns's account in the Dunlop letter of being able to do little for the preceding three weeks. The lowered mood appears to continue throughout December and into January 1790, with several letters exhibiting symptoms although not reaching the threshold for clinical significance. This would lead to the conclusion that this is a period of pervasively lowered mood with points of mild depression. Considering the evidence within the Dunlop letter in particular, this may actually represent the resolution of an episode of moderate depression which began in November 1789.

### **Group 11 (9<sup>th</sup> Jul 1790 – 11<sup>th</sup> Sep 1790)**

The summer of 1790 offers a direct contrast to the preceding winter in terms of Burns's mood. The family remain at Ellisland, and Burns divides his time between farming the land and the Excise. Around the end of June, Jean would conceive again, as would Anna Park, a barmaid in nearby Dumfries.

Table 27 shows this period is a tricky time to explore as the correspondence for this summer is sparse - at least one letter to Frances Dunlop is known to have been written but has never been found, suggesting loss or destruction. Nevertheless, what does remain indicates a man working at a breakneck pace, juggling the busiest time of the farming year with his Excise duties in a division 'hitherto carelessly surveyed' (L419).

The letters written over the course of the summer variously recount evenings spent composing or socialising, thinking nothing of supping and dining past midnight then sitting down to transcribe copies of poems and write long accompanying letters. The letters written throughout July show some signs of hypomania but never reaching the threshold for clinical significance; what is evident throughout is a positive and upbeat tone.

This does appear to peak towards the end of July, in letters to Dugald Stewart, Frances Dunlop, John McMurdo and Alexander Cunningham. He transcribes several copies of his 'Elegy of Captain Matthew Henderson' (itself a 24-stanza composition) for Stewart, Dunlop and McMurdo. Two letters to Dunlop, as well as that to Stewart and Cunningham run to multiple pages. Such writing activity is despite repeated assertions that he 'actually could not find time to transcribe it', is 'not collected enough to write [...] a letter' or that his addressee 'cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead' (L410, L411, L411B).

Over the period of 30<sup>th</sup> July to 8<sup>th</sup> August in which these letters are written, Burns is prone to grandiose language and a fluidity and sharpness of thinking which verges on stream of consciousness. Burns is clearly experiencing an elevated mood of a severity which indicates an episode of hypomania during this week.

Perhaps one of the most notable features of this week comes in the letter written to Frances Dunlop on the 30<sup>th</sup> July. Previously, Burns has been seen to write with care and tenderness, offering valuable life advice to his younger brother William, an apprentice saddler working in Liverpool then London.<sup>124</sup> Burns clearly cared deeply for his younger brother and was keen to see him make

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<sup>124</sup> See L321, L337 and L391 as examples of these.

something of himself. Thus, William's death on the 24<sup>th</sup> July would be expected to be a significant blow to Robert. It is, therefore, surprising that in his letter to Dunlop reporting the death, bearing in mind that she is probably his closest epistolary confidante and the person to whom he will pour out his woes in his darker moods, Burns is relatively glib about William's death. Although his 'bosom laboured with the anguish consequent on the distressing intelligence', Burns appears more affected by the plight of Dunlop's daughter, pregnant and recently widowed (*L411*). Subsequent letters between the two see much focus on the ongoing situation of Dunlop's daughter but no further mention of the loss of William; indeed, the next letter from Burns on the 8<sup>th</sup> August sees him irked by some perceived slight to his pride. Neither does Burns, as far as is known, write to any other friend about the loss of William from a fever, never reports of the impact of the news on his mother or siblings. It is possible the elevated mood and spikes of hypomania Burns is experiencing during this period are pervasive and affect his reaction to news that might otherwise be expected to have at least a temporarily depressive effect on his mood state.

Although letters from Burns during August 1790 are sparse, those written in the last week of the month and into early September point to the elevated mood state being an ongoing situation. Two letters, to Robert Cleghorn and John Mitchell, indicate Burns to be 'in a hurry, a d-mn'd hurry', likely pointing to having spent the previous four days riding over all ten parishes of his division - a risky endeavour that would have involved over 200 miles of riding, to the point that he had 'broke [his] horse's wind and almost broke [his] own neck', besides 'some injuries in a part that shall be nameless, owing to a hard-hearted stone of a saddle' (*L416, L417*). Subsequent days would see him call on Captain Riddell before riding to Dumfries to participate in the 'whirlpool of an Excise-fraud-Court', where he had 'a good deal of business for the Justices', including the case of Thomas Johnston for which he produced a lengthy statement responding to Johnston's petition (*L419*). Gilbert's letter to his brother on the 4<sup>th</sup> September details the heavy workload at Mossgiel at the time, it being the height of harvest; we can safely assume that circumstances were similar at Ellisland - Burns would return from fulfilling Excise responsibilities to deal with farm responsibilities. Burns's energy and activity levels over the course of these two weeks cannot be denied.

The letters to Cleghorn and Mitchell both also reveal a degree of irritation; on one hand, an understandable sense of injustice about offenders who get off lightly because they have ‘so many Great Men to espouse his cause’, on the other a more personally directed tetchiness at a book which had not yet been returned (*L416, L417*).

Alongside the elevated energy levels, the irritability and risky behaviour expressed in these letters, Burns’s letter of 4<sup>th</sup> September to Robert Graham reveals a fluency of thinking, and an over-arching sense of well-being and optimism as he lays out his success and efficiency as a gauger in a disorganised division; he expresses his hopes that this will lead to promotion to a better-paying Port division, although he’s not yet been in the job for a year, and even offering to draw on the support of some of the ‘Great Men’ who can speak for him, ironic in light of his earlier irritation at others who would use their connections for personal benefit (*L419*).

As August moved into September, it is clear that Burns’s mood had slipped into hypomania, as it had done a month previous. The whole summer of 1790 conveys a sense of a man in his personal, professional and mental prime, his energy and drive heightened by a pervasively elevated mood state. In short, clinically abnormal as it might have been, Burns felt good. It is a period of elevated mood which may have extended back as far as early June, to the time when both Jean Armour and Anna Park conceived within a couple of weeks of each other; its after-effects are evident as far forward as October when Burns, having recovered from a severe bout of quinsy, composed ‘Tam o Shanter’, the work he considered his finest composition.<sup>125</sup>

There is, however, also a sense that, Burns enjoys the effects of this mood state but was acutely aware that it was not normal and would not last. In early August 1790, he writes with wonderful insight to Helen Craik about the ‘fairy pleasures’ bestowed by the Muse to ‘counterbalance [the] catalogue of evils’ brought on by the ‘stronger imagination and more delicate sensibility’ of the poet (*L413*). This letter can be seen to be Burns’s tacit acknowledgement of the instability of

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<sup>125</sup> See Ch.5 for a fuller examination of ‘Tam o Shanter’ as the creative expression of Burns’s bipolarity, particularly the hypomanic aspect.

mood that affected him, that the wonderful high he was currently experiencing - persistently elevated mood punctuated by at least two episodes of hypomania - would inevitably be replaced by the horrific lows with which he was only too familiar.

### **Group 15 (1<sup>st</sup> Dec 1793 – 25<sup>th</sup> Dec 1793)**

By December 1793 Burns had given up the lease on Ellisland and moved with his family to Dumfries, where he was now solely employed as an Excise officer, having been promoted to the Dumfries Port Division with a salary of £50 per annum. The second Edinburgh edition of his *Poems* was published in February 1793.

This group of letters made up Block 1 for testing the methodology, as previously described. During this testing, this period was identified as indicating melancholy but with challenges arising from the fact that several letters are incompletely dated. Subsequent treatment of the letters through Phases 2 and 3, however, show there is an appreciable sequence of significance starting with his letter to Maria Riddell (Table 28). He describes feeling ‘altogether Novemberish, a damn’d melange of Fretfulness & melancholy.’ He is bleakly pessimistic ‘on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper’, and expresses a restlessness which can neither ‘rouse me to passion’ nor ‘repose me in torpor’ (*L600A*). Roy’s sequencing indicates the letters to George Thomson and Frances Dunlop to have been written around the same time. Although not presenting the same severity of symptoms as the letter to Riddell, they both indicate a lowered mood level, a pessimistic outlook and anxiety which centres on a theme of spousal abandonment. This is manifested in the inclusion of a new poetic composition in the letter to Thomson (*L602*).<sup>126</sup> Burns also transcribes ‘Logan Braes’ in the letter to Dunlop; although written several months earlier, the similar tone and common theme of spousal abandonment suggest Burns may

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<sup>126</sup> Includes *K441* ('Husband, husband, cease your strife'). Although the poem names 'Nancy' not Jean, this may have been a choice made for poetic effect. There may, however, also have been an element of reflection on the lost relationship with McLehose precipitated by difficulties between Burns and his wife arising as they nurse their dangerously ill daughter.

have returned to editing the poem, deliberately choosing to include it as an accurate reflection of his feelings at the time (*L603*).<sup>127</sup>

Following this sequence of letters demonstrating a pervasively lowered mood, there is a period of around 12 days where no known correspondence exists.<sup>128</sup> This gap may be a result of interim letters being lost or destroyed; it may, alternatively, be an absence of any writing activity on Burns's part, a feature which would fit with him sliding into an episode of clinical depression, and with patterns of correspondence in previous depressive episodes. This is convincingly supported by the next letter he is known to have written, to Frances Dunlop on the 15<sup>th</sup> December. It shows Burns to be experiencing lowered mood level, anxiety, a pessimistic outlook, morbid thinking and disturbed sleep. He echoes *L600A*, writing 'I am in a compleat Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid' and reflects on the fate that might befall his family should anything happen to him, likely provoked by the ongoing illness of his daughter, commenting 'on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang!' (*L605*). His lines 'Farewell, thou stream that winding, flows' echo these bleak sentiments (*K405*).

*L605*, however, also points to this episode resolving shortly thereafter. A further four sections are added to the letter on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December before Burns sends it Dunlop. The tone of these additional sections is starkly different compared to the first. Burns is significantly brighter in mood, his passions fired into producing 'Scots wha hae', enjoyment of the current theatre season evident, and his Christmas wishes to his good friend hearty and heartfelt. No further mention is made of his daughter, so it can be reasonably assumed that the worst has passed and she is recovering from her illness. Outwith the letters in this sequence, *L616* and *L619* comment on the severity of this episode and particularly the impact on his creativity, while *L620* makes specific mention of his mood lifting as the new season of Spring approaches, further suggesting that the episode resolved within the first few weeks of 1794.

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<sup>127</sup> Includes *K409* ('O logan, sweetly didst thou glide').

<sup>128</sup> This assumes *L602* and *L603* are written within a day or two of *L600A*. There is an equal possibility that they were written during this intervening twelve-day period.

The severity of symptoms in the early letters, the gap in the correspondence, and the severity of this final letter may indicate a mild to moderate depression, characterised by some impairment of social or occupational functioning. The episode would appear to last for around three weeks, certainly resolved by the 20<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Group 18 (19<sup>th</sup> Oct 1794 – 19<sup>th</sup> Nov 1794)**

The final episode of clinical significance highlighted by this analysis falls in the autumn of 1794. The Burns family remains in Dumfries, supported by the Excise salary. For two years, Burns has been working with Edinburgh publisher George Thomson to collect and edit songs for Thomson's multi-volume *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, refusing to take payment for a task he saw as both a pleasure and his duty as a bard with a responsibility to preserve the disappearing oral culture of rural Scotland.

It is this role as collector and editor which forms the focus of this short sequence of letters from October and November 1794 (Table 29). As with the previous group, this is a numerically small batch of letters but this masks the extremely lengthy nature of these letters, particularly those addressed to Thomson. Indeed, in the letter dated Nov 1794, replying to Thomson's of the 27<sup>th</sup> October, Burns admits ending the letter only because he has run out of paper, being 'in a scribbling humour' (L646).

The contents of the letters reveal Burns to be reviewing, editing, suggesting tunes for and critiquing no fewer than 32 songs, often writing out full lyrics for Thomson. Among these songs, there are no fewer than six fully original compositions; there are a further two original compositions included in the letter to Dunlop. Thus, across this relatively small number of letters, there is evidence of a vast amount of work, requiring considerable energy and activity on Burns's part, and all around his ongoing duties related to his paid employment.

Within the letters to Thomson, Burns is confident in his role as editor and critic, standing firm in the face of some of Thomson's suggestions. The letter of 19<sup>th</sup> October is particularly grandiose in its language as Burns explains some of his creative practices, and the role of various women in inspiring his work over the

years. His optimism and positivity make the great degree of pleasure he is deriving from this work patently evident. Within the context of his other commitments, it becomes clear that the Burns who writes to Thomson during this month is experiencing an elevated mood state and is possibly hypomanic.

The letter to Dunlop, although not indicating any abnormal mood at this time, is interesting in Burns's comment that writing to his good friend is something he would look to do in his 'desponding hour of oppressing care' (L645). While this may indicate a recent occurrence of such a state (perhaps early September when Burns writes of his 'diseased spirit' although concurrent letters do not support this being a full-blown depressive episode), it is also a wider indicator of the role Dunlop played in Burns's life and certainly correlates with earlier work which shows Dunlop to be the correspondent of choice for Burns when in an abnormal mood state, particularly a depressed one. It also possibly points to a further instance of the mixed mood state previously exhibited by Burns.

## **Detailed results of sub-threshold episodes**

### **Group 3 (11<sup>th</sup> Jan 1787 – 7 Feb 1787)**

Following closely from the mild depression previously identified in December 1786, this group is also situated during Burns's first trip to Edinburgh. While the three weeks between 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1786 and 11<sup>th</sup> January 1787 show little evidence of abnormality, several letters in this group indicate a lowering of mood to a sub-threshold level (Table 30).

Having written to John Ballantine in December 1786 of his 'miserable head-ach and stomach complaint' and his fear that he should 'be ruined by being dragged to [*sic*] suddenly into the glare of polite & learned observation' (L63), Burns writes again on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1787 'I am still "dark as was Chaos" in respect to futurity'; he desires to return to a farm in his native Ayrshire but is anxious that, as a result of leaving behind a pregnant Jean Armour, he 'will be happier any where than in my old neighborhood' (L63, L77).

Burns writes the following day to Frances Dunlop. Although still a new acquaintance, the confidential tone established in this letter testifies to the immediate bond between Burns and Dunlop, and foreshadows the deep friendship which would grow. He echoes his words of *L66*, doubting his worthiness as a correspondent and as a poet. Again, he expresses his fear that ‘with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas’, the public attention he is receiving is disproportionate to his talents, and that he looks ‘with rueful resolve to the hastening time when the blow of Calumny should dash it to the ground’ (*L78*).

Only two other letters are known to have been written in the second half of January, neither showing evidence of lowered mood, but Burns again repeats the sentiments expressed in the letter to Dunlop in his letter to George Lowrie on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, suggesting an on-going lowering of mood.

Although the lowering of mood appears to persist throughout January and into February, the limitation of letters which express such symptoms to personal friends, and the presence of concurrent professionally appropriate letters to individuals such as the Earl of Glencairn and Patrick Miller indicate little social or occupational impairment and a failure to meet the criteria for clinical significance. Thus, this group would appear indicative of an episode of melancholy that does not cross the threshold into clinical depression, although it may represent the resolution of the episode of mild depression evidenced in Group 2.

### **Group 17 (30<sup>th</sup> Aug 1794 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sep 1794)**

Burns continues to live in Dumfries with his family, employed as an Excise officer. In his own time, he is actively and enthusiastically engaged in collecting and editing songs for George Thomson.

Three of the six letters in this group show Burns to be experiencing elevated mood (Table 31). Two of those, both addressed to George Thomson, exhibit the poet’s pleasure in his editing work and the lengthy letters he would write to Thomson addressing amendments to several different songs, indicative of the time and energy Burns commits to this. While dating is not sufficiently complete

to indicate hypomania, there is certainly a sense of a pervasive elevation of mood.

In contrast to this, the letter to Frances Dunlop exhibits a sub-threshold lowering of mood. Burns is 'so poorly today as to be scarce able to hold my pen, & so deplorably stupid as to be totally unable to hold it to any purpose, suffering from a 'diseased SPIRIT' (L639). Nevertheless, he manages to produce a lengthy letter. The lack of concurrent letters which also exhibit features of lowered mood suggest this to be an isolated day of low spirits rather than an episode of melancholy or depression.

This group is problematic in that only the first letter is definitively dated, the others limited only to the month and year of writing. Nevertheless, that all letters are dated to the month of September 1794 points to this month, or at least part of it, being a period of elevated mood with some evidence of mixed mood state. There is insufficient evidence to argue it meets the threshold for hypomania.

### **Group 19 (18<sup>th</sup> May 1796 – 17<sup>th</sup> Jul 1796)**

This final sub-threshold episode occurs in the weeks prior to Burns's death (Table 32). He is still resident in Dumfries, but unable to work due to his illness and progressive decline. Around 4<sup>th</sup> July 1796 he travels to the Brow Well at the Solway Firth, where his doctors have advised he take a course of sea bathing to stimulate his failing body and aid his recovery.

It is evident that Burns is coming to terms with the likely terminal nature of his illness, writing to James Johnson on 1<sup>st</sup> June that '[t]his protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, ever my dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career[sic]' (L696). The ordeal of travelling to the Solway Firth and the subsequent bathing treatment takes its toll on Burns; he writes to George Thomson on 4<sup>th</sup> July that his 'health

is so precarious nay dangerously situated', and to Alexander Cunningham on the 7<sup>th</sup> that 'my spirits [have] fled! fled!' (*L699, L700*).<sup>129</sup>

Most affecting are letters written to Frances Dunlop on the 10<sup>th</sup>, desperately seeking to repair their fractured friendship before he dies, and to his brother Gilbert on the same day expressing fear over his impending death and anxiety over the fate of his wife and children afterwards. Burns's physical weakness by this point likely explains the brevity of both letters (and all subsequent letters up to Burns's death) and this is certainly evidenced by the tremulous script in contrast to Burns's usually firm, clear handwriting; the language is controlled and, in the case of Dunlop, more formal than seen in previous letters. Yet, the implied regret and fear contained in their lines points clearly to Burns experiencing a pervasive lowering of mood. Apparently accepting of his own fate, Burns's concerns for his family become over-riding and feature in several of his final letters, including his plea to George Thomson to send money to pay off a debt.<sup>130</sup>

The lengthy duration of this lowering with occasional occurrences of letters which demonstrate sufficient symptoms to be clinically significant could underpin an argument that this is an episode of depression. In light of the circumstances - severe illness, an expectation of death, a realistic and justified concern for the welfare of his family - such a mood state can also be argued to be congruent with context; thus, erring on the side of caution, this episode is classed as not clinically significant but indicative of a sub-threshold lowering of mood.

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<sup>129</sup> Burns would return home to Dumfries on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1796, dying there on the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>130</sup> Burns had previously refused to accept any remuneration for his work in collecting and editing songs, despite Thomson's willingness to pay.

## Phase 3 Analysis Discussion

### Moving towards a diagnosis: discussion of findings

Any assessment of the validity of the hypothesis that Robert Burns was affected by a mood disorder must be underpinned by a return to the clinical descriptions and diagnostic criteria of such conditions within the medical literature. Having based the definitions used in this study on those laid out by ICD-10 and DSM-V - the gold standards within the field of psychiatry - this analysis has demonstrated two things which enable a conclusion to be drawn.

Firstly, Burns suffered more than one episode of clinical depression in the final ten years of his life: mild depression in December 1786; pervasively lowered mood during December 1787 through February 1788, with mild to moderate depression in January; mild to moderate depression in December 1789; and mild depression in December 1793.

Secondly, Burns suffered from more than one episode of clinical hypomania during the same period: February 1788; March 1788; pervasively elevated mood from July 1790 through September 1790, with hypomania towards the end of August; October/November 1794.

On this basis, given that the diagnostic criteria require at least one episode of clinically depressed mood and at least one episode of clinically hypomanic mood, it can be stated with a reasonable degree of confidence that the clinical evidence shows Burns may have been affected by what would now be recognised as Type II bipolar disorder. The same conclusion was reached by Jamison in 1993.<sup>131</sup>

The seasonal nature of Burns's episodes of abnormal mood - the association of the short days of winter (typically November to February) with depressive episodes, the more equal durations of light and dark during the days of Spring

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<sup>131</sup> Jamison, (1993), p.66.

and Autumn associated with hypomanic episodes - correlates with features of bipolar disorder reported as a specifier for mood disorders.<sup>132</sup>

A further three episodes of pervasive but sub-threshold shifts in mood were also identified: lowered mood in January 1787; elevated mood in September 1794; lowered mood in May to July of 1796. The 1787 and 1794 episodes also follow the pattern of seasonality demonstrated by the clinically significant episodes. This is not the case for the episode of 1796, however this is closely connected with Burns's final illness and his awareness of his approaching death, probably a far stronger influence of his mood state than the time of year.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that while these episodes of abnormal mood have been identified, their total duration represents only a small fraction of time within the ten-year period covered by this analysis. That is to say, Burns would have spent most of his time in a euthymic (normal) mood state. This reflects the large number of potential items of evidence which were discounted for not showing sufficient signs of abnormal mood. Thus, while the thesis necessarily focuses on Burns's life and creativity in and around these periods of abnormality, and the evidence relating to these, their comparative significance within the period of time under consideration should not be artificially inflated.

Beyond confirming the hypothesis that Burns was affected by a mood disorder, this analysis has also highlights the effectiveness of the methodology in drawing a distinction between eighteenth-century ideas of melancholy and twenty-first-century definitions of depression. It also highlights the fact that it is erroneous to consider all Burns's melancholic episodes as incidences of depression.

Beveridge extracted a list of melancholic episodes as described in Mackay's biography (Table 9).<sup>133</sup> Comparing the dates of those episodes which fall within the last ten years of Burns's life with the incidence of episodes of disordered mood detected by this analysis, Table 9 shows the correlations identified:

**Table 9: Detection of previously identified periods of melancholy**

Period identified by Mackay	Evidence in analysis?
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<sup>132</sup> American Psychiatric Association, p.153.

<sup>133</sup> Beveridge, pp.148–49.

December 1786	Detected as mild depression
November/December 1787	Detected as mild to moderate depression
January 1788	Continuation of Nov/Dec 1787 episode
December 1789	Detected as mild to moderate depression
November 1791	Not clinically significant
October/November 1792	No evidence found
December 1793	Detected as mild depression
September 1794	Sub-clinical elevated mood

Of the eight episodes identified by Mackay for this period, three do not correspond with episodes of clinical depression. One - September 1794 -actually corresponds with an episode of hypomania, pointing to the identification of melancholy likely being made on the basis of the single letter to Frances Dunlop (*L638*) without consideration of the nature of the surrounding correspondence.

Mackay's identification of the November 1791 episode is likely based on Burns's letter to Robert Ainslie (*L482*). It does exhibit features consistent with moderate depression; however, concurrent evidence for periods around the traditional dating of November 1791 or Roy's suggested alternative of February 1792 is not supportive of either of these being periods of depression. The mood state expressed in the letter may indicate a particularly low day, a period of sufficiently low mood but of insufficient duration, or point to a further date not previously considered.

Likewise, the October/November 1792 episode seems to have been deemed melancholic on the basis of a single letter, likely *L512* to Frances Dunlop. While the letter is gloomy in tone, it is in response to Dunlop's (now lost) letter reporting the death of her daughter, so the tone is in keeping with the subject matter. Neither is there anything in letters written around this period which would support this being an episode of lowered mood or depression.

These episodes, while also demonstrating the flaws in the conclusions of previous critics and the flaws in equating melancholy with depression, again draw attention to Burns's propensity for writing to Frances Dunlop when experiencing extremes of mood, particularly lowered mood. This relationship and its role in Burns's life will be examined more closely in Ch.3.

## **Strengths, limitations and caveats**

The strength of this approach to assessing the nature of Burns's disordered moods lies in two key areas. Firstly, the use of the clinical diagnostic criteria provides an objective basis for the assessment of the presence of symptoms. It clearly defines the symptoms of significance, as well as the quantity and duration of symptoms required to qualify as a clinical episode of disordered mood. The quantitative nature of these criteria also allows for the introduction of an objectively defined nuance of disordered mood which is not clinically significant but may add further detail to the overall picture of the natural course of the condition in Burns's lifetime.

Secondly, the combination of the clinical approach with the contextualised approach of literary analysis has led to a highly conservative methodology which accepts a clear and limited range of evidence as significant. Thus, there is an increased degree of confidence in the accuracy with which any item of interest has been designated as clinically significant and, consequently, an increased confidence in the conclusions drawn on the basis of these designations.

Although the findings generated by this analysis are exciting, there are some on-going limitations in the study which must be acknowledged. The most significant of these is the irregular frequency of the correspondence to and from Burns. Records and internal evidence indicate the existence of many more letters, now lost, either by accident and the passage of time or by deliberate destruction. Notably, it is likely that Burns's own destruction of his early correspondence, in preparation for his emigration to Jamaica in 1786, is responsible for the need to limit the scope of this chapter of the thesis to the last decade of his life. This is compounded by friends and acquaintances who may have chosen to destroy items written at any point in Burns's life as they feared they might be used to damage the poet's character, or that their release into the public domain would cause offence or upset to individuals still living. Other items will simply have been lost as they passed through various hands; their origins forgotten, their value unappreciated. There are likely items still anonymously lurking in storage. It must also be acknowledged that the text of some letters are now known only

from previously published sources, such as those from Agnes McLehose to Burns. While these are largely transcribed from the now-lost manuscripts, the extent to which the editors of these volumes altered or manipulated the text of the letters, or for what potential reasons, remains a largely speculative point.

The outcome of this irregularity is that some periods of time are far better or more reliably documented than others. Consequently, some periods of disordered mood are better indicated than others. A period with a gap in an otherwise large number of letters is more convincingly argued to be indicative of Burns withdrawing from social contact as a result of depression than a period with fewer letters.

Conversely, assessing for hypomania is complicated by potential episodes consistently falling during periods of low letter frequency. It would be reasonable to expect that elevated energy levels and social gregariousness lead to more letters being written, but this does not seem to be the case. It may be indirect evidence of Burns's exhibiting social impropriety in his correspondence, letters which have then been destroyed to protect his reputation. Or it may be that he simply wrote fewer letters; he felt good and had no need to complain. Instead, he engaged other in activities he enjoyed - socialising, composing, editing - evidencing these in longer-than-usual letters.

While it is possible that lost material may resurface, and certainly has done in the thirty years since Roy published his volumes of the letters, it is far more likely that these gaps in the evidence will remain. It is also unlikely that substantial third-party evidence will exist to convincingly fill these gaps. As a result, it is likely that there will be some items of evidence which, although exhibiting sufficient symptoms to meet the threshold for clinical significance, cannot be considered representative of a possible episode of clinically abnormal mood because of a lack of evidence relating to the duration of those symptoms. Thus, while these items can be recorded as of interest, analytical rigour demands that they be ultimately listed as not clinically significant.

## Conclusion

As the first stages of exploring the mental health of Robert Burns, and its impact on his life and creativity, this study has proven successful. It has used a novel methodology to provide a reasonably confident indication of a clinical diagnosis of Type II bipolar disorder, while also differentiating between the broad eighteenth-century categorisation of melancholy and the well-defined twenty-first-century condition of depression. It has also shown that Burns's correspondence is an effective substitute for the face-to-face consultation of modern psychiatry.

Nevertheless, this does not represent the end of the diagnostic process. While a psychiatrist would undertake consultation with the affected individual, they would also seek to gather additional evidence of the nature and timing of abnormal mood states from those closest to the patient. In attempting to mimic the modern process as far as possible within the context of retrospective diagnosis, it is therefore vital to look at the broader evidence base of testimonies and accounts from Burns's contemporaries, to explore the existence of further corroborating evidence that would testify to his activity and behaviour during periods of disordered mood, whether elevated or depressed. Sketches and accounts by Burns's friends and family offer valuable insight, not necessarily into the day-to-day specifics of his mood state, but into the broader patterns and features he exhibited, and how they might further add to the argument that Burns was affected by Type II bipolar disorder. This is the focus of Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2 – additional evidence relating to Burns’s mental health

Having presented a clinical case for Burns being affected by what would now be recognised as Type II bipolar disorder on the basis of the evidence present within his extant correspondence, this chapter aims to assess other sources of evidence that might support this conclusion. This evidence is drawn from a range of sources, each of which relates to an aspect of the modern diagnostic process and wider clinical description of mood disorders.

The chapter will continue to track the diagnostic practice of modern clinicians by exploring the accounts and character sketches of those who knew Burns in life. Mimicking a clinician’s gathering of a wider patient history from family and friends, this process will uncover testimony from those closest to Burns regarding both his general demeanour and temperament, and specific points in his life which will talk to the externally observable manifestation of Burns’s mood state.<sup>134</sup> Testimony is restricted to that from individuals who knew Burns in person and thus were in a position to provide a first-hand account, either in their own correspondence or as contributions to biographies or ‘life and works’ collections. Thus, individuals such as George Thomson, although significant in Burns’s biography, is not considered an appropriate source for this component of the research as there is no evidence he and Burns actually met in person.

In addition to drawing evidence from friends and families, a modern clinician will also explore the family history of the affected individual for evidence of any incidence of mood disorder in close relatives (parents, siblings, children) because severe mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder are substantially heritable. In alignment with this, the second section of this chapter will lay out what evidence exists in relation to any reports of disordered mood among Burns’s first-degree relatives.

The chapter will then return to Burns’s own experience, examining the poet’s own reports of physical symptoms, exploring the possibility that some of these

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<sup>134</sup> American Psychiatric Association, p.135.

represent psychosomatic manifestation of disordered mood, and particularly focusing on what was known in the eighteenth century as hypochondria.

Finally, the chapter will conclude with an exploration of the unique evidentiary source of the day-book of Charles Fleeming which relates to Burns's time in Irvine between July 1781 and March 1782, when the poet was 22/23 years old.

### **Third-party testimony**

The use of correspondence sent by Burns, as shown in Ch.1, allows for the building of a fairly specific picture of Burns's mood state at any given time, dependent on the volume of extant material available. The picture this builds can be augmented by including similarly time-specific data gleaned from the letters received by Burns from his various correspondents in reply to his own.

As noted in Table 21, Burns tended to write to a limited number of people regarding his mood state; consequently, only a limited number of people will write *to* Burns about his mood state and thus there is a relatively limited body of additional evidence to be gathered which can be as specific on the timing of disordered mood as Burns's own letters are.

As the most frequent of Burns's correspondents, Frances Dunlop may automatically be assumed to be the most likely source of such additional data. Examination of these letters and the timeline of their friendship quickly shows, however, that this is an erroneous assumption. The letters between the two are dialogic, responding to the contents of each other, and are interspersed with only infrequent episodes where Burns and Dunlop are actually in each other's company. Thus, the correspondence offers virtually nothing by way of additional independent commentary on Burns's mood state at any given time, serving only to respond to those episodes which he reports himself. That is not to say, however, that the correspondence is of no use; that the vast majority of both sides of the conversation is available offers a valuable resource from which unique insights into Burns's attitude to his mood state and mental health can be gleaned. These insights will be explored more fully in Ch.3.

In contrast to the self-referential nature of the Burns-Dunlop correspondence, the letters passed between Burns and Agnes McLehose are more fruitful in shedding light on Burns's mood state at particular points. The letters are mostly concentrated in the period between December 1787 and February 1788, and provide a commentary that sits alongside the personal encounters that took place between Burns and McLehose at the same time.

Burns had been introduced to McLehose at a tea party early in December 1787; on arriving home, the instant attraction spurred McLehose to invite Burns to tea at her home. The appointment, however, would not be kept as Burns was rendered housebound with a dislocated kneecap as a result of a coach accident.<sup>135</sup> What ensued was a flurry of apparently affectionate and increasingly passionate letters under the pen-names of Sylvander (Burns) and Clarinda (McLehose), a correspondence which would have put the married McLehose in a very awkward position had it come to light. As soon as he was able, Burns began to call on McLehose, spending evenings at her home. The concurrent correspondence makes mention of these visits, and some of what happened there. While the letters are clear that some degree of physical intimacy occurred between Burns and McLehose, there is still uncertainty surrounding the question of just how far McLehose allowed things to go, not helped by the ambiguity of the letters themselves. Some argue that it was McLehose's refusal to allow the relationship to become sexual that drove Burns to seduce her maid, Jenny Clow, leading to the birth of an illegitimate son in November 1788.

As shown in Ch.1, the winter of 1787/88 was likely a period of mild to moderate depression for Burns, 'six horrible weeks, anguish and low spirits made [him] unfit to read, write, or think' as he described it to Frances Dunlop (*L184*). The full severity of the depression is masked by the sentimental grandiosity of the letters written over the same period to McLehose. The tone of Burns's correspondence with McLehose is so directly contradictory of the mood state he reports to Dunlop, it is evidence of Burns specifically engaging in behaviour which may not lift him out of his depression but will, at least, distract him from the painful thought processes he associates with his more severe episodes of

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<sup>135</sup> Maurice Lindsay, *The Burns Encyclopaedia*, ed. by David Purdie, Kirsteen McCue, and Gerard Carruthers, Fourth (London: Robert Hale, 2013), p.230.

lowered mood, activity that may be consistent with the psychodynamic concept of ‘manic defence’<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that the depression has begun to lift by mid-January, coinciding with Burns regaining his ability to venture outdoors and, importantly, to start calling on McLehose. Thus, as the month progresses, McLehose’s letters shift from referring to Burns’s ‘ravings’ to his happiness and amorous behaviour.<sup>137</sup> The risk associated with this, within the context of McLehose’s status as a married woman (and the precarity of her financial dependence upon relatives who placed great import on her proper conduct) foreshadows the ensuing period of hypomania evident in Burns’s letters of February. On the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> January 1788, McLehose sends Jenny Clow to deliver a letter to Burns with instruction to call back that afternoon to collect a reply; the letter was full of anxiety and concern over the tension between sexual desire and moral propriety, again hinting that the relationship remained unconsummated.<sup>138</sup> Against this backdrop and coupled with Burns’s mood shifting towards hypomania, with the associated lowering of inhibitions and elevated libido, it is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that in sending Clow to deliver her letter, McLehose had unwittingly made a target of her maid as a release of Burns’s disinhibited frustrations.

McLehose’s correspondence, however, is not only indicative of Burns’s mood shifting from depression to hypomania during January 1788. Her letter of 5<sup>th</sup> February 1788 also highlights that Burns could be prone to instances of depressive and manic symptoms occurring at the same time, perhaps consistent with what would be considered by clinicians to be a mixed mood state. She writes ‘[l]ast night I saw you low and Depress’d - my heart was bent upon soothing & raising your spirits’ and goes on to ask, ‘Why do you allow yourself in Melancholy Reflections?’<sup>139</sup> Importantly, this question suggests that this is not the first time McLehose has observed such a mood in Burns. It is possible she only mentions it now as it is more markedly incongruent with his near-hypomanic mood state of February than it was with the easing depression of January, and

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<sup>136</sup> Morriss and others, p.35.

<sup>137</sup> McLehose, pp.133–37, 141–46, 173–78.

<sup>138</sup> McLehose, pp.162–67.

<sup>139</sup> Letter from Agnes McLehose to Robert Burns, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1788 (Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina, MS PR4331.A462 1788).

may indicate her underlying fear that he is sliding back towards the earlier depression.

The likelihood of this concern is further supported by her letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1788. By this point, Burns has left Edinburgh to return to Ayrshire, promising McLehose regular letters during their separation. Having not heard from him for nearly a week, she worries for Burns's mental well-being, writing 'God forbid that your nervous ailment has incapacitated you for that office from which you derived pleasure singly; as well as that most delicate of all enjoyments, pleasure reflected.'<sup>140</sup> Clearly, over the period of their short-but-intense acquaintance, McLehose has developed an understanding that Burns is emerging from a prolonged period of abnormally lowered mood, is still prone to discrete occurrences of lower mood, and is concerned that this apparent silence is indicative of the social withdrawal that may be a prelude to a further period of prolonged lowered mood, perhaps triggered by their separation.

Unfortunately, the nature of the relationship between Burns and McLehose is unique in his life and this is reflected in the correspondence - there is no other with whom these very time-specific insights are evident. As discussed in Ch.1, Burns was adept in masking his true mood state when necessary, and to the select few with whom he is known to discuss such matters, arguably only McLehose and later Maria Riddell saw him regularly enough to comment on anything unusual. Riddell, however, writes 'we lived so near, and were so constantly together, that we seldom had recourse for the communication of our thoughts or sentiments to the medium - the cold imperfect medium - of paper.'<sup>141</sup>

Despite correspondence to Burns being relatively limited in adding specific detail to the timeline of his mood state, there do exist some letters where one individual speaks to another about Burns and adds further testimony to the body of evidence. Some of the most interesting of these are found in the

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<sup>140</sup> McLehose, p.231.

<sup>141</sup> Letter from Maria Riddell to James Currie, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 1797 (Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.601, letter 12); as addressed in the General Introduction, Riddell did produce a sketch of Burns but this was specifically aimed at refuting the misrepresentation of her friend and thus dealt with his general character rather than specifically with his mental health.

correspondence from John Syme to Alexander Cunningham.<sup>142</sup> Burns met Cunningham during one of his visits to Edinburgh, either in winter 86/87 or winter 87/88, while Syme and Burns became friends in 1791 when the poet moved from Ellisland to Dumfries, taking up residence in rooms directly above Syme's office<sup>143</sup> Both would be instrumental in gathering subscriptions and material to enable Currie's biography of Burns for the support of Jean Armour and the Burns children.

The regular correspondence from Syme to Cunningham, starting in 1790, offers contemporaneous accounts of Syme's activities including meetings with their mutual friend. Each letter in the collection up to Burns's death mentions the poet, with Syme often passing on the poet's good wishes or promise of a letter to Cunningham soon. By and large, these references to Burns are unremarkable but one does stand out. In the last week of July 1793, Syme undertook a short tour of Galloway with Burns, an account of which he sends to Cunningham on 3<sup>rd</sup> August. Syme recounts how Burns's new, expensive 'jimmy boots' had been completely soaked in a rainstorm on the first evening, rendering them near-impossible to get on the following day. As a result

[t]he brawny poet tried force & tore them in shreds - a whittling vexation like this is more trying to the temper than a serious calamity [...] Burns was quite discomfited - a sick stomach, headache &c lent their forces & the man of verse was quite accable mercy on me how he did fume & rage - Nothing could runstate him in temper <sup>144</sup>

Syme goes on to report that it was not until Burns laid eyes on Lord Galloway's stately home that '[h]e expectorated his spleen against the aristocratic elf, and regained a most agreeable temper' then turned out 'half a dozen of capital extempores'. The new-found agreeability seems short-lived however, as by the evening, 'Robert had not regained the milkiness of good temper', evidenced by what Syme terms his 'obstuperous independence' in insisting that he 'would not dine but where he should, as he said, eat like a Turk, drink like a fish & swear

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<sup>142</sup> This correspondence is held by the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. Only the letters from Syme to Cunningham remain.

<sup>143</sup> Lindsay, pp.101, 308.

<sup>144</sup> Letter from John Syme to Alexander Cunningham, August 1793 (Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.6162a-c; (available digitally at <[http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object\\_detail/3.6162.a-c](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object_detail/3.6162.a-c)>).

like the Devil’, forcing the party to dine where he would prefer rather than the home of an acquaintance as had been intended.<sup>145</sup>

As described in Table 8, the weeks preceding this tour are marked by features of elevated mood, although the duration and severity of the symptoms evident in Burns’s correspondence are not clear enough to be able to confidently point to clinical significance. Within this episode recounted by Syme, Burns is shown to be irritable and impetuous, tending towards grandiosity and moments of inappropriate behaviour, and demonstrating an inspired mental efficiency that generates several new poems. It is, therefore, reasonable to consider this evidence supplements that generated in Ch.1 to add to the argument that Burns experienced a prolonged period of elevated mood, possibly including an episode of hypomania, during the summer of 1793, in a manner similar to that found in the summer of 1790, and in keeping with the previously noted seasonality of his disordered moods.<sup>146</sup>

As with the McLehose correspondence, this account from Syme is important in that it is written near contemporaneously with the events being described. Syme and Cunningham knew Burns well and were friends themselves so there is little likelihood that what Syme describes is exaggerated - Cunningham would have spotted this - and thus the account can be trusted. Tellingly, Syme’s later footnote indicates this particular letter was sent to James Currie during his preparation of the biography ‘as a sort of development of Burns’s character.’ Syme goes on to comment that ‘[i]t is an odd performance’, highlighting the unusual nature of this behaviour; this lends weight to the pattern of Burns’s disordered moods laid out in Ch.1, in that he was affected by episodes of abnormal mood but, for the majority of the time, he was in an unremarkable euthymic state.

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<sup>145</sup> It is possible Syme meant ‘obstreperous’ – noisy and difficult to control.

<sup>146</sup> In a letter written on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1790, Alexander Findlater, Burns’s Excise supervisor in Dumfries, would write to William Corbet describing Burns as an ‘active and zealous officer...unremitting attention...more than I at first look’d for from so eccentric a Genius’, indicating both the reputation of Burns’s temperament and the potentially positive impact of the prolonged period of elevated mood Burns experienced during the summer of 1790. (Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.6111, <[http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object\\_detail/3.6111](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object_detail/3.6111)>).

Further accounts of Burns's behaviour and mood state at specific points in time are available from different sources but, unlike the McLehose and Syme evidence already laid out, these are similar to Riddell's character sketch in that they were written some time after the actual events. Thus, while valuable sources, it should be borne in mind that they may have been coloured by the passage of time or presented in such a way to satisfy a particular agenda.

One such account comes from Alexander Smellie, son of William Smellie whose printshop undertook the production of Burns's Edinburgh edition of *Poems* in the early months of 1787. Alexander, likely not too much younger than Burns, recalls the poet's first visit to the printing house where he 'walked three or four times from end to end of the composing room, cracking a long hunting whip [...] he frequently repeated this odd practice during the course of printing his work, and always in the same strange and inattentive manner.'<sup>147</sup> Certainly unusual behaviour on the part of Burns, it may be argued as evidence of grandiosity, attention-seeking and excessive self-esteem, or equally Burns simply showing off or expressing excitement. This period, however, is not marked in any other way as a period of potentially abnormal mood, making it unlikely to be symptomatic of a clinically significant state of disordered mood.

This account also seems to contradict other accounts Alexander Smellie offered of the poet's visits to the printing house. In contrast to the whip-wielding posturing, Smellie has also related how Burns would sit in the office correcting his proofs, always using the same chair which became known as 'Burns's Stool.'<sup>148</sup> Taken together, it might be argued that the first account is the image of an impatient Burns awaiting proofs from the printing presses, keen to see his new volume taking shape and to ensure it is being done so accurately, not the image of a man under the influence of an abnormal mood state. Neither recollection offers anything more than a snapshot, certainly no great insight into the mood state of Burns nor clear suggestion of a clinical abnormality in mood at the time.

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<sup>147</sup> Lindsay, p.376.

<sup>148</sup> Lindsay, p.293.

In contrast, Robert Anderson provides James Currie with an account of Burns's time in Edinburgh in the winter of 1786/87. He describes Burns, in keeping with accounts from others, as having an 'air of keen penetration and calm thoughtfulness approaching to melancholy', complimenting Burns on the positive public display he puts on, the charm of his conversation and his pleasurable rustic manners.<sup>149</sup> However, Anderson then goes on to describe how Burns 'was always the slave of his own passions, which were powerful, ardent, and irritable in such an excessive degree as to unfit him for the commerce of life.' While this in itself is not definitively descriptive of a man under the influence of a mood disorder, considering that much of this period was marked by lowered mood, including much of December being a mild depression, the melancholic thoughtfulness would certainly fit within this picture, the powerful passions and irritability displayed, being typical features of Burns's elevated moods, become possible markers of a mixed mood state at points within Burns's usually well-disguised battle with his low mood and the exhausting necessity of putting on a public show.

Anderson's account, although sited at a specific point in time, is more typical of the bulk of accounts of Burns's mood and temperament in that it takes a broader view of his character, rather than focusing on specifics of detail. Thus, it provides a general picture of the man that Anderson encountered during that winter of 1786/87, a sense of the general temperament rather than the momentary mood state. This is broadly in keeping with the additional third-party evidence which does attest to Burns's personality and mental health. With a great deal of correspondence lost or destroyed, the day-to-day detail simply no longer exists.

Nevertheless, these more general accounts, often provided posthumously, as both Smellie's and Anderson's were, are still useful. As previously mentioned, there must remain a wariness about agendas and intentions behind the provision of any particular character sketch, as well as the general accuracy of the depiction of any single source. Still, these accounts work to build a reasonably

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<sup>149</sup> Lindsay, p.343.

consistent picture of Burns's general temperament where they provide independent corroboration of each other.

Thus when John Murdoch, tutor to Burns and his brother Gilbert, writes to James Currie that the young Robert's 'countenance was generally grave, and expressive of a serious and contemplative mind', it is not too dissimilar to that account of the adult Burns provided by Anderson.<sup>150</sup> Murdoch even goes on to comment 'if any person who knew the two boys had been asked which of them was the most likely to court the Muses, he would surely never have guessed that Robert had a propensity of that kind.' Other than providing an account of the early, and relatively unevidenced, years of Burns's life, Murdoch had nothing to gain by presenting the young poet in this fashion. He certainly makes no claim to his tutoring being responsible for the awakening of Burns's muse, although others do acknowledge the benefit and impact of the education provided by Murdoch. He continued to be held in high regards by Burns and his brother, and there is no sense that he would wish to jeopardise that through misrepresentation.

Thus, it is unsurprising that Murdoch's account correlates with Gilbert's accounts of his brother's younger years in his letter to Frances Dunlop, of the somewhat reserved nature of his early teens and of the great 'anguish of mind' caused by the difficult farm life, 'sensations of deepest distress' which was, in Gilbert's opinion, 'in great measure the cause of that depression of spirits, with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards.'<sup>151</sup> Gilbert goes on to report how Burns, as he entered his late teens, became more enthralled to his sensibilities, reporting that 'the agitation of his mind and body exceeded anything of the kind I ever knew in real life.'<sup>152</sup> In a separate account, provided to Peterkin for his updated edition of Currie's biography, Gilbert would further report that around this same time, his brother started attending a dancing school much to the displeasure of their father who had 'started to see the dangerous impetuosity of my brother's passions', a possible early indicator of

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<sup>150</sup> Lindsay, p.368.

<sup>151</sup> Currie, p.71.

<sup>152</sup> Currie, p.73.

the impulsivity that would mark Burns's behaviour during elevated moods later in his life.<sup>153</sup>

What Gilbert's accounts achieve is a broadening of the picture to Burns's early years, the years before he acquired fame and public attention. They offer insight into the onset and early progression of Burns's potential mood disorder. Their testimony can be added to the findings of Chapter 1 and the additional third-party accounts discussed here to create a fuller sense of the patterns and nature of Burns's moods and his premorbid temperament to be compared, along with further evidence, to the pattern of 'typical' Type II bipolar disorder.

Prior to undertaking such a comparison, however, familial evidence of a different nature should be considered.

## Family history

In assessing a patient for a possible diagnosis of bipolar disorder, modern clinicians will gather a family history alongside the personal medical history of the affected individual. Despite the recent discovery of multiple genetic risk alleles conferring an increased chance of subsequent mood disorder, bipolar disorder does not conform to a single dominant gene or Mendelian model of inheritance. The population incidence is estimated at 100 affected people per 10,000 in the Western population, i.e. approximately 1%, but strong familial association means the first degree relatives of an affected individual have about a ten times higher chance of developing the disorder than the general population.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, while the incidence of unipolar depressive disorder in the general population is around 1000 in 10,000, i.e. 10%, first-degree relatives of a person affected by bipolar disorder are also twice as likely than

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<sup>153</sup> Alexander Peterkin, *The Life and Works of Robert Burns, as Originally Edited by James Currie, M.D.* (Edinburgh: MacRae, Skelly and Muckersy, 1815), p.79.

<sup>154</sup> J. H. Barnett and J. W. Smoller, 'The Genetics of Bipolar Disorder', *Neuroscience*, 164.1 (2009), 331–43 (p.332). First-degree relatives are defined as the parents, siblings and children of an individual.

the general population to be affected by unipolar depression.<sup>155</sup> As well as a genetic component, this may of course also be attributable to a shared environment and upbringing. These rates of prevalence are used with the acknowledgement that it is impossible to say how they may have changed over the 250 years since Burns's lifetime, due to shifts in disease definition and lack of monitoring data for most of that period.

Nevertheless, within this context, it is reasonable to expect that first-degree relatives of Burns may also exhibit signs or symptoms of a mood disorder or mental illness, and thus it is worth exploring sources for any such evidence. Initial consideration would suggest a potential wealth of information to mine - aside from Burns, the sample for study would include both parents, six siblings and 12 children (Figure 2).<sup>156</sup>

Taking each of the three generations in turn allows a systematic consideration of the evidence available and the limitations inherent in any assessment being made.

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<sup>155</sup> Nick Craddock and Ian Jones, 'Genetics of Bipolar Disorder', *Journal of Medical Genetics*, 36 (1999), 585–94 (p.587).

<sup>156</sup> Lawrence R. Burness, *Genealogical Charts of the Family of Robert Burns and Descending Families*, ed. by Peter J. Westwood (Kilmarnock: Burns Federation, 1997), pp.4, 13, 15 and 19; John Burness, 'William Burness', *Burness Genealogy and Family History*, <<https://www.burness.ca/q0/p95.htm#i945>> [accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018].

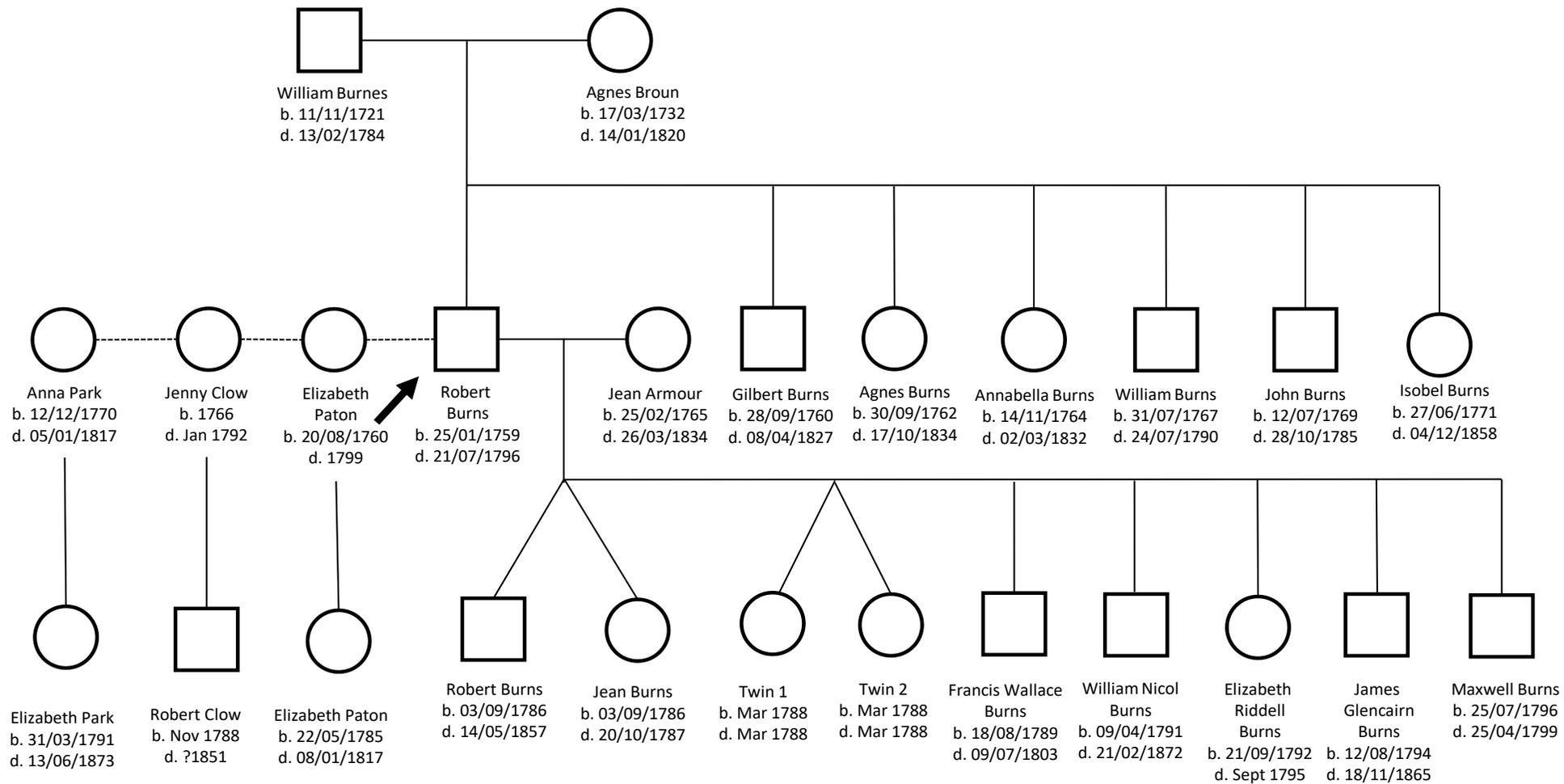


Figure 2: First degree relatives of Robert Burns

## Burns's parents

In considering Burns's parents, William Burnes and Agnes Broun, available information is scant and comes from a limited range of sources.<sup>157</sup> This is most likely simply down to the fact that Burnes and his wife were individuals of little importance so no value was seen in documenting their lives. It is only after their eldest son achieves fame, which did not happen until after Burnes's death, that they become figures of interest. Nevertheless, there are some accounts which testify to their general temperaments.

Burns himself, in his autobiographical letter, explains of his father

I have met with few who understood men - their manners and their ways - equal to him; but stubborn ungainly integrity and headlong ungovernable irascibility are disqualifying circumstances, consequently, I was born a very poor man's son.

(L125)

He goes on to describe his father as a man 'whose spirit was soon irritated' and 'the sport of strong passions', easily evoking an appreciation of the similarity in temperament between the poet and his father. Yet, Burns clearly had a very strong emotional attachment to his father. He was deeply affected by his father's death after a life of backbreaking work and, in his darker moments, would reflect on what his father would now make of him as a man. This may be grounded in a story recounted by Isabella, the poet's youngest sister, of Burnes on his deathbed stating, 'there was only one of his family for whose future conduct he feared', referring to his eldest son, words which moved Burns to 'streaming' tears.<sup>158</sup>

Burns's childhood tutor, John Murdoch, would also give an account of the character of William Burnes, describing an evening with his young student and his father where 'we enjoyed a conversation wherein solid reasoning, sensible remark, and a moderate seasoning of jocularities, were so nicely blended as to

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<sup>157</sup> The family name was originally spelled with an 'e' as per the north-east variation, reflecting William's origins in Kincardineshire. Robert would drop the 'e' in favour of the Ayrshire form of the spelling. References to William will always use the older spelling while those to his children and grandchildren will favour the newer.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Burns Begg, *Isobel Burns (Mrs Begg): A Memoir by Her Grandson* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1894), p.32.

render it palatable to all parties.’<sup>159</sup> He would also describe Burnes as ‘a tender and affectionate father’.<sup>160</sup> Burnes is repeatedly described as a serious man of strong religious belief, latterly broken by financial worries and the challenges of making a living on difficult farming land. He is, however, also repeatedly noted as being a man of uneven temper. Lockhart describes him as being of ‘robust but irritable structure and temperament of body and mind’ with Burnes’s ‘moody thoughtfulness, and laconic style of expression[...]both inherited from his father.’<sup>161</sup> Mackay similar notes that ‘from his father, [Burnes] undoubtedly derived his tenacity of purpose, amounting at times to stubbornness, and from the same source came his depressive, melancholic tendencies.’<sup>162</sup> While the sources for Lockhart’s and Mackay’s characterisations of William Burnes are not clear, they do align with Burnes’s own accounts of his father’s temperament. Although not substantive evidence of William Burnes being affected by a mood disorder, it is a repeated suggestion of a temperament characterised by depressive and irritable features which may point to some inherited aspect of Burnes’s own character.

In relation to Agnes Broun, Burnes’s mother, there is a similar lack of specific information which would add anything to a family history of mood disorder. Burnes himself has little to say about his mother beyond asking Gilbert to pass on his love and best wishes, although she has been described as the woman from whom he inherited ‘his impulsive generosity of heart and tender sympathy of feeling, his exquisite sense of humour, and his love for the romantic and poetic.’<sup>163</sup> John Murdoch describes her to Burnes as ‘one of the most tender and affectionate mothers that ever lived’.<sup>164</sup> Agnes Broun is, however, further described as being a woman who, ‘with all her good qualities - and they were many - her temper at times was irascible’.<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Isabella Burnes ‘always spoke of her mother with the tenderest love [...] possessing an active,

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<sup>159</sup> Robert Burns Begg and Peter J. Westwood, ‘William Burnes 1721-1784: Father of Robert Burns’, *Burns Chronicle*, 1999, 51–57 (p.52).

<sup>160</sup> Begg and Westwood, p.53.

<sup>161</sup> Lockhart, p.43.

<sup>162</sup> James Mackay, *Burns: A Biography* (Alloway: Alloway Publishing, 2004), p.26.

<sup>163</sup> Begg and Westwood, p.51.

<sup>164</sup> R.H. Cromek, *Reliques of Robert Burns* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1808), pp.385–86.

<sup>165</sup> Robert Crawford, p.24.

industrious, and cheerful temperament, although later in life depressed by anxieties, arising, no doubt, from the hardships and difficulties she had been called upon to endure' leading to a difficult-to-control temper.<sup>166</sup> These early reports of uneven temper combined with later development of depressed spirits may point to some indication of a mood disorder in the life of Agnes Broun, although it is far from conclusive. Nevertheless, like her husband, it is possible that she may have passed on traits of uneven and disordered mood to her first-born son.

It is not possible to convincingly argue that either William Burnes or Agnes Broun were affected by a mood disorder that would automatically increase Burns's own risk of developing such a condition. He does, however, appear to have inherited melancholic and irritable aspects of his own temperament from each of his parents, particularly from his father.

## **Burns's siblings**

Moving forward in time to Burns's own generation, there is a little more evidence available relating to his siblings and potential evidence of disordered mood in their lives, again from a range of sources.

Two brothers - John and William - die fairly young. While there is nothing to be said about John, William does appear among the list of individuals with whom Burns corresponded. The letters are largely unremarkable in that they recount William's various places of work as an apprentice saddler as he makes his way from Ayrshire to London. They do, however, offer an insight into the relationship between the two brothers. As discussed in Ch.1, Burns's hypomania may be responsible for an apparent lack of response to William's death in the summer of 1790, despite their correspondence showing a deep affection. This affection manifests itself in various advices offered by Burns to his younger brother, asking 'What mischiefs daily arise from silly garrulity or foolish confidence!', cautioning in 'forming connections with comrades and companions' and against 'guilty

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<sup>166</sup> Begg, p.35.

amours' and 'that universal vice, Bad Women', particularly noting 'Whoring is a most ruinous expensive species of dissipation [... and] has ninety nine chances in a hundred to bring on a man the most nauseous & excruciating disease to which Human nature is liable' (L321, L337, L391). These letters appear to show an older brother supporting a younger who is starting to make his way in the world and doing so a considerable distance from home, although one may ask whether there is something in Burns's own past experiences to explain why he feels the need to offer advice of this particular nature. This raises the possibility that Burns sees in William similarities with his own character and is concerned that his brother may repeat his own errors as a result of this. This is conjectural but not beyond possibility, but obviously falls short of a basis for asserting any type of disordered mood in William's life.

Other than William, it is clear that Burns is closest to his brother Gilbert. Only 20 months separate them in age, so they have grown up together, taken on their share of work during that time, as well as being educated together by John Murdoch and various stints at local schools. Although, as previously mentioned, Murdoch described the young Gilbert as being more lively and the more likely to pursue a creative outlet, by the time the boys reach their late teens, Burns says of Gilbert 'my brother wanted my harebrained imagination as well as my social and amorous madness, but in good sense and every sober qualification he was far my superiour [*sic*]' (L125). Gilbert's steadfastness and relative success - eventually becoming factor to the estates of Lady Katherine Blantyre in East Lothian - along with his continued care of their mother and unmarried sisters, as well as later attention to the debts of Burns's oldest son, support this description, and there is little in Gilbert's biography which might indicate the influence of disordered mood.<sup>167</sup>

One of the most intriguing pieces of evidence regarding Burns's siblings does, however, come from Gilbert. In a letter to his brother in the autumn of 1790, Gilbert tells Burns of the difficulties the bad weather is causing in getting the harvest in and lays out accounts for money owed between the two. The letter concludes with Gilbert writing

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<sup>167</sup> Lindsay, p.62.

Tell Nanny that Bell is much better than she was once, but still complains frequently of being out of order and want of digestion, and from the extreme delicacy of her nervous system is incapable of bearing any fatigue either of body or mind. She wished to have wrote her, but could not mustor [sic] as much resolution.<sup>168</sup>

Crawford identifies 'Nanny' as referring to their second sister Annabella, meaning it is likely that 'Bell' refers to youngest sister Isobel.<sup>169</sup> This letter certainly points to Isobel displaying signs and symptoms of disordered mood, including physical manifestation as an upset stomach. Although, it is insufficient evidence of meeting the criteria for a clinical diagnosis, it is a tantalising suggestion of the presence of a mood disorder in a first-degree relative of an affected individual.

This suggestion is further supported by a later letter, this time between the eldest sister Agnes and Isobel. Agnes, upset by not hearing from her sister for an unusually long period, has written accusing Isobel of neglecting her. Isobel's response is lost but Agnes's next letter makes clear the reason for Isobel's prolonged silence - 'I did not suspect the cause nor ever once thought [...] that you were suffering so much from pain and depression of spirits.'<sup>170</sup> That this correspondence again involves Agnes and again refers to pain and disordered mood adds to the evidence that she may have been affected by episodes of lowered mood.

Further evidence may also be drawn from the memoir of Isobel in which this letter from Agnes is quoted. Highlighting the fact that Burns's siblings, as with his parents, are only really of interest because of their relationship to the poet, the memoir, while recounting Isobel's life, does so with repeated reference to her famous brother. Thus, there are repeated comments emphasising how her talents and characteristics 'may almost be regarded as akin to that with which her poet brother was so prodigally endowed', that the 'brilliant ray of genius transmitted through old William Burness and his helpmate Agnes Brown [...] reflected even in the very youngest of their numerous offspring', emphasising

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<sup>168</sup> Gilbert Burns, 'A Letter to Robert Burns from His Brother Gilbert', *Burns Chronicle*, 2.4 (1993), 133 and 137 (p.137).

<sup>169</sup> Robert Crawford, pp.24–25.

<sup>170</sup> Begg, p.9.

just how similar she is to Burns, more so than any of the other siblings.<sup>171</sup> In light of the epistolary evidence between Burns and his brother, then between Isobel and her sister Agnes, it is tempting to ask whether Isobel was also like her brother in a tendency to depressive episodes and/or temperamental instability. Obviously caution must be sounded in making such leaps on the basis of such incomplete evidence, but it is certainly a stronger suggestion than is evident for any of the other Burns siblings, suggesting the degree of similarity between the oldest and youngest is remarkable and worth considering as evidence of further familial incidence of mood disorder.

### **Burns's children**

Moving forward to consider Burns's children, there would initially seem to be a large group to consider but this is very quickly whittled down as a result of several premature deaths; of the 12 children, many died young - one at 13 years, five others before the age of three - immediately removing them from consideration as potential subjects.

Two of Burns's surviving legitimate sons - William and James - had successful careers in the East India Company, rising to the ranks of Colonel and Lieutenant-Colonel respectively.<sup>172</sup> Correspondence between James and his mother, written during his time in India, survives but nothing within those letters is indicative of a mood disorder.<sup>173</sup> Similarly, correspondence from William, written later in his life, is extant but includes nothing indicative of disordered mood.<sup>174</sup>

The third son to survive to adulthood was the eldest of Burns's children, Robert. He also had a relatively successful career, in his case in London within the Stamp Office. He was, however, encouraged by his superiors to retire early, at the age

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<sup>171</sup> Begg, p.7.

<sup>172</sup> Lindsay, pp.62, 70.

<sup>173</sup> These letters are held by the National Trust for Scotland at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (MSS 3.6445-3.6462).

<sup>174</sup> These letters are held by the Dumfries and Galloway Museums Service (MSS EADO101n, EADO106, DMBN001-DMBN006, accessible at <[www.futuremuseum.co.uk](http://www.futuremuseum.co.uk)>).

of 46, likely as a result of repeatedly running up significant gambling debts.<sup>175</sup> Such gambling problems could point towards wider issues of impulse control and inappropriate behaviour related to a mood disorder, but the description of Robert jr. as a ‘basically decent man’ but ‘unworldly’ suggests it more likely that he was victim of the London lifestyle rather than any clinical condition, a situation in which gambling debts would not be unusual.<sup>176</sup>

Burns’s three illegitimate children who survived to adulthood - Elizabeth Paton, Elizabeth Park and Robert Clow - like their brothers and sisters, garnered no public acclaim. They do not even seem to have gained much public attention as children of the poet, in the way that James and William did, likely as a result of their illegitimate status.<sup>177</sup> Records for both daughters exist, indicated they married and had families of their own, and that some provision was made for them from the funds raised following Burns’s death, continuing Burns’s wish in life to support his acknowledged children. Beyond biographical information there is, however, little else available and nothing that can testify to the possible presence of a mood disorder in either Paton or Park. Robert Clow seemed to disappear from history following his mother’s death when he was three years old but fairly recent scholarship has potentially rediscovered him, showing him to have become a prosperous London merchant.<sup>178</sup> Again, however, the information available is biographical so there is nothing to point to Clow having been affected by anything that might be recognised as a mood disorder.

In reality, none of Burns’s children appear to have used their famous name to gain advantage or seek public attention for themselves. As with their aunts, uncles and grandparents, public interest in them is only a reflection of their relationship to the acclaimed poet. Thus, they lived lives which, in contrast to their father, are relatively undocumented. This absence of evidence hinders a full exploration of mental health within Burns’s first-degree relatives; there is simply far too little information to confirm or refute the presence of mood

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<sup>175</sup> Lindsay, p.69. His uncle, Gilbert, would pay off these debts. (Farquhar McKenzie, “Gilbert...My Superiour”, *Burns Chronicle*, 1974, 10–16 (p.15).

<sup>176</sup> Lindsay, p.69.

<sup>177</sup> Lindsay, p.248. Elizabeth Park’s sons do seem to have gained a little more public notice, attending celebrations of their grandfather as guests of honour.

<sup>178</sup> Mackay (2004), p.425.

disorder among Burns's children. This is further confounded by the high number of individuals who died young, one or more of whom may have been an individual who would have gone on to develop a mood disorder, had they survived beyond adulthood.

### **Mood disorder in the Burns family**

Given the previously quoted increased risks that first-degree relatives of a person affected by bipolar disorder have of developing bipolar disorder or a depressive illness themselves, it would be expected that among the initial field of twenty individuals - parents, siblings and children - two might be affected by bipolar and four by a depressive illness. Premature deaths, particularly among Burns's children, significantly narrow this group from a cohort of 20 to only 12 reaching an age where symptoms would be expected to emerge, thus decreasing the possibility of any such case emerging. A dearth of primary source material, arising from a lack of production rather than later loss or destruction of material, also significantly impacts the likelihood of any definitive evidence of mood disorders among the group being available.

Of the evidence that does exist, there are indicators of temperamentality in Burns's parents, evidence of lowered mood with somatic manifestation in one sister, and equivocal indications of behaviour which may tenuously relate to disordered mood in a brother and a son. As tempting as it may be to read more into each of these cases, the paucity of evidence means no definite conclusions can be drawn with regards to the presence of what would now be recognised clinically as a mood disorder in any of Burns's first-degree relatives. Any such assessment is impacted by the early deaths of a significant proportion of the individuals who would be included in the examination. The strongest indicators point to his youngest sister Isobel being affected by a depressive illness,

consistent with incidences indicating depression being twice as likely to emerge within the group as bipolar disorder.<sup>179</sup>

## Somatic manifestation of disordered mood

In his letter to Burns which mentions their sisters, Gilbert refers to Bell's 'want of digestion', indicating the presence of physical symptoms associated with her disordered mood state.<sup>180</sup> The connection of disordered mood and physical symptoms, particularly those of a gastrointestinal nature, goes back to classical times, likely to Galen.<sup>181</sup> Modern clinical literature continues to indicate mood disorders can present with gastrointestinal and other somatic symptoms such as headache and chest pain.<sup>182</sup>

Reference to physical symptoms of various types is also evident in Burns's correspondence. While some of these symptoms can be clearly associated with physical illness or injury, there are some which Burns can be seen to link to episodes of disordered mood. Most notable among these are his various references to hypochondria.

Now understood to refer to 'a persistent preoccupation with the possibility of having one or more serious and progressive physical disorders', hypochondria is a term which has changed in meaning during the 250 years since Burns's lifetime.<sup>183</sup> In the eighteenth century, it was considered a genuine condition, falling under the same category as melancholy. Although the aetiological explanations for hypochondria had varied over the centuries, by Burns's lifetime explanations of melancholy and hypochondria had shifted from Galenic humoral theory to a theory of nervous stimulation. William Cullen classified them as a nervous disorder resulting from an under-stimulation of the nerves, and

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<sup>179</sup> Correspondence received from a member of the Burness family line rooted in Kincardineshire in north-east Scotland, from which William Burnes – the poet's father – originates, indicates a strong presence of bipolar disorder through several generations of this branch of the family (personal email from Agnes Gunn, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

<sup>180</sup> Burns, p.137.

<sup>181</sup> Jackson, p.274.

<sup>182</sup> Matthew J. Bair and others, 'Depression and Pain Comorbidity', *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 163.20 (2003), 2433-2445 (pp.2434–35).

<sup>183</sup> World Health Organisation, sec. F45.2. DSM-V categorises hypochondria as somatic symptom disorder (American Psychiatric Association, p.311).

differentiated hypochondria from the less-serious melancholy by the presence of gastrointestinal symptoms which were secondary to the melancholic temperament.<sup>184</sup> With melancholy carrying an increasingly fashionable association with sensibility and creative genius in the eighteenth century, leading to mimicry and affectation of the symptoms, hypochondria appears to offer terminology which allows continued acknowledgment of the more serious form which would be akin to a true clinical depression.<sup>185</sup>

Thus, examination of the physical symptoms evident in Burns's biography can potentially shed further light on the nature, and particularly the severity, of his disordered moods.

### **Physical symptoms reported by Burns**

While extracting evidence for the analysis undertaken in Ch.1, a further note was also made of those items where Burns mentioned being affected by physical symptoms (Table 10). The context of these symptoms was also noted to allow identification of any clear cause or association with physical or mental conditions.

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<sup>184</sup> Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.82–83.

<sup>185</sup> Lawlor, (2012), p.94. The potential issues arising in attempting to draw direct correlations between eighteenth-century melancholia and hypochondria and twenty-first-century definitions of depression are explored more fully in the introduction to Section 2 of the thesis.

Table 10: Reporting of physical symptoms in Burns's personal writing

Key:



Symptoms related to mood



Symptoms related to alcohol consumption



Symptoms related to physical illness



Symptoms of unclear root cause

Source	Date	Global Score	Symptoms	Notes
L63	13/12/1786	-1	'miserable head-ach & stomach complaint'	Coincides with mild depression
OEWRB1, p.123	24/5/1787	-0.5	'strong feverish symptoms'	Also notes 'embittering remorse scares my fancy at the gloomy forebodings of death'; records being restored to health on 25/5/1787
L123	29/07/1787	0	'lingering indisposition'	Period of low mood, duration unclear
L125	02/08/1787	-0.5	'hypochondriac complaint'	Referring to three month period (Nov 1781-Feb 1782) in Irvine
OEWRB1, p.152	15/9/1787	0	'Reflections in a fit of the colic'	Assuming stomach pain but no indicator of cause or duration
L153	25/11/1787	-0.5	'On looking over my engagements, constitution, present state of health, some little vexatious soul concerns &c...'	Unclear if this refers to physical health; does precede episode of mild/moderate depression
L156	?1787	0	'sour faced old acquaintance called Glauber's salts'	Written from Edinburgh (Nov 87 - Feb 88) with mild/moderate depression for most of that period Glauber's salts are sodium sulphate decahydrate; used as purgative, mild laxative. 'sour faced' indicates it being drunk in solution Is this being taken for constipation resulting from laudanum used as analgesia for kneecap

				(as indicated by McLehose's letter of 16/12/1787) of as a purgative, a commonly prescribed treatment for melancholy?
L159	08/12/1787	0	'bruised one of my knees that I can't stir my leg'	First mention of dislocated kneecap following carriage accident; also mentioned in 159A, 160,162, 163, 164A, 167, 168, 169, 173
L177	12/01/1788	-0.5	'Tho' I find your letter has agitated me into a violent headach...'	Writing to McLehose - his previous letter had upset her; has her response stressed him and induced headache, or is it feigned as an expected response of a sensible individual? Lies within episode of mild/moderate depression
L228	20/03/1788	0	'...with watching, fatigue, and a load of Care almost too heavy for my shoulders, have in some degree actually fever'd me'	Preparing for entry to Ellisland - stress-induced?
L238	28/04/1788	0	'miserable effects of a violent cold'	3 days in bed; attributed to having slept in damp and draughty room at the weekend.
L267A	05/09/1788	0	'Hypochondria which I fear worse than the devil'	Feels hypochondria is impending and trying to ward it off, connecting lowering mood with images of weather to indicate sense of inevitability. Seeks refuge in poetry and writing to Dunlop
L277	?Oct 1788	0	'my symptoms are continuing milder [...] liquid drug [...] unction'	Unclear what symptoms this refers to, no indications in surrounding letters. Could liquid drug be laudanum - possibly for flare-up of pain in knee?
L371	08/11/1789	-0.5	'A most violent cold [...] stuffed aching head and a sickly crisis'	'crisis' - obsolete term for one's constitution. Notably, Sterne uses 'crisis' in <i>The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman</i> , a novel Burns is known to have particularly favoured

L374	13/12/1789	-2.5	'nervous head-ach'	Result of 'groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous System'; sits within a 6-week episode of mild to moderate depression (Dec 89-Jan 90)
L381	11/01/1790	-1	'horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body & Soul'	Attributes mental state to difficulties of farming Ellisland, describing it as 'a ruinous affair'. Sits within 6-week episode of mild to moderate depression
L388	?Feb 1790	0	'incessant headache'	Reports being 'ill this whole winter' with 'deranged nervous system', compounded with workload of Excise
L390	09/02/1790	0	'jaded to death with fatigue'	Attributed to riding an average of more than 200 miles per week for the past two or three months; does follow from 6-week episode of mild to moderate depression noted in 374, 381 and 388
L422	05/10/1790	0	'slow, illformed fever [...] malignant squinancy'	Squinancy = quinsy (severe bacterial tonsillitis) Notes still not 'in a confirmed state of health' yet had ridden to Dumfries (~6 miles) the previous day
L423	06/10/1790	0	'malignant squinancy & slow fever which had tormented me for three weeks & had actually brought me to the brink of the grave'	Same illness noted in 422
L482	?Nov 1791	-2	'...head-ache, nausea [...] beset a poor wretch, who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness'	'Can you minster...' letter to Ainslie - should possibly be dated to Feb 1792 Physical symptoms of a hangover although letter does refer to lowered mood
L529	02/01/1793	0	'I am better though not quite free of my complaint [...] occasional hard drinking is the devil to me'	Is this complaint the result of 'hard drinking'? Previous letter to and from Dunlop make no mention of anything else which would explain.

				Discusses how he has cut back drinking to avoid the after-effects; issue is visiting people's home and hospitality
L584	08/09/1793	0	'my head achs miserably'	Hangover - hopes that the fact he suffers so much now for 'last night's debauch, that I shall escape scot-free for it in the world to come.'
L619	25/02/1794	-1	'deep incurable taint of hypochondria'	Reports has 'not been able to lift a pen' for past two months; attributes to 'domestic vexations' and financial losses. Episode of mild to moderate depression in Dec 1793 - this letter suggests may have lasted longer. Stress-induced depression?
L628	25/06/1794	0	'brooding fancy [...] solitary confinement [...] poor health [...] flying gout'	Suffering for the 'follies of my youth'. Flying gout linked with rheumatism - pain in muscles and/or joints, various and varying locations.
L671	30/05/1795	0	'delightful sensations of an omnipotent TOOTHACH'	Clear physical explanation for symptoms. Possibly source of infection that led to bacterial endocarditis
L673	03/07/1795	0	'quite occupied with the charming sensations of the TOOTH-ACH'	Clear physical explanation for symptoms. Possibly source of infection that led to bacterial endocarditis
L674	Jun/Jul 1795	-0.5	'not able to leave my bed'	Unclear if this is impact of physical or mental; unclear dating doesn't help in narrowing this down
L687	Jan 1796	0	'rheumatic fever'	Just starting to recover 'after many weeks of a sick-bed' Potentially an illness which further damaged his heart, allowing bacterial infection to gain a hold

L688	31/01/1796	0	'most severe Rheumatic fever'	Just starting to recover 'after many weeks of a sick-bed' Potentially an illness which further damaged his heart, allowing bacterial infection to gain a hold
L693	Apr 1796	-0.5	'PAIN! Rheumatism, Cold & fever'	First mention of symptoms of what would be his final illness; comments on impact on his creativity
L694	May 1796	0	'a flying gout'	On-going effects of worsening final illness Seems more positive than 693 in tone - relapsing-remitting symptoms?
L696	01/06/1796	-0.5	'...the hand of pain, & sorrow, & care has these many months lain heavy on me!'	Attributed to 'personal & domestic affliction' On-going effects of worsening final illness
L697	01/06/1796	-0.5	'Rackt as I am with Rheumatisms'	On-going effects of worsening final illness
L699	04/07/1796	0	'inveterate rheumatism [...] appetite is quite gone [...] emaciated [...] scarce able to support myself on my own legs'	On-going effects of worsening final illness
L700	07/07/1796	-0.5	'...for these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism...'	On-going effects of worsening final illness
L706	12/07/1796	0	'upon returning health...'	Optimistically vowing to repay a loan he is requesting of Thomson

Where Burns makes reference to physical symptoms which clearly arise from specific physical illnesses or injuries, such as his toothache in the summer of 1795, a ‘malignant squinancy’ (bacterial tonsillitis) in September 1790, violent colds and broken bones, these were discounted as being unrelated to disordered mood.<sup>186</sup>

The period in which Burns most frequently refers to physical symptoms is during the first half of 1796, and increasingly so during the months of May to July. This is unsurprising as it represents the terminal period of his life as his body was overtaken by the illness that would lead to his death at the age of 37. This illness is currently thought to have been a bacterial endocarditis affecting his heart which had been damaged by recurrent episodes of rheumatic fever throughout his life. Such cardiac damage is well-recorded in the clinical literature, as is the increased susceptibility of such individuals to bacterial infections of the heart valves.<sup>187</sup> As a result, the references Burns makes to physical symptoms - fever, rheumatic pain, loss of appetite and weight - in these letters were discounted as not resulting from disordered mood.

The remaining letters make reference to several other symptoms, predominantly headaches, stomach upsets and hypochondria. Some of these headaches can be attributed to the after-effects of alcohol consumption and discounted from this analysis.<sup>188</sup> Continuing the similarly conservative approach taken in Ch.1, the remaining symptoms, coloured blue in Table 10, were analysed within the context of Burns’s mood state at the time of writing, or the time to which he indicates having experienced these symptoms with a view to discounting as far as possible any connection with mood.

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<sup>186</sup> It is hypothesised that the 1795 toothache was the result of a dental abscess and also the source of the bacterial infection that would lead to his death. This knowledge adds a sadness to the otherwise humorous *K500* ('Address to the Toothache') that Burns composed in the autumn of 1795.

<sup>187</sup> Eloi Marijon and others, 'Rheumatic Heart Disease', *The Lancet*, 379.9819 (2012), 953–64 (p.953).

<sup>188</sup> The alcohol consumption which led to these headaches, and Burns’s wider relationship with alcohol in relation to his mood will be more closely examined in Chapter 4.

## Mood-related symptoms

Analysis of the mood-related physical symptoms reported by Burns reveals two specific points: firstly, that such symptoms are associated exclusively with lowered mood; secondly that there is a very clear relationship between the nature of the symptoms and the severity of the disordered mood.

On several occasions Burns reports what can only be called vague symptoms - ‘...lingering indisposition...’, ‘...present state of health [and] some little vexatious soul concerns...’, ‘...fatigue, and a load of Care almost too heavy for my shoulders...’ (L123, L153, L228). The symptoms seem generalised rather than localised to any one area of the body. Where Burns reports such general symptoms in association with a lowered mood, that mood does not reach clinical significance, either due to lack of a threshold number of symptoms or the minimum duration required by the diagnostic criteria. Thus, it can be seen that even a mild lowering of Burns’s mood may have been accompanied by somatic manifestation, albeit vague and non-specific.

However, as the lowering of mood shifts into clinical significance, so too can the physical symptoms be seen to coalesce into something more definite, clearly sited within a specific bodily location, either as headache, stomach upset (almost always identified by Burns as hypochondria) or a combination of the two. These very specific somatic manifestations correlate with the more severely lowered moods Burns experiences - every episode of clinical depression identified in the analysis of Ch.1 is associated with specific physical symptoms of headache and/or stomach upset, indicating the possibility that there may be a relationship between the two.

Burns’s description of his symptoms, particularly the hypochondria, are also indicative of his awareness of this connection between the somatic manifestation and the severity of the depression he experienced. He describes it as a ‘deep incurable taint’, indicating what he considered its inherent unavoidability, having previously described it as that ‘which I fear worse than the devil’, illustrating his fear of the associated depression which the physical symptoms presaged (L619, L267A).

The fact that there is often an association between the somatic manifestation of mental disorder and the severity of that disorder is helpful in both adding strength to the argument that Burns was affected by a clinical mood disorder, and in adding to the wider picture of the course of Burns's illness.

In the biographical letter sent by Gilbert Burns to Frances Dunlop, he reports, as previously mentioned, how his brother 'was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull headache', and that it was the hardship of their teenage years at Mount Oliphant that precipitated the 'depression of spirits' that affected Burns's life thereafter.<sup>189</sup> The report of headaches and the connection with the distress of the time and Burns's propensity for melancholy at this young age - what he called 'a constitutional hypochondriac taint', in light of the strong association between physical symptoms and lowered mood, add to the picture of Burns's mood disorder in the earlier years of his life, a time which is poorly represented within his correspondence (*L125*).

Gilbert, however, goes further, explaining the 'dull headache' of Burns's teenage years 'at a future period of his life was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed, in the night time.'<sup>190</sup> This is an intriguing reference to symptoms which don't appear in any of Burns's own writing yet are supported by an account from a farm servant which tells how Burns would keep a bowl of cold water by his bed for such occasions, as plunging his face into the water would relieve the symptoms of fainting and suffocations.<sup>191</sup> Crichton-Browne suggested that these palpitations were related to rheumatic heart disease. This is likely to be correct but the specific description of palpitations accompanied by faintness and a sense of suffocation might also be consistent with panic attacks, which are relatively common in people with depressive disorders.<sup>192</sup>

The other notable entry in Table 10 is that for *L125* where Burns recounts 'my hypochondriac complaint being irritated to such a degree, that for three months

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<sup>189</sup> Currie, p.71.

<sup>190</sup> Currie, pp.71–72.

<sup>191</sup> Lockhart, p.272.

<sup>192</sup> Crichton-Browne, p.62; Currie, p.146; American Psychiatric Association; World Health Organisation, sec. F41.0.

I was in diseased state of body and mind' (*L125*). This refers to a period of illness during his time in Irvine between July 1781 and March 1782, during which he writes *L4* to his father, and to which he would refer in his commonplace book (*OEWRB1*, p.44). Although a potentially crucial period in relation to Burns's mental health, this illness is not explored in Ch.1 because of the lack of extant contemporaneous correspondence or personal writing from Burns. It is, however, a period worth consideration within the context of this chapter in light of the existence of a unique contemporaneous source of evidence.

## Case Study – Irvine

In 1781, the Burnes family were working the land of Lochlea Farm near Tarbolton. Although the details are scant, Burns appears to have been courting and proposed marriage to Alison Begbie but was rejected.<sup>193</sup> Lochlea was increasingly financially challenging but part of the land had been given over by William Burnes to his sons Robert and Gilbert for the growing of flax.<sup>194</sup> Used for making linen, flax was in high demand and attracted an additional government premium for its production.<sup>195</sup> That summer, Burns would travel to Irvine, a prosperous seaport which was bigger and busier than the town of Ayr with which Burns was familiar. He would lodge with Alexander Peacock to learn the trade of flax dressing, skills which would allow him to further maximise the money to be made from this lucrative crop.<sup>196</sup> Irvine would, however, prove a 'sadly unlucky affair' for Burns as his 'partner was a scoundrel of the first water who made money by the mystery of thieving' (*L125*).<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (Glasgow: Humming Earth, 1951), p.62. Mackay suggests Burns proposed to Eliza Gebbie but her name was mis-remembered by Isobel Burns Begg, the poet's youngest sister, who would only have been ten years old at the time (James Mackay, (2004), p.89); Alison Begbie persists as the name by which this woman is known.

<sup>194</sup> Daiches (1951), p.63.

<sup>195</sup> Irvine Burns Club possesses a copy of the Glasgow Mercury from January 1782 which shows Robert Burns of Lochlea being paid such a premium of £3 for growing three acres of flax.

<sup>196</sup> Daiches, (1951), p.64; Mackay (2004), p.95. Mackay also suggests that Peacock may have been a cousin of Agnes Broun, Burns's mother (Mackay (2004), p.698, n.15).

<sup>197</sup> Robert Crawford suggests this 'thieving' was smuggling (p.117) but it is unclear if the partner to whom Burns refers is the aforementioned Peacock as the two are said to have quarrelled and split (Franklin Bliss Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1968), p.90, n.30).

Burns had moved from the outdoor rural life of a farmer to live and work in a bustling port town, lodging in the heckling shed where he worked. Thus, he would sleep in the loft of a dark and dusty building, above the coalman's horse which was also stabled in there overnight, then spend his day in the same dim, dusty, noisy shed working at the range of physically demanding tasks involved in breaking down and preparing the flax fibres for weaving into various grades of linen. Local history asserts that Peacock, while likely agreeable to having very cheap (if not free) labour, was unhappy at having Burns there as it ran the risk of his dishonest dealings being revealed.<sup>198</sup>

Burns would spend approximately nine months in Irvine, from July 1781 to March 1782. Daiches describes Burns as arriving in Irvine 'in a mood of bitterness and recklessness' following the rejection of his marriage suit.<sup>199</sup> Nevertheless, it was not an entirely negative period. It is here that Burns would spend many an hour in Templeton's bookshop, expanding his literary horizons, including a fateful encounter with the poetry of Robert Fergusson which resulted in him stringing 'anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with renewed vigour' and attempting poetry in Scots. It is also in Irvine that he would make the acquaintance of Captain Richard Brown - 'the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when WOMAN was the presiding star' - a key figure in encouraging Burns to try publishing his poems.<sup>200</sup> Despite this, the sub-standard living conditions, the move from the rural to urban setting, and the move away from his family appears to have led to Irvine being a time where Burns's 'moods of gaiety and excitement seem to have alternated with fits of depression'.<sup>201</sup> The experiences took their toll on Burns, resulting in that irritation of his 'hypochondriac complaint'.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Members of Irvine Burns club in private conversation with me at Wellwood Burns Centre and Museum, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

<sup>199</sup> Daiches (1951), p.65.

<sup>200</sup> *L125*; Robert Crawford, p.117. Irvine Burns Club now possess the chair from Templeton's bookshop where Burns sat to read, having it on display in the Wellwood Burns Centre and Museum.

<sup>201</sup> Daiches (1951), p.65.

<sup>202</sup> In *L125*, Burns would appear to suggest that a Hogmanay fire that destroyed the heckling shed, rendering Burns 'not worth sixpence', was also responsible for triggering his hypochondria. However, the dating of Charles Fleeming's daybook and the letter to William Burnes on 27<sup>th</sup> Dec

Burns's description of his ensuing illness as an irritation belies the seriousness of the episode. Between 14<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1781, Burns was attended on six occasions by Surgeon Charles Fleeming.<sup>203</sup> Fleeming's daybook recorded these visits as well as the treatments administered to Burns over this period. Mackay previously detailed these treatments using a 'transcript of the relevant entries, which have not previously been published'; his presentation of the treatments and their indications suggest he was relying on the transcription produced in the late 1950s rather than having sight of the daybook himself.<sup>204</sup> Access to the daybook has allowed high-resolution digital imaging of the relevant entries and fresh transcription, which indicate that Burns was treated with the following preparations:<sup>205</sup>

**Table 11: Treatments prescribed for Burns by Fleeming**

Date	Prescription	Active Ingredient(s)
14/11/1791	sacred elixir	rhubarb, aloe
19/11/1781	anodyne draught	laudanum
20/11/1781	anodyne draught	laudanum
21/11/1781	powdered rhubarb	rhubarb
22/11/1781	powdered Peruvian bark	cinchona (quinine)
23/11/1781	stomachic pills	rhubarb, mint, gentian, tartar (potassium sulphate)

Consultation with reliable and authoritative contemporaneous sources - the *Pharmacopoeia Edinburgensis*, Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, and the consulting correspondence of eminent Edinburgh physician William Cullen - shed light on the medical indications for these prescriptions on the basis of their ingredients

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1787 (L4) would contradict this. It may not have been a trigger but it certainly wouldn't have helped his ongoing recovery.

<sup>203</sup> Whereas 'Doctor' indicates a professional who has been trained in a medical school, and is a title attached to Fleeming, this is likely an erroneous attribution. In contemporary sources, Fleeming is specifically referred to as 'Surgeon' or 'Mr', denoting his status as a member of the medical profession but not trained in a medical school. His obituary in the August 1809 issue of the Scots Magazine indicate he likely learned his trade 'on the job' in the navy in his twenties. In the same issue of the Glasgow Mercury which records Burns's flax premium, there is an advert for 'Maredant's Drops', a quack treatment for ulcers and sores, endorsed by Fleeming which testifies to the respect his medical opinion held.

<sup>204</sup> Mackay (2004), p.99. McIntyre (p.37) and Robert Crawford (p.119) subsequently rely on Mackay's account as the source for their own treatments of Fleeming's ministrations.

<sup>205</sup> Surgeon Charles Fleeming's daybook, Irvine Burns Club. Digital reproduction of the summary from the 1960s, the relevant page containing the entry pertaining to Burns, and a transcription produced for this thesis are included in Appendix 3.

and dosages, thus giving a clearer picture of the potential diagnoses being considered by Fleeming.<sup>206</sup>

Both *Pharmacopoeia* and *Domestic Medicine* indicate that sacred elixir consisted of rhubarb, aloe, cardamom and vinous spirits (brandy or similar), while stomachic pills contained rhubarb, mint, gentian and oil of tartar.<sup>207</sup> *Domestic Medicine* describes an anodyne draught as containing laudanum, cinnamon-water and sugar syrup.<sup>208</sup> Peruvian bark came from trees of the genus *Cinchona* while rhubarb remains recognisable today.

The record of Burns's initial treatment on the 14<sup>th</sup> details the materials for sacred elixir, presumably these then being dissolved in brandy or port to make up the elixir, but also records 'VS - Vomitor'. Previous interpretations have taken this to mean an emetic compound, perhaps ipecacuanha, was also administered.<sup>209</sup> However, 'vomitor' as Latin for 'one who vomits' and assuming 'VS' an abbreviation of 'versus', this would indicate that the sacred elixir was begin prescribed to prevent vomiting. Both Buchan and Cullen describe sacred elixir as gently opening the gastrointestinal tract rather than being a harsh purgative, as an emetic would be. This points to Fleeming's diagnosis including some aspect of gastrointestinal obstruction which should not be relieved by violent purging through vomiting, strong laxative or clyster (enema). Buchan points to such abdominal upsets often being nervous in origin, while Cullen explicitly states the strong correlation between the occurrence of nervous disorders and costiveness (constipation).<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> The dosages administered appears to be an aspect of Fleeming's treatment that neither the daybook transcription nor Mackay account for when attributing indicated conditions or intended effects to each preparation.

<sup>207</sup> Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, *Pharmacopoeia Collegii Regii Medicorum Edinburgensis* (Edinburgh and London: John Bell and George Robinson, 1783), pp.118, 216–17; William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine, or a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines*, 8<sup>th</sup> edn (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1784), pp.744, 756.

<sup>208</sup> Buchan, p.722.

<sup>209</sup> Mackay (2004), p.99.

<sup>210</sup> Buchan, p.485; Letter from William Cullen to Andrew Stewart, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1769, *The Consultation Letters of Dr William Cullen (1710-1790) at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, (2013) <<http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/docs/75/>> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018]. All subsequent references to letters to and from Cullen are taken from this online edition unless otherwise indicated.

The day-book suggests Burns continued his thrice-daily dosing of sacred elixir at least until Fleeming visited again on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, when he prescribed an anodyne draught. Containing laudanum, this has previously been assumed to have been prescribed as pain relief, laudanum being an opiate. Buchan, however, also recommends a low dose of laudanum to settle stomach cramps associated with ‘an increased degree of sensibility’, while Cullen indicates it as appropriate for treating colic where there is no costiveness, a possibility in Burns’s case after five days of sacred elixir.<sup>211</sup> Fleeming records the dosage only as ‘u.d.’ (use as directed), thus shedding no light on whether he was aiming to settle Burns’s stomach, his nerves or alleviate pain.

Burns’s treatment continues with powdered rhubarb. As with the sacred elixir, which also contains rhubarb, Buchan and Cullen agree on this being an appropriate treatment to gently settle the stomach, open the bowels and promote appetite.<sup>212</sup> Again, it is indicated by both for gastrointestinal symptoms related to nervous disorder. While Fleeming is clearly continuing to treat Burns for costiveness which may have been nervous in origin, the use of laudanum also raises the possibility that Fleeming was seeking to treat a costiveness arising from the use of an opiate.<sup>213</sup>

Just as there may be an erroneous presumption that Fleeming used laudanum as an analgesic, there also appears to have been a similar error in assessing the use of Peruvian bark. A source of quinine, it was widely recognised as an effective treatment for intermittent fever, particularly the fever associated with malaria, a condition for which quinine is still indicated. Buchan makes clear, however, that the required dose for such treatment is far higher than that which is prescribed by Fleeming for Burns. Whereas intermittent fever requires two ounces (875 grains) to be divided into 24 doses (36.5 grains) and taken every two hours, Fleeming prescribes Burns only 15 grains divided into 12 doses (1.25

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<sup>211</sup> Buchan, p.610; Letter from William Cullen to unknown addressee, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1776, <<http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/docs/3940/>> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018].

<sup>212</sup> Buchan, pp.212, 469, 474; Letter from William Cullen to Andrew Stewart, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1769, <<http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/docs/75/>> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018].

<sup>213</sup> *L156* indicates Burns use of Glauber’s salts in the winter of 1787/88, around the same time he was again using laudanum, this time for relief of pain relating to his dislocated knee cap. Glauber’s salts were used as a treatment for constipation, indicating that Burns may have been prone to this side-effect of opiate use.

grains).<sup>214</sup> Pertinently, Buchan explicitly recommends lower doses of bark for the strengthening of the stomach in hypochondriac complaints, noting that the doses which can be tolerated in such conditions are often too small to have any other effect.<sup>215</sup> The introduction of Peruvian bark at this low dose may give the clearest indication yet of Fleeming's diagnosis of Burns's illness - hypochondria - pointing to the gastrointestinal symptoms being nervous in origin, what may now be recognised as the somatic manifestation of depression.

On his final visit, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November, Fleeming makes his last prescription for stomachic pills. Again, containing rhubarb along with several other natural ingredients, these are indicated for keeping open and invigorating the stomach, strengthening the bowels, and promoting appetite.<sup>216</sup> Fleeming seems only to prescribe these for two days which, along with no further recorded visits, suggests Burns's physical symptoms were sufficiently resolved that he was no longer considered at significant risk and that continued care could be undertaken by others, perhaps following ongoing instructions from Fleeming. That Fleeming's daybook records no cost or payment for Burns's treatment, unlike the preceding entry, may also point to him being given only what is deemed absolutely necessary, given that Burns's financial state at the time would have severely restricted his ability to afford more treatment, or that Fleeming was given payment in kind.<sup>217</sup>

Almost all treatments prescribed by Fleeming point to Burns being treated for an abdominal upset related to a nervous disorder; only the anodyne draught is ambiguous in its indication, possibly for analgesia or for colic. The concomitant prescriptions would weight towards the latter, given that the combination of various numbers of these treatments are indicated by both Buchan and Cullen for melancholic and hypochondriac disorders. To this can also be added a recorded instance of Fleeming consulting Cullen for advice on an earlier patient affected by a nervous ailment. Cullen advises Fleeming to administer bark for

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<sup>214</sup> Buchan, p.167. One grain is equivalent to ~65 milligrams.

<sup>215</sup> Buchan, pp.498, 501.

<sup>216</sup> Buchan, p.744; Letter from William Cullen to unknown addressee, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1769, <<http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/docs/53/>> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018].

<sup>217</sup> Although the daybook entry following Burns records no costs either, the patient is noted to be "Mrs Cunninghame, widow, Doctor George's mother" and would, presumably be far better placed to cover the costs of Fleeming's extensive list of prescriptions.

purging, small doses of opiates to settle the nerves, and small doses of a gentle laxative when no bark is being given.<sup>218</sup> It is reasonable that, having consulted a physician as esteemed as Cullen, Fleeming would continue to follow this advice for subsequent patients presenting with what he considered to be a similar condition.

That Fleeming diagnosed Burns with a nervous disorder, and possibly more specifically hypochondria, is further supported by the fact that Burns never refers to his Irvine illness in any terms other than those of a nervous illness.<sup>219</sup> While not absolutely conclusive, it is highly indicative that Fleeming's diagnosis is the source of Burns's labelling of his 'hypochondriac taint'.<sup>220</sup>

Burns had moved away from his family, leaving his native rural setting for a dirty urban environment, for a new and presumably exciting opportunity, and the winter months were now approaching. These circumstances all call to mind the similar circumstances of other depressed periods in Burns's life, not least his first visit to Edinburgh in the winter of 1786/87. With regard to this episode of illness in Irvine, Mackay argues 'people nowadays use the term "depression" when they really mean low spirits; but in Robert's case the depression was very real, in the full clinical sense'.<sup>221</sup> While Mackay does not explain what the 'full clinical sense' is, the evidence of Fleeming's daybook presented against the medical authority of Buchan and Cullen, and Burns's contemporaneous and subsequent descriptions of the period, there is a very strong suggestion that Burns's illness in November 1781 was diagnosed by Fleeming as hypochondria and

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<sup>218</sup> Letter from William Cullen to Charles Fleeming, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1779, <<http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/docs/4359/>> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018].

<sup>219</sup> *L4* and *L125* make clear that both at the time of the Irvine episode and in later years he considered this illness to have been nervous in origin.

<sup>220</sup> Burns's attitude towards his depression, to be further discussed in Chapter 3, may have been compounded by reading Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*. In the first edition (1772), Buchan writes "[hypochondria and hysterics] are disease which nobody chuses to own; and indeed it would be better if their names were never mentioned" (p.561) giving an insight into attitudes toward such conditions at the time. *K55* ('Death and Doctor Hornbook. A True Story') indicates Burns had at least a passing acquaintance of *Domestic Medicine* and thus may have read these words, depending on which edition he accessed, as they have disappeared by later editions. This idea of the preventability of mental illness in men is a direct contrast to later works such as Madden's which uses Burns as an example of a salutary warning of the propensity for madness among men of genius.

<sup>221</sup> Mackay (2004), p.98. Despite Mackay's insistence that Burns suffered depression in the clinical sense, he then describes the episode as a 'nervous breakdown', a commonly used but non-clinical phrase which appears in neither DSM-V nor ICD-10.

would now be recognised as his first major depressive episode. It was an experience and a label which would continue to trouble Burns throughout the rest of his life.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explore evidence originating from sources other than Burns which relates directly to his mental health, or to the wider picture relating to the possibility of him being affected by a mood disorder. It has shown some specific accounts from others which point to moments of disordered mood in Burns's biography, moments which correlate with episodes identified in Ch. 1 as points of disordered mood, although not all as episodes of clinical significance. In addition, general accounts, usually constructed after Burns's death, add to the overall picture of Burns's temperament, attesting to his tendency towards melancholy and to his reputation for having an irritable and uneven temper.

Consideration of his family history indicates an unevenness of temper in both parents and the possibility of disordered mood in one or two siblings, but there is nothing which would conclusively argue the presence of a mood disorder in any of his first-degree relatives. This is, however, possibly due to a lack of extant evidence regarding these members of Burns's family, particularly in the face of high levels of mortality at a young age, rather than the presence of sufficient evidence to argue against mood disorder.

Finally, the consideration of evidence relating to the potential somatic manifestation of disordered mood shows a link between particular symptoms - headache and abdominal upset - and Burns's mood state, specifically lowered mood. Such symptoms become more clearly localised and more severe as the lowered mood becomes more severe. Focus on Burns's time in Irvine, and the episode of illness experienced there, may point more strongly towards a diagnosis of hypochondria than rheumatic fever as previously suggested, although this does not preclude a co-occurrence of both conditions.

The findings presented in this chapter add new perspectives on aspects of Burns's disordered moods which have not previously been given detailed consideration. It is important, however, that they are considered within the complete body of evidence relating to Burns's moods and the clinical literature which addresses both the symptomatic presentation and wider clinical description of mood disorders.

## Section 1 conclusion

This section opened by asking two questions - “Should an attempt at retrospective diagnosis of mood disorder in the biography of Robert Burns be undertaken?” and “Can such a study, which would rely entirely on historical sources, be undertaken?”. It was argued that this should be undertaken as such labels had already been suggested by Jamison in relation to Burns, but that it should be done with a mind to Muramoto’s three functions which give ethical validity to such activity. Proof-of-concept testing of a novel methodology further argued that personal writing, in combination with other accounts and evidentiary sources, was a suitable substitute for the face-to-face consultation of a modern clinician. Using current diagnostic criteria provides a clear framework which teases out aspects of the eighteenth-century conditions of melancholy and hypochondria which would not now map onto the criteria for mood disorders. Therefore, a retrospective study of Burns’s mental health within the framework of mood disorder was possible, allowing the first research question of the thesis to be addressed:

What evidence exists to support the theory that Burns suffered from what would be recognised as a mood disorder - recurrent depression, bipolar disorder or cyclothymia - as defined by modern diagnostic criteria?

Seeking to answer this question would offer an opportunity to begin a detailed study of an aspect of Burns’s biography which has been relatively ignored in comparison to other areas of his life, and thus develop significant new understanding of the man and the influences which shaped him and his work.

Application of the designed methodology generated a range of evidence which has allowed the construction of a medical biography relating to Robert Burns’s mental health and the potential presence of a mood disorder. Ch.1 focused on drawing together the evidence from Burns himself as it occurs within his correspondence and personal writing, while Ch.2 explored the wider evidence available from friends, family and additional reliable sources. Combining the findings generated across both these chapters builds a picture of Burns’s moods throughout his life, and particularly within the last ten years between 1786 and 1796.

Within the terms of the diagnostic criteria employed in Ch. 1 the evidence shows Burns was affected by episodes of depression which demonstrated a winter seasonality and by episodes of hypomania with a spring and autumn seasonality. He was also subject to sub-threshold episodes of lowered and elevated mood, as well as periods of mixed mood state where he would exhibit symptoms incongruent with his predominating mood state. His episodes of depression and lowered mood were sometimes accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, a sense of guilt and worthlessness, pessimism with morbid and suicidal thinking, lowered activity levels, and social withdrawal. Episodes of hypomania and elevated mood included irritability, grandiosity and exaggerated well-being, increased activity and energy levels, social impropriety, risky behaviour, and impulsivity. These episodes, however, represent a small proportion of the ten-year time period examined, with Burns's mood stated being predominantly euthymic, i.e. insufficient signs of an abnormal mood state in either direction manifesting itself. This is proportionate to the number of items actually considered clinically significant within the entire body of potential evidence (156 items from a possible 902).

While much of the evidence generated correlates with the clinical diagnostic criteria, it also incorporates additional aspects which can be considered within the context of the clinical literature which addresses the wider description and natural course of bipolar disorder (Table 12).

**Table 12: Comparison on wider features of Burns's bipolar disorder with typical disease course**

Aspect of condition	Typical presentation	Burns's presentation
Age of onset	<30 years <sup>222</sup>	22 years
Premorbid temperament	Anxiety, sub-threshold lowered mood, sleep dysregulation, minor adjustment disorder in response to adverse life events <sup>223</sup>	Reported periods of lowered mood, headaches, possibly panic attacks in teenage years; onset following familial financial difficulties
Predominant mood state	Depression>hypomania <sup>224</sup>	Depression>hypomania

<sup>222</sup> Morriss and others, p.28.

<sup>223</sup> Anne Duffy and others, 'The Developmental Trajectory of Bipolar Disorder', 2014, 122–28 (p.127).

<sup>224</sup> Morriss and others, p.23.

Triggers	Prolonged negative childhood experiences can increased predisposition Acute psychosocial stressors and illness can precipitate episodes Depressive episodes can become self-perpetuating due to stress <sup>225</sup>	Episodes of depression and lowered mood particularly appear to be precipitated by stressors and illness but no evidence of childhood trauma
Duration and frequency of episodes	More frequent episodes of depression of shorter duration (weeks rather than months) than in unipolar depression <sup>226</sup>	Four identified episodes, between two and six weeks duration
Stability	Variation in severity of episodes Episode duration remains fairly constant over time Clustering of episodes interspersed with prolonged periods of euthymia Periods of euthymia between episodes may shorten Stability in work-life balance, sleep-wake cycle and daily routines can reduce occurrence of episodes <sup>227</sup>	Episodes of varying severity; Some clustering of episodes with long periods of euthymia between; Fewer episodes during times of low stress and high personal stability
Somatic manifestation	Gastrointestinal upset Headache Chest pain associated with anxiety <sup>228</sup>	Lowered mood accompanied by generalised complaint, localising to abdominal pain and headaches as severity of episode increases Heart palpitations possibly as a symptom of panic attacks
Co-morbidity	Commonly comorbid disorders are anxiety	Suggestion of panic attacks from ~27 years

<sup>225</sup> Morriss and others, p.34.

<sup>226</sup> Liz Forty and others, 'Clinical Differences between Bipolar and Unipolar Depression', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 192.5 (2008), 388–89 (p.389).

<sup>227</sup> Morriss and others, pp.43, 49.

<sup>228</sup> Bair and others, pp.2434–35.

	and substance-use disorders Also personality disorders, self-harm <sup>229</sup>	
Family history	Strong familial linkage with increased risk of bipolar disorder and recurrent depression in first-degree relatives <sup>230</sup>	Both parents reported as temperamental with Burns having particular similarities to paternal character; possible depression in 1 sibling

These features, which show some correlation with the wider clinical features of the typical nature and course of bipolar disorder, bolster the argument emerging from the analysis of Burns's correspondence and personal writing, and the additional accounts from those who knew him in life. The reporting of teenage episodes of lowered mood and associated headaches also add to the argument that Burns's melancholy does not originate in excessive consumption of alcohol. Therefore, it is possible to answer the research question with a good degree of confidence - there is sufficient evidence present across the various sources to support the hypothesis that Robert Burns was affected by a condition that might now be defined by ICD-10 and DSM-V as Type II bipolar disorder. This is, however, with the caveat that this is a clinical diagnosis on the basis of identifying symptoms from an incomplete evidence base, matched against diagnostic criteria.

The objective conservative approach employed in this section of the thesis demonstrates the efficacy of the novel interdisciplinary approach as a means of retrospectively exploring the mental health, not only of Robert Burns, but potentially any historical individual for whom a similar body of evidence is available. It enables personal writing and third-party accounts to substitute for a first hand clinical history while always maintaining an awareness of the limitations arising from gaps in the evidence base and from shifting clinical definitions of and cultural attitudes to specific conditions. This has resulted in a conclusion regarding Burns's mental health which, on balance, is consistent with the earlier hypotheses of Purves-Stewart and Jamison regarding the presence of

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<sup>229</sup> Morriss and others, p.40.

<sup>230</sup> Barnett and Smoller, p.332; Craddock and Jones, p.587.

a mood disorder in the poet's life, but moving beyond both these representations by presenting more evidence upon which the conclusion is based, thus ensuring responsible application of the label.

Consequently, future reference to the nature of Robert Burns's disordered mood can now be couched in modern clinical terms, allowing for a more accessible way of understanding for a modern audience who are not familiar with eighteenth-century definitions of mental illness, particularly melancholy. Furthermore, the timeline created allows for a deeper appreciation of the course of Burns's condition throughout his life, illustrating the frequency of episodes of disordered mood, their polarity, severity and duration, while also highlighting the relatively small proportion of Burns's final decade that was actually spent in an abnormal mood state.

This fulfils Muramoto's function of establishing an understanding of the life-course of bipolar disorder through the construction of a more detailed medical biography while also providing a useful framework for progressing towards fulfilling the other two functions - understanding Burns's lived experience within his eighteenth-century context, and understanding the potential impact of his disordered moods in his life. Arguably, understanding these aspects is far more important and interesting than any label which might be generated by a study of this nature.

## **Section 2 – ‘Many and sharp the num'rous Ills Inwoven with our frame!’: exploring the impact of mood on Burns’s life**

Section 1 supported the hypothesis that Robert Burns was affected by a clinical syndrome consistent with Type II bipolar disorder, providing a useful framework for aiding our modern understanding of the nature and patterning of Burns’s moods. The usefulness of the work also goes beyond this framework, allowing the creation of a ‘mood map’ of Burns’s life. The map of mood state against time generated allows for an exploration of key points in Burns’s life in relation to the occurrence of episodes of disordered mood, with a view to identifying the potential role his mood state played in decisions made and actions undertaken, as well as his own attitudes towards his disordered moods. Thus, progress towards further fulfilling Muramoto’s functions of retrospective diagnosis is possible - having constructed a medical biography of Burns, it is now possible to examine more closely the potential influence of his disordered moods on his personal and professional lives, and to tease out an understanding of Burns’s own lived experience of the condition.<sup>231</sup>

Such a study combines the externally observable consequences of Burns’s condition with the internal conscious and subconscious influences it exerts. As previously discussed, Cunningham, Karenberg and Rosenberg argue that retrospective diagnosis is best undertaken within the historical context in which the individual lived, necessitating a shift from the twenty-first-century understanding of mood disorder to that of the eighteenth century. In doing so, attention is again drawn to the questionable validity of equating historical illnesses with modern diagnoses; in the case of Burns, it is particularly pertinent to the correlation between the historical condition known as melancholy and what modern clinicians identify as depression. On the other hand, while mania was recognised by eighteenth-century physicians as a worsening of melancholy,

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<sup>231</sup> Muramoto, p.23.

rather than the opposing pole, hypomania would not be recognised as a mood state in its own right.<sup>232</sup>

Jennifer Radden highlights that while the descriptivist approach of modern psychiatry allows for the comparison of these conditions across time, it is not reflective of the entirety of what was recognised as melancholy in the eighteenth century.<sup>233</sup> Thus, while an eighteenth-century perspective would view all episodes of depression as melancholy, a twenty-first-century perspective does not view all episodes of melancholy as depression. This realisation also highlights the over-simplified representation of Jamison's position as simply drawing a line of continuity from melancholy to depression. Just as Radden's differences between the two conditions centre on the socially constructed aspects, Jamison is less concerned with definitions of disease and the generation of labels than she is with the lived experience of the individual.<sup>234</sup> Both positions recognise that an approach which works strictly within the clinical criteria results in the loss of nuance and appreciation of an individual's experience, and this same rationale underpins the refinement of the methodology in Ch.1 which adjusted scoring to capture sub-threshold shifts in mood and provide a more detailed picture of the pattern of Burns's moods regardless of the clinical significance of their severity.

To further enhance the value of the findings of Section 1, particularly in relation to these sub-threshold episodes, an understanding of the eighteenth-century context in which Burns lived is required - what contemporary medicine and society would have considered symptomatic features of 'melancholy', how social attitudes may have shaped Burns's view of his mental health, and how social attitudes may have shaped others' views of his behaviour. Each of these will be explored throughout Section 2.

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<sup>232</sup> Brittany Mason, E. Brown and Paul Croarkin, 'Historical Underpinnings of Bipolar Disorder Diagnostic Criteria', *Behavioral Sciences*, 6:14 (2016), 1–19 (p.2). Mason *et al* also note that until hypomania was first defined in DSM-III (1980), what is now diagnosed as Type II bipolar disorder would have been considered cyclothymic disorder, matching Purves-Stewart's original description of Burns's condition in 1935 (Purves-Stewart, pp.37–38).

<sup>233</sup> Radden, p.48.

<sup>234</sup> Radden, pp.39–40; Jamison's treatment of Byron in *Touched with Fire* and her biography of Robert Lowell, *Setting the River on Fire - A Study of Genius, Mania, and Character* (New York: Knopf, 2017) both illustrate her focus on the lived experience of mood disorder.

## Melancholy in the eighteenth century

Since the time of Aristotle, melancholy had been connected with creativity; by the second half of the eighteenth century, both were now linked with sensibility, at least in part as response to the empirical observation of the natural world that flourished in the Enlightenment. There have been various arguments about how significant this progression of natural knowledge was in shaping, or even driving, the Enlightenment in Scotland, but that it was influential is not refuted.<sup>235</sup> In turn, Scotland itself became influential in driving shifts in thinking across Britain and Europe.

This was particularly true for the field of medicine. The end of the seventeenth century had seen a push for modernisation of the Scottish universities' curricula, to better reflect what was already being taught in the European institutions, meaning a development of teaching and research in mathematics and natural sciences.<sup>236</sup> As a consequence, by the mid-eighteenth century, Edinburgh University had become the leading European centre for medical education and the city itself was fast becoming a hub of Enlightenment networking, knowledge development and exchange.<sup>237</sup> The medical school of Edinburgh University would shape understanding of the structures and functions of the human body, and the origins and treatments of diseases. They would raise questions about the connections between the visible and the invisible, the physical structures of the body and the unseen realms of the mind, and the potential causes of conditions which affected cognitive abilities, mood states and sanity, including melancholy.<sup>238</sup>

By the early eighteenth century, the classical millennia-old humoral theories of disease were being challenged by mechanistic explanations that had emerged

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<sup>235</sup> Paul Wood, 'Science in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.94–116 (p.94).

<sup>236</sup> Wood, p.99.

<sup>237</sup> Wood, p.100.

<sup>238</sup> Wood, p.107.

from the improved understanding of the anatomy of the human body.<sup>239</sup> These initial explanations argued that the low mood of melancholy, with accompanying fear and sadness, was a consequence of sluggish circulation of blood and lymph.<sup>240</sup> By the 1740s, a combination of the influence of Newton's theories on the propagation of motion, the theories of vitalism and the emerging interest in electrical experimentation led to explanations for the causes of melancholy shifting away from the mechanistic theories of circulatory flow and towards theories of stimulation associated with the nervous system. The work of anatomists, physiologists and physicians who taught and researched within Edinburgh's medical school, such as William Cullen, Robert Whytt, Alexander Monro II and John Gregory, would revolutionise medical thinking with this neurophysiological model of disease aetiology. Cullen would argue melancholy was 'praeternatural affections of sense and motion which do not depend upon a topical affection of the organs but upon a more general affection of the nervous system', the nervous system being affected by the over- or under-stimulation that would then give rise to the 'stimulant' regime of treatment to which James Currie subscribed, as discussed in the General Introduction.<sup>241</sup>

These developments in the understanding of the physiological basis of melancholy would also come to affect the social and cultural status of the condition. For philosophers, the scientific revolution within what might have been considered the 'traditional' sciences inspired similar approaches in their studies of the components of human nature such as emotions, morality and social structure.<sup>242</sup> Philosophers engaged in the study of what David Hume called the 'science of man' considered themselves as much natural scientists as might physicists or chemists or botanists, and so the objective empiricism of the Enlightenment came to shape thinking and approaches across a wide range of disciplines beyond the basic sciences.<sup>243</sup> These influences are particularly evident

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<sup>239</sup> Jackson, p.116.

<sup>240</sup> Jackson, pp.117–18.

<sup>241</sup> G.E. Berrios, 'Epilepsy: Clinical Section', in *A History of Clinical Psychiatry*, ed. by G.E. Berrios and Roy Porter (London: The Athlone Press, 1995), pp.147–63 (p.151); Lawlor (2012), p.82.

<sup>242</sup> Wood, p.95.

<sup>243</sup> Alexander Broadie, 'The Human Mind and Its Powers', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.60–78 (p.60); Alexander Broadie, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to The*

in Edinburgh, where the neurophysiological theories were spread by Whytt, Cullen, Monro and Gregory to other parts of the university, most notably to the school of moral philosophy which, at the time, was led by Hume and Adam Smith.<sup>244</sup>

This philosophical science of man became concerned with how men think, the processes which led to the formation of thoughts and ideas, of one's character and sense of morality, of how one related to and formed relationships with others.<sup>245</sup> In the great Enlightenment tradition of 'improvement', by better understanding how man thought, society would be better placed to formulate strategies for improving the individuals within it and thus, itself as a whole. By applying the same empirical principles that his scientific colleagues had applied, Hume argued that man's reason is subject to his emotions, and thus it is through one's emotions and passions that a moral conscience is developed, that 'morality [...] is more properly felt than judged of.'<sup>246</sup> This idea of morality being felt emerges in Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* in both his theories of sympathy and the impartial observer.<sup>247</sup> From this development of philosophical understanding emerged at least two new genres of popular writing - biography and its related forms as a means of exploring personal identity, and the genre of sentimental literature typified by authors such as Mackenzie, Sterne, Richardson and Smollett, all names to be found in Burns's personal reading and some of which were, by his own admission, his particular favourites.<sup>248</sup> As observed by Lawlor, 'with the new medicine of nerves came the cultural phenomenon of sensibility and its related concept of the Sentimental.'<sup>249</sup> Consequently, the shifts in scientific thinking and approaches which emerged from the Enlightenment would have a profound effect on the understanding of and

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*Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.1–8 (p.4).

<sup>244</sup> Barker-Benfield, p.7.

<sup>245</sup> Darcy (2013), p.75.

<sup>246</sup> Darcy (2013), p.76.

<sup>247</sup> Darcy (2013), p.76. Chapter 3 includes discussion of Smith's ideas in relation to Burns.

<sup>248</sup> Darcy (2013), p.75; Barker-Benfield, p.15.

<sup>249</sup> Lawlor (2012), p.84.

attitudes to melancholy, and thus on both how Burns perceived his own condition and how it would later be framed by his early biographers.

Jennifer Radden, in discussing the continuity between melancholy and depression, acknowledges the presence of similarities between the two - a core group of symptoms focused on sadness and despondency with associated fear and anxiety; the irrational and baseless nature of these states; a self-centred, self-conscious oversensitivity to perceived criticism; and recurrent connections made between states of melancholy and states of elevated mood.<sup>250</sup> She goes on, however, to detail what she considers the more significant differences, the variations in description which argue against equating the historical with the modern. Descriptions of melancholy include a wider range of symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions which would now be considered components of conditions such as psychotic depression, mania (including that of bipolar disorder), schizophrenia, anxiety and paranoia. Conversely, such descriptions do not include aspects which would be recognised by a modern clinician as components of mood disorder, such as the self-loathing associated with depression. Melancholy is also considered a 'male' disease, in contrast to the 'female' hysteria of the time, whereas current literature characterises depression as affecting twice as many females as males, with no difference in the symptomatic presentation of affected males and females.<sup>251</sup>

Perhaps more significant, however, is the differing social standings of twenty-first-century depression and eighteenth-century melancholy. Although progress has been made in recent years, depression, and mental health issues more widely, has been heavily stigmatised throughout the twentieth century. In contrast, the eighteenth century saw melancholy, through the sensibility which might predispose an individual to melancholy, become, up to a point, a condition of positive associations and fashion.

Pivotal in the emergence of this culture of sensibility was George Cheyne's volume *The English Malady* (1734). As humoral theory gave way to the

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<sup>250</sup> Radden, pp.38–39. This encapsulation of lowered and elevated mood within pre-nineteenth-century descriptions of melancholy point to the fact that what is now recognised as bipolar disorder would also have been considered a melancholic condition within Burns's lifetime.

<sup>251</sup> Radden, pp.39–40.

mechanistic then neurophysiological explanations for melancholy, the intellectual and theological underpinnings for the condition began to collapse, leading to an increasingly negative perception of the condition as a form of madness.<sup>252</sup> Part of the popularity of Cheyne's publication is the trouble it went to in arguing that melancholy was not madness.<sup>253</sup> By writing for the public and not fellow professionals, Cheyne, Darcy argues, is almost solely responsible for the transformation of melancholy into a fashionable disease.<sup>254</sup> Cheyne posits that melancholy affects only individuals with the brightest and quickest minds, or those of the upper classes and thus, it is a condition which is a sign of intellect, of refinement of taste and of gentility.<sup>255</sup> While the necessity of income generation might override succumbing to the incapacitating effects of melancholy, it was argued that the

rude labourer was not subject to the disease of melancholy because his lifestyle and intrinsically cruder nervous system would lack the necessary refinement to render his prey to the paradoxically elevated and elevating condition of melancholy.<sup>256</sup>

This also gave the condition the added cachet in that it could not be caught from the poor, and so, in what Middeke and Walk call 'nobilitation', melancholy, becomes a fashionable condition which affects the middle- and upper-classes.<sup>257</sup>

For Cheyne, the onset of melancholy in those of a temperament susceptible to the condition was rooted in exposure to upper class living - the increasingly rich diet and increasingly sedentary lifestyle associated with increased wealth, as well as a moved towards increasingly urban living.<sup>258</sup> Thus, his recommended

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<sup>252</sup> Roy Porter, 'Mood Disorders: Social Section', in *A History of Clinical Psychiatry*, ed. by G.E. Berrios and Roy Porter (London: The Athlone Press, 1995), pp.409–20 (p.417); Darcy (2013), p.69.

<sup>253</sup> Darcy (2013), p.72.

<sup>254</sup> Darcy (2013), p.79.

<sup>255</sup> Darcy (2013), p.81; Porter (1995), p.455.

<sup>256</sup> Lawlor (2015), pp.29–30.

<sup>257</sup> Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, 'Melancholia as a Sense of Loss: An Introduction', in *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*, ed. by Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.1–19 (p.1); Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* (London: Penguin, 1987), p.86.

<sup>258</sup> Porter (1995), p.455. Although Cheyne's ideas slightly predate Cullen's stimulant theories, they can be seen to mirror each other in the idea that the nerves can be over-stimulated by alcohol and under-stimulated through lack of exercise and fresh air.

treatment was a move to a simpler diet and increased exercise, not particularly different from the recommended treatment for melancholy within the humoral theory of disease, but now argued to be intended to purge the body of waste biological materials rather than noxious humours.<sup>259</sup> While these recommendations were not a wholesale success for Cheyne, his additional recommendations of fresh air and strengthening tonics popularised health cures which involved ‘taking the waters’ in spa towns, so much so that as many people visit places like Bath for the purposes of treating melancholy and hypochondria as did for gout.<sup>260</sup>

The shift in social attitudes to melancholy, however, was not an entirely positive one. There emerged from Cheyne’s repositioning of melancholy two competing versions - the lighter type associated with refinement and intelligence, and the more serious type akin to what we would now recognise as depression.<sup>261</sup> With the new scientific methods having undone the theological explanations for melancholy - divine or diabolical affliction which caused a preoccupation with one’s spiritual state, manifest broadly as a melancholy fixated on either an almost fanatical devotion or equally extreme doubt about God - Cheyne sought to re-situate these forms within his new paradigm.<sup>262</sup> Thus, what had previously been a ‘divinely sent’ melancholy became the positively viewed evidence of refinement and intelligence, a state which gave one capacity for sympathy albeit accompanied by that increased propensity for melancholy; conversely, the more sinister melancholy emerged from moral failures and uncontrolled passions, what Currie would come to term Burns’s ‘weakness of volition’.<sup>263</sup> Thus, Cheyne’s new model of melancholy, emerging from the new science of the Enlightenment, created an apparently irreconcilable contradiction within itself - a condition of sensibility which is associated with intelligence, refinement and

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<sup>259</sup> Lawlor (2012), p.83.

<sup>260</sup> Porter (1987), p.87. Porter also dedicates a volume to gout, exploring the social history of this condition which has also long been linked with superior class, intellect and creativity (Roy Porter and G.S. Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>261</sup> Lawlor (2012), p.74.

<sup>262</sup> Darcy (2013), p.86.

<sup>263</sup> Darcy (2013), p.73.

morality but also with weakness, suffering and a susceptibility to disordered moods and behaviour.<sup>264</sup>

Consequently, a socially acceptable melancholy should not be too severe in its nature. As a condition, it is relatively attractive in that it leaves the body unscathed, its chronic nature creates the time and space for introspection and creative production, and that introspection stimulates the creative imagination.<sup>265</sup> The leisure time that comes with financial security accommodates the periods of seclusion and introspection required for a poetic temperament to develop and for inspiration to strike.<sup>266</sup> Thus, Lawlor terms melancholy a ‘double-edged sword’, providing the material for creativity but also the seeds of mental illness.<sup>267</sup> Its effects are not to be under-estimated, a question raised over the balancing of the benefits with the drawbacks. Lawlor concludes that ‘all the genius in the world does not compensate for the misery caused by depression even though the genius might be aided by the malady.’<sup>268</sup> Lawlor’s choice of language here is notable - he refers specifically to depression, again highlighting the serious nature of the condition and also implying that not all melancholy might be considered depression. This leads to a contested but valid argument ‘as to how many people were seriously tempted to put on the airs of melancholy’.<sup>269</sup> That such action was possible lies in the nature of melancholy. It is a psychological condition which manifests with varying severity between individuals, even within a single individual across a period of time. Relying almost entirely on patient self-reporting of symptoms causes difficulties with authentication of the condition and confidence in the diagnosis, particularly when the fashionable association of the condition makes such a label a desirable goal. False representation of a melancholic affect is possible, even by those genuinely affected where they might wish to make their condition appear more serious than it actually is. This is where the use of modern criteria becomes valuable - objective description by verifiable symptoms using

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<sup>264</sup> Barker-Benfield, p.9.

<sup>265</sup> Lawlor (2015), p.37.

<sup>266</sup> Lawlor (2015), p.34.

<sup>267</sup> Lawlor (2015), p.34.

<sup>268</sup> Lawlor (2015), p.44.

<sup>269</sup> Lawlor (2015), p.40.

quantifiable thresholds distinguishes between performed melancholy and genuine clinical illness by creating a context where a sustained, believable performance that consistently fits clinical criteria for a prolonged period becomes increasingly challenging. Thus, this points to the complex relationship an individual might have with their condition, if it is authentic, and to the value of exploring the influence of this in the life of Burns.

## Exploring unstable mood in Burns's life

Authenticity is a question which has arisen at various points in relation to Burns's mood. While the existence of his melancholy has never been disputed, it has, as previously discussed in the General Introduction, been attributed to alcohol consumption, physical illness and psychoneurosis at various points in history. Since Jamison's attribution of a clinical label however, this question of authenticity seems to have shifted with more recent scholarship focusing on the authenticity of Burns's performance of his melancholic temperament.

Beveridge rightly acknowledges the importance on assessing the impact of and Burns's reaction to his melancholy in the context in which he was living, a man of the farming classes reading and writing during a time of sensibility, citing several writers of the time that Burns is known to have read.<sup>270</sup> He also recognises that Burns is 'fond of discussing his moods', particularly with Frances Dunlop, and the connection that Burns makes between his mental health and his poetic temperament.<sup>271</sup> Several of Burns's letters are cited which are alleged to portray the poet performing the role of Romantic genius consumed with introspective melancholy, but without giving consideration to whom Burns writes and for what purpose. Thus, letters to Margaret Chalmers and Agnes McLehose, which Ch.1 has shown to be exaggerated as Burns seeks to court them romantically, are equated with letters to Frances Dunlop and Robert Ainslie, both friends of Burns's with whom he is more honest.<sup>272</sup> Although Beveridge

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<sup>270</sup> Beveridge, pp.146–47, 151.

<sup>271</sup> Beveridge, pp.153, 156, 158–59.

<sup>272</sup> Beveridge, pp.152, 145, 153.

argues that ‘to condemn Burns as entirely insincere and self-pitying, is to do him a disservice as he was a genuine sufferer’, the Burns that he presents is a man of exaggerated performance who plays out his melancholy in both his correspondence and his creative output.<sup>273</sup> This is only partially true, in that some letters almost certainly deliberate exaggerations on Burns’s part, but this should not detract from the fact that what are arguably the most severe epistolary manifestations of his melancholy appear in letters written to his most trusted confidantes and thus represent the performance of reality rather than exaggeration.<sup>274</sup>

Leigh Wetherall Dickson also focuses on performance in her consideration of the manifestation of Burns’s melancholy and his underlying motivations. She cites Daiches and Costa who, similarly to Beveridge, object to Burns’s appropriation of the language of sentiment and sensibility as an inauthentic expression of the reality of his persona.<sup>275</sup> Wetherall Dickson argues against this, positing that Burns is not appropriating the language but using it as a scaffold to construct the frames of reference for his own identity. Just as Beveridge refers to the range of authors that Burns has read, so too does Dickson but more accurately placing him within the culture of sensibility, arguing that ‘rather than being a literary pose, Burns admiration for the sentimental provides him with a model for [...] expressing his melancholia’.<sup>276</sup> So, like Beveridge, Dickson presents Burns as someone who draws on the cultural references of his time but as a means of expressing his melancholy rather than performing a fashionable persona, although both agree that from that engagement with the contemporary literature emerges a great creative talent. His choice of reading, particularly the characters within the novels of Sterne and Mackenzie, provide him with models to emulate, allowing himself the ‘special entry ticket’ to the melancholic classes that his labouring background would otherwise have excluded him from.<sup>277</sup> In taking this position, Wetherall Dickson begins to create a space where Burns’s melancholy might be considered not simply as performance but as possible

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<sup>273</sup> Beveridge, p.151.

<sup>274</sup> Ch.5 will deal with the impact of Burns’s disordered mood on his creative output.

<sup>275</sup> Wetherall Dickson, p.250.

<sup>276</sup> Wetherall Dickson, p.250.

<sup>277</sup> Beveridge, p.158.

evidence of a clinical condition, arguing that the works of others, either in their idea or through the employment of their words becomes a self-protective mechanism in that it provides an expressive outlet for his abnormal mood states, something mentioned in Ch.2 and which will be further discussed in Ch.4.

It would be ill-advised to suggest that Burns never engaged in any degree of exaggeration in expressing his melancholy. It would, however, be equally ill-advised to suggest that he always did so. The truth, as is so often the case, lies somewhere in between. The clinical evidence generated in Section 1 supports the hypothesis of a recognisable condition underlying Burns's disordered mood. The contextual assessment of his personal writing which accounted for the purpose and audience of each piece, as well as the contemporary standards of writing practice at the time, presented alongside the evidence from those who knew him and his family history all point to the authenticity of his condition. As previously indicated, it should always be acknowledged that melancholy has a broader definition and is not limited, as depression is, by thresholds of severity and duration. Thus, all items of writing identified as symptomatic, particularly where Burns is explicitly discussing feelings of melancholy even though these fall outwith bounds of identified episodes, become potentially important indicators. Their inclusion creates that fuller picture of the ways in which Burns's condition would have manifested itself externally to others and internally in his own thoughts, while also averting the privileging the twenty-first-century viewpoint.

## **Aims of the section**

Chapter 3 explores Burns's own awareness of and feelings about his moods, especially within the context of eighteenth-century attitudes to melancholy and creativity. The chapter explores some of his earliest writing about his mental health as he seeks to understand and make sense of his condition in light of the episode of illness in Irvine. The chapter then goes on to investigate the particular influence of his friendship with Frances Dunlop in shaping and developing both the vocabulary he uses to discuss his mood and how he comes to reconcile something he fears intensely as an important integral component of his character.

Chapter 4 then goes on to map various events and incidents in Burns's life. This highlights the potential influence of mood state on his behaviour, actions and decisions at key points in his life. Specific study is made of the potential influence of Burns's disordered moods on his significant romantic and sexual relationships, one aspect of his life which has come to define his modern reputation. The chapter closes with examination of Burns's relationship with alcohol in relation to the timing of episodes of disordered mood, seeking to explore any potential connections between the two, and to challenge the misconception of 'Burns the alcoholic'.

By exploring the influences of Burns's moods on his actions and his thinking, this section seeks to place the public and private manifestations of Burns's disordered mood within the context of the times in which he lived, and to address the second research question:

What evidence exists to demonstrate the way in which Burns understood his disordered mood, and the extent to which these episodes may have affected aspects of his life, specifically his decision making, his drinking habits, and his relationships with women?

## Chapter 3 – Burns’s understanding of and relationship with his mood state

Having reconstructed a more detailed medical biography for Burns in the previous section, outlining the nature of his bipolar disorder and the patterning of his moods, this chapter will examine Burns’s own relationship with his condition, to explore his understanding of and attitude to his disordered moods.

This chapter will explore various influences on Burns’s awareness of his mental health and examine the language he used to talk about his mental health as he developed his understanding of his unstable mood and its impact on his life. It will go on to consider how Burns connects his mental health and his creativity, reconciling their interaction as a natural and necessary aspect of his poetic character, and the role of writing as a therapeutic activity.

To facilitate this examination, the chapter will focus on two key sources of evidence - the early entries of Burns’s first commonplace book as some of Burns’s first writing about his mental health, and his friendship with Frances Dunlop as his most frequent correspondent during periods of disordered mood.

### Burns’s first commonplace book

While Burns’s surviving correspondence, mostly limited to the last ten years of his life, shows him contemporaneously discussing his melancholy, it also points to an earlier awareness of the condition. In his autobiographical letter of August 1787 to Dr Moore, Burns comments that his younger years were affected by ‘a constitutional hypochondriac taint’ (*L125*). As seen in Ch.2, his brother Gilbert confirms that following their father’s hardships, the teenage Burns was ‘almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull headache’ and that such trials were ‘the cause of that depression of spirits with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards.’<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Currie, pp.71–72.

There is, however, earlier evidence of Burns's awareness which also provides a clearer idea of his understanding of the nature of this aspect of his temperament. Between April 1783 and October 1785, Burns kept what has become known as his first commonplace book, a volume he described as a fragmentary collection of 'Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, &c' (*OEWRB1*, p.39). He explicitly states that the collection of writings is intended as 'some entertainment to a curious observer of human-nature to see how a plough-man thinks, and feels', indicating it is, in some way, for public consumption (*OEWRB1*, p.39). It may be argued, however, that finishing as it does prior to the publication of the Kilmarnock edition and containing little material which would appear in Burns's first published volume, what started as an affectation becomes, for the most part, an honest representation of the individual. While Leask has accurately described this commonplace book as 'an invaluable record of RB's dawning creativity and poetic self-fashioning', something to be further explored in Section 3 of this thesis, it is also clear that the commonplace book, written between the ages of 26 and 28, is an invaluable record of Burns's earliest known writings explicitly relating to his mental health, predating almost all of the existing correspondence from Burns, and particularly interesting in its inclusion of material relation to his first significant episode of depression in the winter of 1781, whilst he was in Irvine (*OEWRB1*, p.34).

In an entry dated March 1784, the writing of which may have been stimulated by the death of his father the preceding month, Burns recounts how

[t]here was a certain period of my life that my spirit was broke by repeated losses & disasters [...] attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a Hypochondria, or confirmed Melancholy.

(*OEWRB1*, p.44)

The following month he records

Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of Winter, more than the rest of the year - This, I believe, may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast [...] I don't know if I should call it pleasure, but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me - than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation, in a cloudy, winter day, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees & raving o'er the plain - It is my best season for devotion; my mind is rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who,

in the pompous language of Scripture, “Walks on the wings of the wind.”

(*OEWRB1*, pp.44-45)

An annotation to this entry by Burns’s friend John Syme, who had accompanied him on that short tour of Galloway discussed in Ch.2, confirms ‘I have heard the Bard frequently enforce the same remark - viz that Winter - wild raving tempestuous weather - charmed him most’ (*OEWRB1*, p.45). At this point in time, Burns would appear clear that it is the misfortune of his time in Irvine, discussed in Ch.2, that prompts the onset of a severe episode of melancholy in the winter of 1781. Consequently, he has a lingering tendency towards lowered mood and a preference for the cold darkness of winter which reflects these feelings. As shown in Section 1, Burns’s episodes of depression and lowered mood predominantly occurred in the winter months, and his observations here would appear to confirm that this had always been the case, in alignment with the observed seasonality of episodes of abnormal mood within bipolar disorder.<sup>279</sup>

What can also be appreciated is that Burns has developed a connection between his melancholy, Nature, and his religious beliefs. While he seeks isolation from others in the raging winter storms, the awe-inspiring power of Nature demonstrated during these times also seems to draw him closer to his God, to his appreciation of God’s omnipotence, and to an examination of his conscience and his prospects for the afterlife. Again, the sense of smallness and insignificance, the introversion, and fixedness on a topic, particularly death, he conveys in this entry is typical of clinical depression. Thus, this fits with the conclusions drawn from other evidence relating to his time in Irvine, adding strength to the suggestion that his illness during this period was an episode of significant clinical depression.

Although the explicit discussion of his melancholy starts in the entry of March 1784, it is not the earliest entry in the commonplace book and, arguably, not the earliest indicator of Burns’s relationship with his mental health. Prior to this,

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<sup>279</sup> American Psychiatric Association, p.153.

there are three other entries, dated 'April 1783', 'September 1783' and 'early March 1784'.

The April 1783 entry shows Burns finding his feet as the self-critiquing poet, in keeping with the statement of intention which opens the commonplace book of demonstrating his thinking. This initial enthusiasm apparently evaporates, it being another four months before Burns makes his next entry. Those months probably represent the lowest point in the Burnes family fortunes, seeing legal proceedings against William Burnes for rent arrears, proceedings which would be resolved in Burnes's favour but at the expense of both his savings and his health, and only weeks before his death.<sup>280</sup>

When Burns does return to his commonplace book, the next two entries relate to the theme of remorse, with specific reference to the philosophy of Adam Smith. Burns starts the September 1783 entry with the affirmation that

I entirely agree with the judicious Philosopher Mr Smith in his excellent Theory of Moral Sentiments, that Remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom.

(OEWRB1, p.42)<sup>281</sup>

First published in 1759, the year of Burns's birth, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* laid out Smith's ideas on what he called sympathy - a form of 'fellow-feeling' in which we recognise the situation of another, imagine how we might feel in a similar situation, and to consequently understand an individual's reaction to that circumstance. Smith explained how morality is shaped not by reason but by society, arising naturally from our in-built ability to sympathise, and from our desire to be judged positively in relation to our own behaviours and reactions.

By 1783, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was in its fifth edition and it is clear that Burns had read and engaged with Smith's thinking.<sup>282</sup> Previous critics have explored the influence of Smith evident in Burns's poetry, foregrounding the

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<sup>280</sup> Robert Crawford, pp.125–26.

<sup>281</sup> K26 ('Remorse') is appended to this entry in the commonplace book, the contents of which can be read as Burns already showing concern for both his living and posthumous reputations.

<sup>282</sup> Leask highlights Kinsley's suggestion that Burns may have read *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as early as 1777, thus aged only 18 years old. (OEWRB1, pp.316-17 n.24).

poet's pessimism in the face of the apparent optimism of Smith's writing.<sup>283</sup> Leask sets out to challenge this opposition, identifying a 'contrapuntal relationship' between the two which arises from a shared 'sceptical and radical spirit'.<sup>284</sup> What has been little explored is how Burns's engagement with Smith offers insight into the poet's understanding of his own mind, that what is seen as pessimism is a reflection of Burns's melancholic tendency. Wetherall Dickson notes that for Burns, Smith's ideas act as a conduit to connecting the poet with the melancholy of sentimental literature that would provide him with a framework within which to discuss his own condition.<sup>285</sup> In writing about remorse, Burns references Smith's argument that inherent selfishness and self-interest is tempered by an awareness of society's observation and judgement, an awareness that while pursuing one's own happiness is acceptable, to do so at the cost of another's is not. Ensuing reflection on one's motives, in the face of societal disapprobation, will lead to remorse - a combination of the shame attached to one's own behaviour, the grief at causing harm to others, the pity felt for those who have been harmed, and the dread and terror of facing one's judges.<sup>286</sup>

Most striking perhaps is Smith's assertion that prioritising one's own happiness over that of others will result in judgement by society, the prospect of which means an individual's 'own thoughts can present him with nothing but what is black, unfortunate, and disastrous, the melancholy forebodings of incomprehensible misery and ruin.'<sup>287</sup> As discussed in Section 1, a regular feature of Burns's episodes of lowered mood was an ominous sense of impending ruin, particularly as a result of being found wanting in some way by those he considered his social superiors. As a result, Burns frequently expresses anxiety about being 'drawn into the full glare of learned & polite observation', that his

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<sup>283</sup> Murray Pittock, 'Nibbling at Adam Smith: A Mouse's "Sma Request" and the Limits of Social Justice', in *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century*, ed. by Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2009), pp.161–73 (p.119).

<sup>284</sup> Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns & Pastoral* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.13–14.

<sup>285</sup> Wetherall Dickson, p.254.

<sup>286</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,; Or, an Essay towards an Analysis of the Principles by Which Men Naturally Judge Concerning the Conduct and Character ... To Which Is Added, a Dissertation on the Origin of Languages*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: W. Strahan, 1781), p.145. This was the edition most recently published at the time of Burns writing his commonplace book but it is entirely possible that he read an earlier edition.

<sup>287</sup> Smith, pp.144–45.

actions would be found wanting and, in some way, embarrassing or harmful to others, particularly his patrons.<sup>288</sup> This appears unusual for the man who introduced his commonplace book as being for the ‘curious observer of human-nature’ but lends support to the idea that the artifice of this project was short-lived, overtaken by the need for an outlet in which to safely explore his thinking.

What Burns’s introduction does achieve, however, is invocation of one of the most significant concepts of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that of the impartial spectator. Smith posited that individual morality is driven by consideration of the judgement of an independent observer of actions, and a desire for that judgement to be a favourable one. The parameters against which an impartial observer measures actions is dependent upon the virtues and characteristics valued by society, thus society becomes the mirror in which one assesses one’s own moral character.<sup>289</sup> Burns, as demonstrated from the very opening of his commonplace book, is aware of the observation he is subject to, and while he is arguably setting up the poetic persona of the uneducated farmer, he also points to the criteria by which he will be judged (*OEWRB1*, p.39). A self-confessed devotee of sentimental authors such as Mackenzie and Sterne, Burns must also have been aware of the balance between being an individual of sensibility (of which melancholy can be considered an aspect) and the risks of being considered of unsound mind as a result of extreme passions. Thus, it can be argued that his engagement with *Theory of Moral Sentiments* awakens a realisation that, while it is virtuous to be seen to reflect upon one’s own nature, the dark introspection that accompanies his more severely lowered moods is something that runs the risk of societal disapprobation and is better hidden. This, arguably, is the ‘mask’ that Burns is seen to wear in his first visit to Edinburgh in the winter of 1786, as discussed in Ch.1. He performs ‘normal’ while in public (as attested in correspondence to Burns at the time) then retreats into himself, exhausted by the effort involved.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> L63, L66 and L78 are explicit examples of this.

<sup>289</sup> Smith, p.199.

<sup>290</sup> Letter from Rev. George Lawrie to Robert Burns, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1786. (Scott Douglas, pp.180–181).

The poem (K26 - 'Remorse') appended to the September 1783 entry in which Burns references Smith continues the theme of remorse, echoes Young's *Night Thoughts* and Beattie's *The Minstrel*, demonstrating that in his earliest writing in relation to his moods Burns drew on others to give him a voice (*OEWRB1*, pp.42, 317 n.25).<sup>291</sup> This continues into the next entry, dated March 1784, where Burns again writes K5 ('A Penitential thought, in the hour of Remorse') and alludes to Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in his lines (*OEWRB1*, pp.43, 317 n.27). Notably, however, when transcribing this particular entry in early 1791 for inclusion in the Glenriddell manuscripts, he annotates it 'Intended for a tragedy', indicating an ongoing awareness of the likely negative judgment to which he would be subject should there be any suspicion that these lines actually reflected his genuine mood state (*OEWRB1*, p.43).<sup>292</sup> These entries foreground the previously discussed correlation Burns draws between his mood and the season. In opening his commonplace book with such a focus on his mood state, particularly what might be considered more extreme examples of his lowered mood, and despite the intention that this be read by the 'curious observer', Burns indicates his pre-occupation with his mood state, his need for an outlet for these darker aspects of his character, and his awareness of the need to perform only what society will expect and want to see from an individual of his station and creative bent. Thus, as Leask notes, depression is 'the dark shadow' cast across the 'devil-may-care 'whimsical' self-portrait sketched' in the commonplace book (*OEWRB1*, p.35).

Within these various entries in his commonplace book, ideas which would pervade Burns's thinking about his mental health are evident. That he should turn to religion, nature and the reading material of his formative years as frames of reference should come as no surprise. Through the influence of his father, they were ever-present features in Burns's life: memories of his father's employment always relate to working the land as a gardener or a farmer; the catechism composed by William Burnes for his sons' religious schooling highlights the importance placed on living according to God's word; a corresponding

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<sup>291</sup> This and the other poems included at this point in the commonplace book will be examined more closely in Ch.5.

<sup>292</sup> The Glenriddell manuscripts are a collection of verse and letters transcribed for binding in two volumes as a gift for Burns's friend Capt. Robert Riddell.

emphasis is placed on education through school, private tuition and access to reading material, likely through the Ayr Library Society (L125; OEWRB1, pp.8, 12-16). This background provides Burns with a language as native as his Ayrshire dialect, and thus an initial facility for describing and exploring the nature and impact of his melancholy.

Although these entries illustrate Burns's earliest understanding of his melancholy and point to the manner in which they would continue to pervade his thinking in the years to follow, another entry written later in April 1784 sees him continue to dwell on the nature of an individual's temperament but from an altogether different angle. This may have been elicited by the death of his father only weeks earlier, particularly if his sister's later report of their father's deathbed concern for Burns's future is accurate.<sup>293</sup> This entry opens with the opinion that 'I think the whole species of young men be naturally enough divided in two grand Classes, which I shall call the Grave, and the Merry' (OEWRB1, p.49). He goes on to explain the Grave as those who wish 'to make a figure in the world' while the Merry 'follow the strong impulses of nature [...] generally, the men whose heads are capable of all the towerings of Genius, and whose hearts are warmed with the delicacy of Feeling' (OEWRB1, p.49). Burns does not refer to himself in relation to this distinction but it is not difficult to appreciate these words being written by the same man who would, on one hand, write 'I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas a Kempis or John Bunyan' and on the other 'if I could, & I believe I do it as far as I can, I would "wipe away all tears from all eyes."' (L62, L395). He is capable of understanding the standpoint of both the grave and the merry, of exercising what *Theory of Moral Sentiments* had defined as 'sympathy'. He recognises the intentions of both groups which underpin their actions and this writing can be argued to represent Burns's early attempts to reconcile the two poles of his temperament. While he considers gravity and mirth two natural states of being, in contrast to the induced nature of melancholy, this may also be the first hint that the young Burns considered his depression connected in some way with that pre-disposition to gravity, and that it can be magnified by circumstance.

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<sup>293</sup> Begg, p.32.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Burns lacks confidence in the ability of others to similarly sympathise, that society cannot appreciate the dual natures of his character and thus, will inappropriately judge the extremes which manifest themselves, particularly in assuming the depression is a display of melancholy exaggerated beyond what would be expected from a sensible, poetic individual. Consequently, what Burns performs in public, and in much of his correspondence, is only ever a shadow of his reality. Yet, Burns himself acknowledges that his understanding of the subject is immaturely formed, writing in the next entry four months later ‘The foregoing was to have been an elaborate dissertation on the various species of men; but as I cannot please myself in the arrangement of my ideas I must wait till farther experience, & nicer observation throw more light on the subject’ (*OEWRB1*, pp.49-50).

More light would be thrown by further episodes of both elevated and lowered mood states, and also by the arrival of Frances Dunlop in Burns’s life. As outlined in Ch.1 (Table 29), Dunlop was Burns’s most frequent correspondent, and notably so during periods of abnormal mood, pointing to the significant role she plays in Burns developing his psychological self-awareness. Within this relationship, he would gain an arena to share and discuss his experiences with a sympathetic friend (in both the Smithian and colloquial senses), allowing his ideas to evolve and become better ‘arranged’, giving him a better understanding of the mood disorder which affected him. Thus, the microcosm of the Burns-Dunlop correspondence can be seen to reflect key features of his wider experience.

## **Frances Anna Dunlop (1730-1815)**

Born in 1730, Frances Anna Wallace had married for love at the age of 18, essentially eloping with John Dunlop, a man 23 years her senior. She bore him thirteen children in a happy marriage which was brought to an end by his death in June 1785. Around the same time, the financial mismanagement of their eldest son Thomas had resulted in the sale of the Craigie lands, ancestral estate of the Wallace family; Frances was particularly proud of this family connection to patriot William Wallace, and the sale compounded the grief of her

widowhood, resulting in her descent in to lengthy period of what is likely to have been severe depression.<sup>294</sup>

In the latter half of 1786, as she was recovering from the depression, Dunlop was gifted a copy of *Poems*. She would later describe reading Burns's poetry, particularly 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', as 'an event to which I have since owed inestimable pleasure [...] at a time when nothing less powerful could have animated or interested me'.<sup>295</sup> Dunlop was so affected, she was compelled to make contact with the poet, initiating a correspondence and friendship that would endure until the poet's death ten years later. In that time, nearly 200 letters would pass between the two, Burns would visit Dunlop on at least five occasions, and he would name his second son Francis Wallace Burns in her honour.

Twenty-nine years Burns's senior, Dunlop was widowed, her sight and hearing already failing by the time of their initial introduction. Unlike the women who will be discussed in Chapter 4, Dunlop was never going to be a romantic prospect for Burns. While their letters spare us what M'Naught calls 'the verbal lava of the improvised Sylvander volcano', this is also likely the key reason that this relationship has been somewhat overlooked by lay and academic Burns communities alike.<sup>296</sup> But where the scandal of Agnes McLehose or the tragedy of Mary Campbell is missing, the friendship with Frances Dunlop involves a woman who became Burns's 'friend, confidante, correspondent, critic, advocate and

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<sup>294</sup> Lindsay, p.121. Dunlop's illness was so severe that her daughter Agnes is known to have consulted eminent Edinburgh physician William Cullen about possible treatments on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1786 <<http://www.cullenproject.ac.uk/docs/2895/>> [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018].

<sup>295</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.320.

<sup>296</sup> Duncan M'Naught, 'Mrs Dunlop: Burns's Candid Friend', *Burns Chronicle*, 1917, 5–26 (p.7). There does appear to have been early appreciation of Dunlop's importance to Burns, memorialised in poetic form by Anne Grant:

And when the wounds of Anguish bled,  
Thy kindness dropt the healing balm;  
And when the storm of Passion fled,  
Thy counsel breath'd the sacred calm.

And when Misfortune's tempest lowr'd,  
Thy kind assisting hand was near;  
And when Remorse its sorrows pour'd,  
'Twas thine to wipe the bitter tear.

Anne Grant, 'Addressed to Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop on reading Burns' Letters to that Lady', *Poems on Various Subjects* (Edinburgh: J. Moir, 1803), p.266. My thanks to Kirsteen McCue for bringing this poem to my attention.

surrogate mother'.<sup>297</sup> Her literariness, her encouragement of his ambition, her support for his creativity, and her constant concern for his health and well-being suggests her presence in his life was a welcome substitute for a dynamic missing in his relationship with his own mother. In turn, he provides her with support, empathy and advice during her own times of emotional difficulty.

Admittedly, the depth of relationship between Burns and Dunlop is initially unusual, given the disparity in age, status and situation between the two. However, it is easily explained by the friendship being forged in the shared experience of extreme emotional turmoil. Dunlop's openness about her experience of mental illness and the positive role of Burns's poetry in her healing process creates a space for Burns to discuss his own disordered mood. Dunlop became someone to whom Burns turned in both phases of his bipolarity, and notably someone with whom he shared feelings that he hid from other correspondents around the same time. As might be expected however, explicit discussion of his moods with Dunlop tend to cluster around his experience of lowered moods and depression. This correlates with their shared experience of such episodes and with Burns likely feeling less need for her support during the periods of positivity and well-being associated with times of elevated mood.

While there is evidence of Burns sharing his feelings with Dunlop in the early months of the friendship, it is no more than that which he also shares with other correspondents (*L62-67*). Arguably, it is Dunlop's response to the autobiographical letter to Dr Moore which really seals the nature of the friendship, showing it to be built on a mutual understanding of what it means to be truly melancholic, not simply fashionably affected. Dunlop was already friendly with Moore and his wife, so it was she who first introduced the poet to the doctor. Thus, Burns sent the autobiographical letter first to Dunlop, allowing her to read it before forwarding it on, even though he was sure that it would give her a poor impression of her new friend (*L124*). Her response, however, could not be more different. Picking up the melancholic mindset in which he wrote, and the further impact that dwelling on the past might have provoked, she is sensitive and comforting

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<sup>297</sup> Lindsay, p.121.

You said I would laugh at you, but you know me not. I am more akin to the crying than the laughing philosopher [...] my feelings, tho' strongly marked, were of the tragic comic kind, but never for one moment indifferent enough to become a farce.<sup>298</sup>

But she goes further than this; she draws on her own experiences of disordered mood, her own knowledge that such deep melancholy cannot simply be shaken off, that it is a battle to be fought. She reassures him that his aim of gaining financial independence and poetic fame is a 'noble one', but counsels him that while it 'stands clearly within your stretch' he must beware that

past success, sanguine hope, and dissipated company don't make you indolent, alter your original character, or strengthen that hypochondriac tint which has already tinged your constitution, and which, where it once enters, requires every exertion both of body and mind to throw it off.<sup>299</sup>

In this motherly advice, Dunlop recognises that Burns is not affected by fashion but by a truly debilitating condition which might be worsened by external influences and which cannot simply be shaken off. Burns knows he has found a sympathiser, a kindred spirit, someone who understands the daily psychological battle of keeping the blue devils at bay, and the sheer physical exhaustion that can arise when they do overcome him. He has found a place to explore his mental health, to shape a 'more pleasing arrangement' of his ideas which allow him to rationalise and reconcile its place within his life, and to broaden the range of correspondents with whom he discusses his temperament, although it should be remembered that this number still remains fairly limited within the context of more than 200 different correspondents addressed by Burns's letters.

Typical of the candid manner in which Burns would write to Dunlop about his melancholy, and her astute but subtle responses which supported the development of his thinking and acceptance of his condition, is the correspondence between the two during Burns's depression in the winter of 1789/90. Within these letters are characteristic references to religion, nature and writing as therapy which would combine in Burns's understanding of his

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<sup>298</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.28.

<sup>299</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.28.

melancholy and its place within his life, including its role as part of his creative temperament.

### **‘Groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous System’**

By winter 1789, Burns is living with his wife Jean and their two small sons, Robert and Francis, on the poor soils of Ellisland Farm. Financial strain has led to Burns securing a position within the government Excise service, where he has been assigned a division of ten parishes; thus, as well as his farm responsibilities, he is now riding at least 200 miles weekly and completing three different sets of accounts daily. Life is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding as he balances these competing priorities with family life.

On 13<sup>th</sup> December, Burns writes to Dunlop

I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous System [...] For near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous head-ach [*sic*], that I have been obliged to give up for a time my Excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir Parishes.

(L374)

The strains of farm and Excise duties, financial worries and a new baby have taken their toll and the melancholy to which Burns was prone has consumed him. As Burns continues, the depth of this depression and the manner in which it affects his daily life is appreciable

today in the luxuriance of health [...] in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, loaded with conscious painful being [...] Day follows night, and night comes after day, only to curse him with life which gives him no pleasure...

(L374)

By his own account, he will quickly, and without warning, be overcome by the stresses of events and slide into depression typified by anhedonia and a bleakly

pessimistic outlook. This outlook, however, is not limited to the prospect of a life without pleasure. He continues on to a morbid rumination of the nature of the afterlife he might face

Can it be possible that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence! When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more [...] shall I yet be warm in life, seeing and seen, enjoying & enjoyed?

(L374)

He toys with the idea that the afterlife might be ‘one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind’ and that he may never have the chance of a reunion with his father, his friend or his ‘ever dear MARY’ (L374).<sup>300</sup> For Burns, the certainty of a happy afterlife wavers in the face of his melancholy, victim to the irrational pessimism of the condition, and indicative of the distance Burns feels it puts between him and his God.

That he cannot find comfort in his faith at this time is testament to the degree of disturbance in Burns’s mindset. Only three months earlier, in September 1789, he had written to soothe Dunlop’s own anxieties, telling her ‘Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence’ (L362). The following year, he would offer comfort again following the untimely death of Dunlop’s son-in-law, exclaiming ‘A WORLD TO COME! is the only genuine balm for an agonising heart’ (L403). Such declarations echo his sentiments in one of the earliest letters written to Dunlop; in correcting a mistaken impression she had formed of him, Burns writes

Religion, my honored Madam, has not only been all my life my chief dependence, but my dearest enjoyment [...] an irreligious Poet, is a Monster.

(L198)

He had also previously reported to others that while

the tints of my mind [vie] with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm [...] I have taken tooth and nail to the bible [...] It is really a glorious book.

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<sup>300</sup> ‘MARY’ is thought to refer to Mary Campbell (Highland Mary), with whom it is speculated Burns was planning to emigrate to the West Indies.

(L160)

and that

...in the pensive hours of [...] “Philosophic Melancholy” [...] I have often admired Religion. - In proportion as we are wrung with grief, or distracted with anxiety, the ideas of a compassionate Deity, and Almighty Protector, are doubly dear.—

(L181)

Such exhortations of the value of religion, and particularly the prospect of a happy afterlife, while in a rational state of mind is testament to the irrationality of thought exhibited by Burns in the winter of 1789. This impact, however, plays a role in shaping Burns’s understanding of his condition. He appears to realise that such thinking runs counter to his usual reasoning, and that it is the depression which is the source of this disorder. This has moved beyond the ‘melancholy cast’ he mentions in his commonplace book, telling Dunlop ‘I am a good deal inclined to think with those who maintain that what are called nervous affectations are in fact diseases of the mind’ (L374). Burns uses a form of the word ‘disease’ three times in this letter, suggesting something stronger than a good deal of inclination to this way of thinking. Defining his condition in this way is a direct contrast to the cultural impression of such conditions being fashionable displays of sensibility or pretences to genius. In recognising this, however, Burns not only shifts the frame of reference for his condition from one of fashion to one of mental illness, but also from something easily resolved to something which requires treatment.<sup>301</sup> Thus, Burns is affected not only by a ‘disease of the mind’ but by a ‘dis-easing’ of the mind - his thinking is unsettled, he is further unsettled by his realisation of this, by his apparent inability to correct it by his usual means, and by what this may mean for him in the long term. As a result, there is a tone of both shame and helplessness when he confesses to Dunlop

I cannot reason, I cannot think; & but to You, I would not venture to write any thing above an order to a Cobler. [*sic*]- You have felt too

<sup>301</sup> Arguably, it also signals Burns’s contemplation of the connection between his physical and mental health, a point which would be raised again when he reports ‘melancholy and low spirits are half my disease’ (L705).

much of the ills of life not to sympathise with a diseased wretch who is impaired more than half of any faculties he possessed.

(L374)

This sense of shame is amplified within the context of letters to others written in the following weeks, where Burns goes no further than to say, 'I have been so ill, my ever dear Friend, that I have not been able to go over the threshold of my door since I saw you' or to tell his brother that his 'nerves are in a damnable State' (L375, L381). Burns clearly feels this particular illness is something which cannot be fully discussed and described with just anyone, but only with someone he feels will sympathise without judgement, someone such as Frances Dunlop who has experienced such melancholy herself.

### **'Trade winds', 'mad tornadoes' and 'lurid fog'**

The letters written by Dunlop in November and December 1789 clearly illustrate that Burns's willingness to discuss his mental health with her is grounded in their shared experience of extreme mental disorder - her reactions are sympathetic and non-judgemental, while also working to modify Burns's attitude to his mood disorder to one of acceptance.

Burns wrote to Dunlop on 8<sup>th</sup> November complaining of 'a most violent cold [...] a stuffing, aching head and an unsound, sickly crasis' and would not write again until the 'groaning miseries' letter of 13<sup>th</sup> December (L371).<sup>302</sup> Perhaps alerted by Burns's inclusion of the newly composed 'Thou lingering star, with lessening ray', Dunlop rightly deduces that Burns is sliding into a melancholic episode.<sup>303</sup> She would write twice between Burns's two letters, on 25<sup>th</sup> November and 11<sup>th</sup> December, both letters seeking to comfort his disturbed mind; the first offers a verse epistle with the wish 'my rhymes could divert melancholy from your mind

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<sup>302</sup> While 'crasis' may initially appear to be a mis-spelling of 'crisis', it is a now-obsolete term for one's constitution.

<sup>303</sup> See K274 ('Thou lingering Star with lessening ray') for full text of the poem which sees Burns allegedly dwell on the loss of Mary Campbell. Its composition was reportedly inspired by the third anniversary of either Campbell's death or Burns being notified of the fact (Mackay (2004), p.461).

as yours has often done from mine’, while the second directly addresses the ‘deepening channel of one over-powering stream of long-felt sorrow’.<sup>304</sup>

In writing these words, Dunlop talks to the therapeutic nature of writing, which will be further explored later in the chapter, and to Burns’s understanding of, and affinity for, nature. She seems to pre-empt Burns’s focus on disease and the unnatural nature of his melancholy in his letter of the 13<sup>th</sup> December, written and sent before he would receive her letter of the 11<sup>th</sup>.

She develops the image of his depression being a powerful and irresistible natural force, such as that of water cutting a channel as it flows towards the sea, acknowledging ‘there is no doubt moments when we fancy the channel deepened to an unfathomable abyss’.<sup>305</sup> Her use of the plural ‘we’ reminds Burns of their shared experience, that she writes from a position of first-hand knowledge and, thus, that she entirely understands the helplessness he feels in the face of the current pulling him down into the darkness of depression. However, Dunlop goes on to extend the watery metaphor, explaining that ‘the truth is that time and nature is constantly filling it up, and smoothing the banks to an easie, nay in some degree a pleasant ascent’.<sup>306</sup>

In writing of Burns’s difficulties in this manner, she reframes the emotions, as unpleasant and unwanted as they are, as natural occurrences; like water they can be smooth and calm or turbulent and dangerous. Both states are equally natural in origin, and neither is permanent. What Dunlop also achieves in taking this line of description is to remind Burns that he too has viewed his disordered mood in natural terms in the past, that he too has recognised it as an integral part of himself, and that he should do so again.

The earliest evidence of Burns connecting his moods with seasonality, as previously discussed, is to be found in his commonplace book where he draws parallels between his melancholy and the winter months (*OEWRB1*, pp.44-45). It is a connection which, arguably, becomes even more powerful in Burns’s mind as

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<sup>304</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, pp.224, 227.

<sup>305</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.227.

<sup>306</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.227.

time passes. This is perhaps never more fully evoked than in his letters written in the winter of 1793, as November turned to December.

As another episode of depression approaches, he writes to Maria Riddell

here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a damn'd mélange of Fretfulness & melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion; nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing & fluttering round her tenement, like a wild Finch caught amid the horrors of winter & newly thrust into a cage.

(L600A)

Like the finch in its cage, Burns feels a sense of entrapment and powerlessness in the face of his moods. This is combined with the image of feeling 'Novemberish', in which Burns captures the sense of the unpredictable weather at that time of year. Some days are calm, clear and sharp while others are brooding and bleak, and as midwinter approaches there is the knowledge that the worst is yet to come, capturing a sense of his mood state at the time. This language of association powerfully conveys Burns's own understanding of his moods, that the unpredictability of his day-to-day mindset will inevitably lead into another episode of melancholy, just as November's progression inevitably leads towards December.

Burns captures this inevitability, and further demonstrates the capacity for natural language to act as an effective tool for understanding and describing his mood disorder, when he writes to Dunlop within a fortnight, reporting 'I am in a compleat Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the deity of Dullness herself could wish' (L605). The turbulence and unpredictability of November has progressed to the bleak, isolating darkness of December. Accompanying this depression is a morbid pessimism triggered by the life-threatening illness of his daughter; as the year is dying, Burns dwells on his own death and the consequences thereof for his family. The letter remains unfinished and unsent, the potential contents perhaps too much for Burns to commit to paper, even for the closest and most sympathetic of all his correspondents.

Yet, as December heralds the beginning of a new year and the approaching springtime rebirth, so too does Burns emerge from his depression. Within a week

of his 'Decemberishness', he writes with a renewed vigour, having been 'unable to command half an hour to finish this letter' and recounting how his reading of the battle of Bannockburn inspired the composition of 'Scots wha hae' (L605). The implication is that it is the busyness of his Excise duties and the burst of activity as he emerges from his depression that has kept him from finishing his epistle. No explicit reference is made to the preceding depression, however, signalling that this was not considered an unusual state of affairs and again indicating Burns's acceptance that this is the natural course of his disordered mood. Again, as Dunlop had reminded him in 1789, such episodes are not permanent.

It is not, however, only his melancholy that Burns associates with the progress of the annual cycle of seasons and months, and thus with the 'naturalness' of their occurrence. In his autobiographical letter to Dr Moore he recounts the teenage summer spent learning the craft of surveying, commenting 'I went on with a high hand in my Geometry till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom' (L125). Burns acknowledges both the propensity for periods of elevated moods and the seasonal nature of such episodes; placing them in the month of Virgo - 23<sup>rd</sup> August to 22<sup>nd</sup> September - situates them in that autumnal period previously identified in Ch.1 as a time during which Burns was more likely to experience abnormally elevated moods.<sup>307</sup> In referring to the carnival of Virgo, it is no great leap to connect the sense of celebration and abundance as the farming year culminates in the gathering of a successful harvest with the elevated mood Burns experiences at that time of year. He reports similar experiences in writing to Dunlop on New Year's Day, 1789. The letter is full of cheer and good wishes for his friend in the coming year, while also discussing how his own elevated moods appear connected to the months and seasons, rather than to the set times dictated by the church. Thus, he finds his spirits raised by 'the first Sunday of May; a breezy, blue-skyed noon some time about the beginning, & a hoary morning & calm sunny day about the end, of Autumn', describing how 'these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of Holidays [...] to laugh or cry, be cheerful or pensive, moral or devout, according to the mood & tense of the Season & Myself.—' (L293). Just as he has previously

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<sup>307</sup> Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Zodiac', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2017) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/zodiac>> [accessed 4 September 2017].

acknowledged the association between winter and his melancholy, he pinpoints spring and autumn as times of elevated mood, bearing out the evidence generated in Section 1 which suggests a seasonal component to the timing of his periods of elevated mood and hypomania, and correlating with the stronger association between bipolar disorder and seasonal variation than is evident for unipolar depression.

Thus, we see Burns understand his disordered mood within the context of the seasonal climates of the yearly cycle. It paints a broad picture of the course of his mood disorder, creating a sense of predictability in the occurrence of his episodes of abnormal mood. Yet, this is likely not the full picture. Just as the year will have broadly predictable weather patterns at particular points, on a day-to-day basis there are individual variations which may run counter to the expected weather for the particular time of year, such as the New Year's day cheeriness described above. Likewise, Burns also evidences an awareness of an almost day-to-day instability in his moods at times, and this awareness he also presents in terms of natural cycles, in this case drawing on the shorter periods of the lunar cycle, perhaps again echoing his invocation of the month of Virgo as particular time for elevated spirits.

Burns writes to good friend Richard Brown in December 1787 to congratulate him on his recent marriage. While expecting, on their next meeting, to find Brown altered, 'the wild, bold, generous young fellow, composed into the steady affectionate husband, and the fondly careful Parent', Burns describes himself as

just the same will-o'-wisp being I used to be. - About the first, and the fourth quarters of the moon, I generally set in for the trade-winds of wisdom; but about the full, and the change, I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes, which blow me into chaos.—

(L168)

He presents a picture of a man who, at times, experiences moods rapidly shifting from high to low, shifts which he is unable to control and cannot stop, but which are self-limiting in their duration. While this gives a clearer picture of some of the day-to-day mood states experienced by Burns outwith periods of clinically abnormal mood, it also gives a valuable insight into Burns's understanding of his mood disorder. Again, there is no sense of him feeling this is an unnatural state

but, rather, an integral component of his temperament and, again, there is an implicit acknowledgement that such extremes of mood are temporary states.

Also notable about the description given to Brown is Burns's employment of weather conditions to draw the contrast between two mood states - the consistent and purposeful direction of trade winds contrasting with the chaotic disturbance of tornadoes, also interestingly described as 'mad'. Thus, he draws a stark contrast between two mood states, between the state of normality and the chaos of elevated or hypomanic states, through the use of contrast between calm and stormy seas, particularly apt in light of Brown's profession as a ship's captain.<sup>308</sup>

Stormy weather is, again, an image encountered on several occasions in Burns's descriptions of his mood. While in this instance, it related to his elevated moods, only weeks earlier he had referred to his melancholy in similar terms. Immobilisation due to a dislocated kneecap as a result of a carriage accident had left him housebound and his 'mind vying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm' (*L160*). Again, Burns calls on the image of the disruptive turbulence of stormy weather to establish a picture of his mental state, just as he did in that very earliest writing in his commonplace book (*OEWRB1*, pp.44-45). Clearly, this is an important image for Burns, something he feels effectively explains his understanding and experience of disordered mood.

As evidenced in the commonplace book, he also appears to make a connection between the incidence of such weather and the occurrence of disordered mood, such is the power of the connection in his mind. Thus, in September 1788, he writes to Dunlop '[t]he tremendous thunder-storm of yesternight & the lurid fogs of this morning have driven me, for refuge from the Hypochondria which I fear worse than the devil' (*L267A*). Yet, just as the storm and the fog cannot be escaped, there is a sense that Burns recognises the inevitability of stormy

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<sup>308</sup> In keeping with Burns's tendency to only discuss his melancholy with very close friends, particularly Dunlop, and Brown's previous role as a drinking companion, it is likely to have been a conscious choice on Burns's part to describe normal and elevated mood states while omitting mention of his depression.

emotions and foggy thinking - he dreads its coming but knows he is powerless to stop it.

The progress of the lunar cycle and the seasons, the whirling tornado, oncoming storm, the rolling fog - all present a picture of Burns's developing understanding of his disordered mood as something unavoidable but also something of nature. The images of whirling tornadoes and carnivals which related to the elevated moods of hypomania suggest excitement, exhilaration and unbounded energy. In contrast, the more destructive images of storms point to a feeling of his melancholy being similarly destructive, destroying his ability to think and to function. When Dunlop writes in December 1789, making reference to the 'unfathomable abyss', it is clear that she too understands the inescapable blackness of depression, the struggle to find direction, just as one might struggle to find direction in a thunder-storm or rolling fog.

What also comes through in these images, however, is the sense that they are naturally created. Thus, it is notable when Burns turns to discussion of 'disease' and the implication of something aberrant which requires cure, as he does in the letter to Dunlop in December 1789. He also refers to his 'diseased state of body and mind' in his letter to Dr Moore, which Dunlop also read (*L125*). She could not have known of the content of Burns's letters of 13<sup>th</sup> December but, perhaps fearing the worst as a result of his silence since early November, her own letter of 11<sup>th</sup> December seems a conscious effort to comfort Burns by reminding him of the natural origins of his disordered mood. While melancholy is effectively represented by the 'unfathomable abyss', she extends the metaphor to draw attention to the fact that the same roiling water which carved out the abyss would also smooth the river banks and create a calm and easy flow towards to sea.<sup>309</sup> In doing so, not only does she remind Burns that the turbulent flow will diminish, she also seems to tap into watery images which carry particular resonance for Burns.

Water appears regularly in his creative works, even forming the central concern in some compositions, pointing to the inspirational quality it held for Burns. Dunlop was aware of this, having been recipient of a draft of 'The Banks of Nith'

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<sup>309</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.227.

in August 1788 (L265).<sup>310</sup> In bringing this image of the water, Dunlop has recalled for Burns the connection between his moods and nature, that they are a part of him and that they will come to pass. Crucially, however, she now comes to the climax of her argument: ‘delicate minds of strong sensibility may frequently create horrors to themselves from retrospective views of their life’.<sup>311</sup> The employment of the watery image of the abyss and the river used in conjunction with reference to his sensibility, a vital component of the success of his creative output and pivotal in Dunlop first making contact with Burns, inextricably links his moods with his creative ability. She finishes with the hope that ‘for you, and for myself too, that our woes, whatever they are or may be, shall dispel like a thunderstorm or the horrid mist I now sit in at Loudon Castle’.<sup>312</sup> Thus, upon reading, Burns is steered away from the thinking that his disordered mood, and particularly his melancholy, is a disease requiring medical attention, and towards the idea that it is not only an integral part of his character but a natural consequence, perhaps vital component, of his creative temperament. Thus the earlier shift in thinking shown in Burns’s commonplace-book discussion of the ‘Grave’ and the ‘Merry’ is validated, allowing an increasing acceptance of the nature of his condition.

### **‘Delicate minds of strong sensibility’**

Dunlop, on several occasions, accuses Burns of not reading her letters in their entirety.<sup>313</sup> It would seem evident, however, that he not only read but took to heart her letter of 11<sup>th</sup> December 1789. While Burns has previously contemplated the nature of man, his theory on the ‘Grave’ and the ‘Merry’ as laid out in his commonplace book being an early example, he has relatively little to say on the

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<sup>310</sup> See also *K257* ('Afton Water') or *K174* ('Written with a Pencil, standing by the Fall of Fyres, near Loch Ness') as other examples of water as poetic inspiration. Burns has also been shown to use water-related language in reference to his mood than is typical for his time, and that this is particularly associated with his lowered mood states. (Moirra Hansen and Natalie Finlayson, "Adrift after some wayward pursuit": a literary and corpus-linguistic analysis of Robert Burns's use of water-related language in relation to mood and mood disorder', paper presented at annual conference of Société Française d'Études Écossaises, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2018).

<sup>311</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.227.

<sup>312</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.228.

<sup>313</sup> See her letter of 21<sup>st</sup> March 1794 (Wallace, Burns, and Dunlop, p.400) for one such example.

poetic temperament generally, or as it specifically applies to himself, beyond his previous comment on the monstrosity of an irreligious poet (*OEWRB1*, pp.49-51; *L198*). It seems, therefore, more than coincidental that within months of Dunlop's letter, he writes explicitly about the poetic temperament and that in doing so, he employs images of nature and particularly of the calm and soothing nature of water.

As shown in Ch.1, the summer of 1790 was a period of pervasively elevated mood for Burns, punctuated by at least one episode of hypomania towards the end of August. Various incidents from the summer occupy his mind and time - the pregnancies of Jean Armour and Anna Park, the workload of the Excise, the responsibilities of the farm, even the supernatural tales of Alloway Kirk which he had sent to Francis Grose - all of which may, in their own ways, feed into the production of 'Tam o Shanter'.<sup>314</sup> Among these, there is also a resonance of Dunlop's counsel from the previous winter, and this makes itself evident in Burns's letter to Helen Craik, dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 1790, only a fortnight or so before the onset of that episode of hypomania.

Although he seems not to have previously acknowledged the fact, in this letter Burns admits '[i]t is often a reverie of mine, when I am disposed to be melancholy, the characters & fates of the Rhyming tribe' (*L413*). Such contemplation seems to focus on the imbalance between a poet's need for money and his inability to earn it, but Burns quite firmly grounds this in a poet's affinity for nature

Take a being of our kind; give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which will ever between them engender a more ungovernable set of Passions, that the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as, arranging wild-flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of wanton butterflies - in short set him adrift after some wayward pursuit.

(*L413*)

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<sup>314</sup> A fuller analysis of 'Tam o Shanter' in relation to Burns's mental health is undertaken in Chapter 5.

Lifting Dunlop's phrasing almost *verbatim*, he refers to the strong minds and delicate sensibility which mark out those of a poetic temperament. He draws on the idea of nature as an inspiration, specifically invoking echoes of Dunlop's use of water images, likening creativity to being cast off on some meandering stream to be carried wherever the water might go; nature combines with imagination and sensibility in a heady but pleasurable mixture of poetic passion. It is the reality of life - the need to earn money on which to live - which gets in the way of this; poetry doesn't pay enough so such meandering must be abandoned for purposeful employment. While the conflict between such a temperament and the necessities of life creates a 'wight nearly as miserable as a Poet', it is redeemed by the 'fairy pleasures the Muse, to counterbalance this catalogue of evils, bestows on her Votaries' (L413). Thus, Burns appears to acknowledge the connection between his bipolar character and his poetic temperament - the horrendous difficulties of the downs triggered by adverse life events, the exhilarating rewards of the creativity triggered by upwards shifts in mood, either in recovery from a lowered mood or as he moved towards an abnormally elevated mood state. In stark contrast to the 'disease' that afflicted him eight months previously, he again acknowledges the natural origins of his disordered mood and the temporary nature of such episodes, demonstrating his developed understanding through assimilation of the counsel provided by Dunlop.

### **'The poignancy of your expression soothed my soul'**

That Burns should incorporate Dunlop's thinking into his own is testament to the value he placed on their relationship as a means of mediating his understanding of the tempestuousness of his mood. However, it is also clear that, for Burns, the relationship itself served an important function in managing his condition. As well as giving him frames of reference for the description of his disordered mood, it provided him with a space in which to give full vent to the severity of his episodes, particularly those involving lowered mood. While Section 3 of the thesis will undertake a fuller examination of the connection between his mental health and his creative output, further examination of the Dunlop

correspondence sheds valuable light on the way in which Burns uses this friendship as a means of managing his mood disorder.

As previously noted, the Burns-Dunlop friendship was initiated as a result of the therapeutic value Dunlop found in Burns's poetry. Although several of the early letters in the sequence have been lost, Dunlop would repeatedly refer to the comfort and uplifting of spirits she felt on reading the contents of the Kilmarnock edition. Key to establishing the safe space where Burns feels he can fully express his emotions, regardless of how bleak, is Dunlop's response to reading his autobiographical letter. In the letter, Burns writes of when he 'first committed the sin of RHYME', explaining '[t]hus with me began Love and Poesy; which at times have been my only, and till within this last twelvemonth have been my highest enjoyment' (*L125*). Picking up on this and the accounts of his difficult times both in farming and in Irvine through his teens and early twenties, Dunlop begins to piece together Burns's creative jigsaw, realising that many of the poems in his Kilmarnock edition are written as a consequence of negative life events, particularly his episode of hypochondria in Irvine, giving those of a darker or more melancholic tone an even more powerful emotional underpinning. But she has also realised that, for Burns, poetic creativity is sometimes a therapeutic activity, a means of exploring and coming to terms with what is going on inside his head and his heart. She validates his actions in her reply, telling him that 'since you have encouraged me to scribble rhyme or reason just as they come uppermost, I have found a great relief from doing it, and both my health and spirits are gainers'.<sup>315</sup> In this response, Dunlop makes clear to Burns that their correspondence is not only a space where he can lay out his emotions without fear of judgement, whether in prose or in poetry, but that he should do so as writing is clearly something he feels benefit from, again demonstrating her ability to sympathise with his standpoint without being seen to judge it. Undoubtedly, Burns realises this, and the consequence is his increasingly open discussion of his mental health with Dunlop.

While this increased openness alongside the relative frequency with which he writes to Dunlop during times of abnormal mood represents an implicit

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<sup>315</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.30.

acknowledgement of the benefit to his mental health, Burns also makes it explicitly clear. For example, on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1788 he writes to her

A physical potion to expel a slight indisposition, with my increasing Cares in this, as yet, Strange country - gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of Futurity - consciousness of my own inability for the struggle of the world - my broaden'd mark to Misfortune in a Wife & children - I could indulge these, nay they press for indulgence, till my humour would ferment into the most acid vinegar of Chagrin, that would corrode the very thread of Life.—

To counterwork these baneful feelings, I have sat down to write to you; as I declare upon my soul, I always find *that* the most sovereign balm under Heaven for my wounded Spirit.—

(L264)

While turning to alcohol might ward off the 'gloomy conjectures', Burns does not yet feel them sufficiently severe to justify the horrendous after-effects he will suffer. As previously discussed in this chapter, he is also very serious about the subject of his soul, such that swearing an oath on it might be considered no small matter, thus emphasising the sincerity of his words - Dunlop's friendship, and the outlet its correspondence provides, is good for both his physical and mental health.

Again, only two weeks later, he similarly finds himself seeking 'refuge from the Hypochondria which I fear worse than the devil'; having turned first to complete his address to Robert Graham of Fintry, he has 'this present minute sat down to give you [Dunlop] a copy of it' (L267A). Between these letters of 16<sup>th</sup> August and 5<sup>th</sup> September, Burns also writes a further relatively lengthy letter to Dunlop to offer her comfort, in the form of both words and poetry, as she is affected by an episode of melancholy herself. He urges that 'you write me ever so short a scrap to inform me if you are getting rid of that ugly Distemper' before attempting to 'quit this disagreeable subject' by sharing 'The Banks of Nith, the 'first Compliment [he has] paid the Nith' since moving to Ellisland, and 'The Mauchline Wedding', a humorous piece first written in 1785. Both pieces, 'trifles' as Burns describes them, are intended to help lift her spirits, to provide 'more exhilarating moments' than she has recently experienced.

He undertakes a similar role in the autumn of 1792 when Dunlop is devastated by the death of her daughter Susan. Interestingly, at this time, Burns is again seen to assimilate Dunlop's previous advice. In this instance, Burns states 'consolation I have none to offer, except that which religion holds out to children of affliction' (L512). He acknowledges the pain of losing a child, which he would have understood only too well, and the compounding pain on being left in grief while '[t]he world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence. His next letter continues on the vein of such suffering being godly, particularly in quoting lines from Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora*, that true virtue comes from tempests and rough winds, and the privilege of trial (L524).

Knowing that Dunlop's faith is as important to her as his is to him, Burns offers spiritual consolation in the face of her loss, illustrating it with now familiar natural images of stormy weather, how 'the tempest comes,/ The rough winds rage aloud; when from thus helm/ This virtue shrinks, & in a corner lies/Lamenting', pointing to his understanding that these events run the risk of sending her into a further episode of melancholy (L524). Aside from his explicit confirmation of the value of their relationship in his management of his mood, this exchange implicitly demonstrates Burns's acknowledgement that there is a mutual understanding of experience on both sides of this friendship and, in offering his concern and comfort, he is determined to afford Dunlop the same therapeutic relief as he has gained from her over the years.

### **'A friendship dearest to my soul'**

In 1795, despite the mutually supportive nature of the friendship, it appears to have fractured. The reason for this is unclear but may be related to Burns's criticism of John Moore and his politics, and Burns's own support for the French revolutionaries in his letter written across 20<sup>th</sup> December 1794 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 1795 which upset Dunlop (L649). She did write to Burns from London on 12<sup>th</sup> January, asking that he send news of 'how you and all yours are' but it may be

the case that she had not yet received Burns's letter before writing this.<sup>316</sup> Whatever the root cause, Dunlop's side of the correspondence falls silent. It is enough that Burns writes in a letter dated 'Midsummer 1795' that he was surprised not to have heard from her (L683). By 31<sup>st</sup> January 1796, having still received nothing from Dunlop he confesses 'what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess' (L688). He goes on to plead that she 'be so obliging, dear Madam, as to condescend on that my offence which you seem determined to punish with a deprivation of that friendship which once was [*illegible*] source of my highest enjoyments?' What is clear, however, is that he needs his confidante and counsellor: 'Alas! Madam, ill can I afford, at this time, to be deprived of any of the small remnants of my pleasures. – I have lately drank deep of the cup of affliction.' This is indeed a time of great emotional stress for Burns - he and Jean have lost their daughter Elizabeth, and he has been seriously ill himself with what he identifies as rheumatic fever. Burns knows that Dunlop would sympathise and empathise better than any other person within his circle of friends and acquaintances, that she would recognise he is at high risk of slipping into another episode of depression. Yet Dunlop does not answer. The break between Burns and Dunlop is near irreparable.

It is only Burns's impending death that can overcome her anger. On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1796, he would write to her one final time. Absolutely clear that he is no longer in her good graces yet desperate to make amends to her, he lays out baldly that his illness 'will speedily send me beyond that bourne whence no traveller returns' (L702). He declares her acquaintance over the years to have been 'a friendship dearest to my soul[...]The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart!' These are terms which he uses for no other person in his wide range of correspondents, further testimony to the value and place of the friendship within his life. She is known to have relented, writing to Burns one last time before he died on 21<sup>st</sup> July, although the letter is not known to have survived so her final words to the poet remain between the two.

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<sup>316</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, pp.414–18.

## Conclusion

Focusing on Burns's friendship with Frances Dunlop, which is underpinned by an extensive correspondence, has given new insight into Burns's own understanding of his mental health, as well as a novel examination of the nature of the relationship itself as a mutually supportive arena for managing mood disorder. By concentrating on his most frequent choice of correspondent during times of emotional disorder, the examination has shown that Burns came to understand his mood disorder as something innate but with the potential for aggravation by external factors.

His commonplace book shows that his earliest writings relating to his mental health, particularly to his melancholy, were framed in terms of religion, nature and some of the available reading material, all of which would have been constant features from his earliest childhood memories. He attempts to make sense of them using frames of reference which are familiar to him, but making clear that he sees his disordered moods being precipitated by external factors rather than being an inherent part of his temperament. Through his correspondence with Dunlop, he found an older, more experienced partner who sympathised with his experiences and who could guide him in developing his language, and thus his ability to clarify his understanding in relation to his mood disorder. As a result, Burns is able to rationalise his condition within the context of his life. He combines the language and images employed by Dunlop with those of his own immature writings, using them to demonstrate how effectively and accurately they capture his experience.

At times, his abnormal moods are enjoyable and invigorating, others are disruptive and disturbing. At its most severe, he views his melancholy as a disease in need of treatment. With the support of Dunlop, however, he reconciles them as a natural aspect of his character, although they may be aggravated by external stressors. He also comes to regard them as an essential component of his creativity. He understands that the highs and lows are two sides of the same coin, and he also appreciates that the episodes, no matter how severe, are transient states, that the vast majority of the time his mood is not so disturbed that it impairs his day-to-day living, as is borne out by the evidence generated in Ch.1.

What also becomes evident is that Burns finds therapeutic value in his correspondence with Dunlop. Not only does she provide a means of developing the terms in which he can discuss his mental health, she provides a sympathetic arena in which he can fully express himself without fear of reproach, disgrace or accusations of fashionable affectation. She validates his emotional experiences while simultaneously providing comfort and counsel, something which is not seen to any great extent in any of Burns's other correspondences. She encourages him to use his writing as an emotional outlet, reminding him of the role his poetry played in her own recovery, thus highlighting the role of shared experience as part of the recovery process.

Although he could be an unreliable correspondent and she would often chide him for not writing more frequently, his distress at her silence throughout 1795 is palpable. Reconciled in the final weeks of Burns's life, the tremulous script of his final letter to Dunlop bears witness to the effort required to write and thus the importance he placed on their friendship and on Dunlop knowing how highly he regarded her. The nature and content of their letters, in giving him the means with which to express himself fully, gave him a safe space and sage counsellor in which to make sense of himself.

## Chapter 4 – Impact of unstable mood on Burns's life

Chapter 3 examined Burns's understanding of his disordered moods, and some of the ways in which he expressed and developed that understanding. This chapter will now turn to the connection between Burns's disordered moods and their potential impact on key aspects of his life.

In choosing which aspects to inspect more closely, it is logical to focus on those areas which have come to define 'Burns the man' in the public consciousness. Known from an early stage in his poetic career as the 'heaven-taught ploughman', Burns is inextricably linked with his farming background. In later years, he combines his song collecting with his tax collecting as an officer of the Government Excise service. These two professions shape Burns's life, playing a significant part in determining his place of residence. Thus, exploring those points in time where Burns is making choices related to his place of residence and/or his employment, and how they may have been influenced by his mood state, can be justified as a rational choice of focus for further developing this novel perspective on Burns's life.

Similarly, Burns is clearly defined within the public consciousness as a man who enjoyed both alcohol and women. As discussed in the General Introduction, while there is unambiguous evidence for his relationships with a range of women, his reputation as an excessive drinker is grounded in rumours circulating around the time of his death and by the contents of the early biographies of Heron and Currie. Thus, it is also entirely appropriate that the assertions made regarding Burns's drinking and various relationships be reviewed within the context of his mood state.

As with Section 1 of the thesis, examination of these aspects of Burns's life will principally focus on the period from November 1786 to his death in July 1796, to correlate with those years for which there is more abundant evidence relating to his mental health. In keeping with the conservative approach taken through the thesis, this chapter will focus exclusively on primary testimony from Burns, from those who knew him in life, and on corroborated accounts.

## **‘His course does hameward bend’: home and work life**

As outlined above, Burns’s place of residence is largely determined by his predominant employment at any given time, so it is logical to consider these two aspects in tandem, examining Burns’s mood state at the points where decisions relating to these are made, as well as the degree and nature of engagement with his employment during episodes of abnormal mood. As the analysis of Burns’s moods focuses on his life from November 1786, so too will the analysis of their connection with his domestic arrangements and employment. Thus, this section will cover Burns’s decisions: to apply for admission to and commissioning within the Excise (admitted Jan 1788; commissioned April 1788) and his subsequent work for the service (September 1789-July 1796); to take on the lease of Ellisland farm (considering the lease between January 1787 and March 1788) and the time spent working there (May 1788-November 1791); and finally his decision to leave farming and relocate the family to Dumfries to focus solely on his Excise duties (November 1791). The analysis will follow a chronological sequence, addressing each of these periods and any episodes of clinically or sub-clinically abnormal mood therein (Table 8).

### **November 1786-May 1788: considering Ellisland, applying to the Excise**

By January 1787, Burns has been in Edinburgh for around a month, securing subscriptions for a new volume of his poetry. As identified in Ch.1, he likely experienced an episode of mild depression shortly after arriving in the city in early December 1786; although the episode reduced in severity, a sub-clinically lowered mood persisted throughout the early weeks of 1787. Focusing on this period is not a direct focus on his current employment - he would technically still be described as a farmer as he is still leasing Mossgiel with his brother at this time - but during this time he makes key employment-related decisions which would have repercussions throughout his life.

The lowered mood Burns experiences during this time initially evokes a yearning for a return to his native rural setting and is clearly tied into his continuing creativity. He writes to Patrick Miller indicating that he would be willing to

invest his modest profits from the upcoming publication of his Edinburgh edition if

you could fix me in any sequester'd romantic spot, and let me have  
such a Lease as by care and industry I might live in humble decency,  
and have a spare hour now and then to write out an idle rhyme.

(L78A)

It could be argued that there is an element of Burns buying into his own publicity as the 'heaven-taught ploughman' here, desiring a setting which would perpetuate this image, allowing him to 'return to my rustic station [to] woo my rustic Muse at the Ploughtail' (L82). Within this, however, there seems to be a desire to escape the uncomfortable public glare of Edinburgh and to return to the safety of the farming life he has always known.

Despite his desire to return to farming, Burns expresses reservations, writing to John Ballantine 'Mr Miller is no Judge of land; and though I dare say he means to favour me, yet he may give me, in his opinion, an advantageous bargain that may ruin me' (L77). Such pessimism is in keeping with his mood state at the time but these reservations are repeated at later points, in a better mood state, indicating that while they may be amplified by the depression they are rooted in Burns's rational thinking.

Throughout 1787, although still expressing a desire to return to farming, Burns acknowledges that it is unlikely to bring sufficient secure income he needs to support his family (L77, L113). Other than a very brief hint of toying with the idea of emigration to Jamaica again, his principal course of pursuit is entry to the government Excise service (L113). He first mentions this as a possibility in a letter to Robert Aiken in October 1786, although his circumstances at the time - Jean Armour had recently delivered twins, their irregular marriage rejected by her family and her father allegedly issuing a warrant for Burns's detention - did not lend themselves to the Excise as a serious consideration.<sup>317</sup> By summer 1787,

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<sup>317</sup> The Burns-Armour marriage was 'irregular' in that it had not been formed by a church minister. Instead, it was 'marriage by declaration' formed by both parties signing their name to a statement of their willingness and freedom to marry, this being one of three forms of irregular marriage permissible under Scots law at the time. Armour's father considered Burns an unsuitable husband for his daughter and was possibly unhappy that she should be wed in a manner which might attract the disapproval of the Church. Consequently, he is reported to have taken the document to lawyer Robert Aiken to have the names removed, seemingly under the

Burns has returned to this as a viable alternative to farming, submitting an application for admittance to the service. Later, Burns's supervisor John Mitchell would write of how Burns, upon hearing in January 1788 that his application had been successful, 'stood with Eyes & hands, directed upwards, in an attitude Poetically fancifull [*sic*].'<sup>318</sup> Burns was keen to be given a commission as soon as possible, allowing him to begin earning that steady income he desired, writing to the Earl of Glencairn to ask for his intercession to bring this about sooner rather than later (*L192*).

At this point, in the early months of 1788, Burns is clearly fixed on the Excise as his future. He is, however, again under the influence of his depression and his desire to return to the familiarity of farming resurfaces, even though, by his own continued admission it would not be profitable for him (*L192, L207*). Despite his appointment to the Excise, he hasn't quite abandoned leasing one of three farms from Patrick Miller; Ellisland is arguably the least profitable of the three but most like the 'sequester'd romantic spot' Burns had desired. This combined with his lowered mood, and 'out of complement' to Miller means Burns still visits Ellisland and requests John Tennant's judgment of the farm, despite admitting to Agnes McLehose 'the Excise must be my lot' (*L197, L210*).<sup>319</sup>

Yet, in the face of his repeated declarations of the futility of farming as a viable means of living and the contrasting advantages of the Excise, Burns returns from the visit to Ellisland determined to take the lease and convinced that it will work out for him. He pleads of Agnes McLehose 'don't accuse me of being fickle', signalling his own awareness of how his choice must appear, indeed how it may seem in his own mind (*L213*). Immediately, questions are raised about the factors which may have driven this apparently snap decision.

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impression that this would nullify the declaration and thus the marriage. (Lindsay, p.29. Burns reports the issue of the warrant in *L36*, this purportedly giving rise to his writing the Deed of Assignment to Gilbert (*L35*). A search of Ayr Sheriff Court minute books for 1786, held at the National Records of Scotland, showed no evidence of a warrant being raised against Burns at this time by James Armour or any other person.

<sup>318</sup> Letter from John Mitchell to Robert Graham of Fintry, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1789 (National Records of Scotland, MS GD151/11/26/35A).

<sup>319</sup> The manuscript for *L210* is damaged and 'the Excise' is conjectural.

Undoubtedly, the depression of the previous months has re-ignited his longing for the farming life, albeit an idealised vision of poetic composition by the plough. Ellisland's situation on the banks of the River Nith must surely have tapped into this, presenting Burns with that place of natural beauty that would promote quiet contemplation and stimulation of his muse.<sup>320</sup> The depression itself seems to have been triggered by Burns's relocation away from the rural to the busy urban life of Edinburgh, in the same way that his move to the busy port of Irvine in the summer of 1781 played a part in that first major depressive episode of his life. In turn, it stimulates his desire for a return to a life he perhaps associates with less emotional turmoil and disordered mood, to a landscape that soothes him.

Burn himself indicates that a significant proportion of responsibility for the decision lies with his friends and patrons. He will write to Frances Dunlop 'I had two plans of life before me; the Excise & farming [...] all my Great friends, and particularly You, were decidedly & therefore decided me, for farming' (L324). Quite why so many of his friends were in favour of farming over the Excise seems to result from a range of reasons including the reputation of dissipation associated with the life of an Excise officer.<sup>321</sup> There may also be an element of *them* buying into Burns's publicity as the ploughman poet, desiring to see him maintain this and, in Miller's case, to have the kudos of being landlord to him. Burns will also indicate that he feels a duty to those who interest themselves in his life and so, to run counter to their advice by not taking the farm risked their friendship and, perhaps more importantly, their patronage (L353).

One further factor which may have played into this decision, however, is Burns's mood. By early March 1788, when the requested visit to Ellisland for judgment is made, the shift in Burns's decision from one pole to the other mirrors the shift in his mood from that of depression in the winter months to that of hypomania in the spring. Moving from depression through a mixed mood state to a period of elevated mood and optimism which coincides with his visit to Ellisland likely reinforced the positive association Burns has already demonstrated between

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<sup>320</sup> Burns's affinity for water and water-related language is discussed more fully in both Chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>321</sup> McLehose, p.178; Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.52.

being in a rural setting and feeling happier. Add to this the inflated sense of self-esteem and self-confidence, and the hypomanic tendency towards risky behaviour and impulsive decision making, and it is not difficult to see that Burns's abnormal mood state at this time could propagate his belief in others' opinions of his skills and chances of success as a farmer, despite his own previous reservations. In this context, the snap decision to take a path he had previously ruled out is not 'fickle' as he described it, but may have been related to a hypomanic mood state.

Within a week, Burns has written to Miller to confirm his decision to lease Ellisland. He has also written to McLehose to share his decision, assuring her that the only other person he would tell is Robert Ainslie; he writes to Ainslie, assuring him that McLehose is the only other person who know. He then goes on to write to William Cruikshank, Robert Muir and William Nicol telling them of his new venture, the words pouring onto the pages of these various letters indicative of his inability to contain himself in his hypomanic state (*L213, L214, L214A, L215, L221 and L222*).

Despite mulling for more than a year, and apparently rejecting the viability of farming as a regular source of sufficient income, Burns now found himself tenant of a farm which he knew to be a bad deal. He was also now a commissioned officer of the Excise service. These decisions - perhaps partly rational reasoning, partly hypomanic disinhibition, and influenced by the opinions and advices of others - were ones which would have on-going repercussions.

### **June 1788-November 1791: working Ellisland and the Excise**

Burns was admitted to the Excise in January 1788, receiving his commission in April although not yet assigned responsibility for a particular area so not yet earning. He would enter his Ellisland lease at Whitsun (May 25<sup>th</sup>), but it would a further six months before he could move Jean and the children to the farm due to the need for building and preparatory work, including construction of a family home. This work also meant that Ellisland would be slow to begin making money; by June, he is writing to Ainslie that 'I look to the excise scheme as a certainty

of maintenance', and in September he writes to Robert Graham to explain the situation and request assignment to an Excise division (*L249, L269*).<sup>322</sup>

It is apparent that Burns, by now returned to a euthymic mood state, has realised the implications of his decision to take on Ellisland and the poor judgment he has exercised in taking the advice of various friends, many of whom were not well-placed in life to have any expertise on farming. His letter to Frances Dunlop confirms the weight he afforded to their advice, also noting the important and influential nature of many of these friends; thus, Burns implores her not to make it known that the farm is not, and is unlikely to ever do well (*L324*). Between the lines of the letter, it is easy to read Burns's sense that he has effectively been trapped into a lease by his inability to go against the advice of those who have previously, and continue to support his creative endeavours. There is also a sense of his masking the dented pride and shame arising from failing where so many expected him to easily succeed. Moreover, all of this is underpinned by the realisation that he made such an imprudent decision whilst under the influence of an abnormal mood state, of realising that he has allowed the overinflated sense of self and impulsiveness, a component of his hypomania, to override his rationality.

Burns does have moments of optimism, writing to John Geddes in February 1789 that he now had the time and disposition to 'attend those great and important questions, what I am, where I am, and for what I am destined' (*L308*). He has regularised his marriage, and given a home to his wife and children, he has some hopes for the farm with the fall-back of the Excise for financial security, and the location of the farm is conducive to poetic inspiration. This was not to last though. The potential impact of his decision to lease Ellisland, particularly the financial burden it entails - any earnings from the Excise, when he is eventually assigned a division, must also support the farm as well as the family - clearly weighs heavily on Burns. By the winter of 1789, only seven months after taking on the farm, Burns has entered another episode of depression, arguably his most severe since that initial breakdown in Irvine in 1781. As well as the bad bargain of the farm, since September, he has taken on responsibility for a sizeable and

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<sup>322</sup> With *L269* to Graham, Burns would also enclose *K230* ('To Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq., with a request for an Excise Division').

‘hitherto very carelessly surveyed’ Excise division (*L419*). As discussed in Ch.3, the workload evidently grinds him down such that he writes to Frances Dunlop in December complaining that

I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous System [...] For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous head-ach, that I have been obliged to give up for a time my Excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir Parishes.

(*L374*)

Given Ellisland’s lack of profitability, risking loss of salary because he is unable to undertake his Excise work as a result of his depression adds to the stress associated with Burns’s financial precarity. The stress continues and Burns’s understanding of the root cause is made clear in a letter to his brother three weeks later. Reiterating that ‘[m]y nerves are in a damnable State.— I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body & Soul’, he goes on to state ‘[t]his Farm has undone my enjoyment of myself.— It is a ruinous affair on all hands’ (*L381*). Burns still suffers the effects first provoked in his teenage years by the legal and financial troubles of his father.

The truths expressed by Burns during his depression of the 1787/88 winter - that farming was not a financially viable option for him and that Patrick Miller, although well-intentioned, was trying to draw him into a lease which could never be profitable - surface again here, reinforcing that sense of regret expressed in the letter written to Dunlop in March 1789 (*L324*). The impact of that snap decision made during an episode of hypomania continues to reverberate, the stress of his ‘unlucky bargain’ leading to a further episode of depression and the additional stress of having to give up his Excise work for a period (*L379*).<sup>323</sup>

By the spring of 1790, Burns is again juggling the demands of Ellisland and the Excise, and his mood state has stabilised. This is short-lived however, having gone through his most severe episode of depression since 1781, the summer of 1790 sees him enter what appears to be the most prolonged period of elevated mood he will experience, marked by increased levels of energy and activity, and letters which exhibit grandiose language and a fluidity and sharpness of thinking.

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<sup>323</sup> Burns does remain creatively active during this period however, as evidenced by his enclosure of poems with several letters.

Just as his decision to take on the lease for Ellisland is sited in an episode of hypomania, so too, it seems, is the decision to give that lease up.

The summer of 1790 is a period of persistently elevated mood for Burns, encompassing several significant events in relation to both his personal and professional lives. Burns has fully realised the challenges of his Excise division and the work involved; elevated energy levels seem to enable him to keep on top of his duties. His doubts about the long-term viability of Ellisland persist and early in September, in the midst of what was at least one spike of hypomania within this summer of persistently elevated mood, he writes to Robert Graham to explain his decision to give up Ellisland - its demands restrict his ability to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to seek promotion (and the associated salary increase) within the Excise service (*L419*). That exaggerated self-confidence in his abilities as a farmer seen in March 1788 is found again in relation to his work in the Excise in this letter to Graham where Burns expresses the hope that his performance to date, even though he's not yet been in post for a year and has just admitted a need to gain further knowledge, will warrant his promotion to a more lucrative port division or addition to the supervisors list.

The decision to give up the lease on Ellisland appears to be a rational one, based on assessment of what is best for Burns by way of securing a living and, therefore, the well-being of his family. Thus, it is initially difficult to discern the role Burns mood played in his coming to this conclusion. The key is not in the decision itself but in Burns actually making it. Whereas the decision to take on Ellisland was heavily influenced by his friends and sponsors, an influence he admits himself was irresistible, and was also compounded by the self-esteem and optimism of his elevated mood at the time, the decision to give up Ellisland seems bolstered by that same self-esteem in his ability as an Excise officer, affording him the boldness to take this decision at the risk of upsetting those he previously sought to please. Thus, Burns's elevated mood which may have played a role in the decision to take on Ellisland farm may also have been influential in his decision to give up the lease in favour of moving the family to Dumfries to allow him to better focus on his Excise role. As the circumstances of Ellisland appear to have provoked episodes of abnormal mood, so too would life in

Dumfries appear to have a significant effect on Burns's mental health in the final years of his life.

### **December 1791-July 1796: Dumfries and the Excise**

Following the decision to give up Ellisland in the summer of 1790, it would still take Burns more than a year to extricate himself from the lease and relocate with his wife and children to Dumfries. By the time of this move in November 1791, he would indeed manage to have his name added to the supervisors list, making him eligible for promotion to a post with more responsibility and a better salary. In May 1792, he would be transferred into the more lucrative Dumfries Port division. In January of 1793, only weeks after apparently being questioned over alleged political allegiances to the French revolutionaries, Burns would successfully petition Robert Graham for temporary appointment to a supervisory role while the incumbent was absent as a result of illness. Alexander Findlater, his supervisor in Dumfries and also a friend, would later describe Burns as 'exemplary in his attention as an excise-officer'.<sup>324</sup>

On the whole, Burns's mental health during the last four-and-a-half years of his life seems more settled than it had been during any of the previously considered periods. As identified in Table 8, Burns suffered a further episode of mild to moderate depression in December 1793, a period marked by the life-threatening illness of his daughter. Writing to Maria Riddell, he complains that 'Sunday closes a period of our cursed revenue business, & may probably keep me employed with my pen until Noon.— Fine employment for a Poet's pen!', indicating that while this particular episode is marked by a lack of usually evident enjoyment of his Excise duties, it is not impeding his ability to complete them, in contrast to the episode in the winter of 1789/90 (*L600A*). Outwith this episode, the final months of Burns's life are, unsurprisingly, marked by a lowered mood while the autumn of 1794 appears to be a time of elevated mood, including some hypomania in late October/early November. This is a time in which the correspondence is dominated by that with George Thomson in relation to Burns's song collecting and editing activities, producing a body of work which

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<sup>324</sup> Peterkin, p.xciii.

consists of both original poetic compositions and re-workings of existing material.<sup>325</sup>

Largely, the Dumfries period of Burns's life is one of stability and security. His Excise work provides a steady and guaranteed income, as well as a routine that, although involving bookwork, also allows him a great deal of time in the rural outdoors, riding the locality as he undertakes his rounds. His work with George Thomson provides him with a hugely enjoyable creative outlet and further sense of purpose. Burns is settled in himself and in his life. The benefit of less stress and more regular patterns of living on the course of bipolar disorder are well-documented in the clinical literature, and it can be argued that this is what is seen here in Burns's life.<sup>326</sup> The reduced stress and increased stability of this period create fewer trigger points, modulating the expression of symptoms of disordered mood, and resulting in fewer clinical and sub-clinical episodes than marked the period between November 1786 and November 1791. Whereas previous stages in Burns's life clearly show the impact his mood had on shaping aspects of his work and home life - influencing key decisions or his ability to actually work - this stage clearly shows the impact of his work and home life on his mood.

### **'I like the lasses – Gude forgie me!': relationships with women**

Outwith his working life as farmer, Exciseman and poet, public perception of Burns is perhaps most firmly grounded in his reputation as a ladies' man. Dunnigan argues that '[t]he apparent inextricability of the poet's life and art from each other has generated a mythical Burns whose relationships with women comprise a fable of heroic, heterosexual masculinity.'<sup>327</sup> It is a mythic construction that requires dismantling. That he did have relationships with a range of women is undeniable, simply on the basis of his acknowledgement of

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<sup>325</sup> This is to be further explored in Section 3 of the thesis.

<sup>326</sup> Morriss and others, p.49.

<sup>327</sup> Sarah Dunnigan, 'Burns and Women', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.20–33 (p.20).

the pregnancies of four different women other than his wife. Such affirmation is unnecessary however, as Burns is very open about his appreciation of and attraction to various women in his life. Starting with Nell Kirkpatrick, a 'bonie, sweet, sonsie lass' partnered with the 14-year-old Burns in the harvest, it was in honour of her that he 'first committed the sin of RHYME' (L125). It is unclear how far this relationship went but Nell was certainly the first of many women who would inspire Burns's poetic muse. A sizeable number of poems make reference to women, adding fuel to the speculation surrounding the extent of his romantic and sexual liaisons; the reality is that some of these women were nothing more than friends, many were nothing more than an inspiration, and more still were simply names which fitted the rhythm and rhyme of the poem in question.<sup>328</sup>

Burns goes on to explain that having been 'perhaps the most ungainly, awkward being in the Parish', his late teens saw him grow into himself and in confidence, such that 'far beyond all other impulses [... m]y heart was compleatly [*sic*] tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some Goddess or other' (L125). This is corroborated by his brother Gilbert, who describes his brother as having been a 'bashful and awkward' youngster who matured into a young man who was 'constantly the victim of some fair enslaver'.<sup>329</sup> Such behaviour would not be unusual for a pubertal teenager, certainly not for a rural lad (and the young ladies of the locality) who had grown up with and were only too familiar with the literal and metaphorical birds and bees. Yet it seems to have been portrayed as something more, an aspect of the teenage Burns which he has not been allowed to grow out of, and which is the basis upon which his subsequent reputation has been built. His later relationships are added to these to create a lengthy roll-call of promiscuity and immoral behaviour and to provide further evidence of his inability to control his passions. It is an example of exactly those fears expressed by Burns in his letters in the winter of 1786/87 - being thrust into the public glare where all his faults would be scrutinised, and he would be

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<sup>328</sup> George Scott Wilkie, *Robert Burns: The Lassies* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 2004) provides coverage of many of the women, real or otherwise, who appear in Burns's poems.

<sup>329</sup> Currie, p.73.

held to a far higher standard than any other individual of his background and status, and consequently found wanting in some aspect of character or morality.

While a great deal could be written with regard to the moral and/or social propriety of Burns's relationships within both eighteenth- and twenty-first-century contexts, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the value judgements which have been made over the years. Nor is this the correct forum for discussion of the debate around Burns's attitudes to women, whether he was a man who used or respected women. Instead, this thesis is concerned with the context and nature of relationships within Burns's life in relation to his mental health. Thus, it is concerned with their occurrence in relation to the timing of episodes of clinically or sub-clinically abnormal mood, and to what extent they may have been influenced by or acted as an influence on his mood state.

To this end, as with the previous section of this chapter, the focus will rest on those relationships which occurred after November 1786, where there is a more substantial body of evidence to talk to this aspect of Burns's life, either through Burns's own words or the words of reliable first-hand accounts. Thus, his relationship with Elizabeth Paton, and the birth of their daughter 'Dear-bought Bess' is not addressed, nor are the early days of his relationship with Jean Armour. Analysis will focus on those relationships where a genuine romantic attachment or verifiable sexual relationship has existed. Relationships with women such as Maria Riddell, which was clearly nothing more than platonic friendship and admiration, and Jean Lorimer, where something more than friendship cannot be conclusively proven, are not considered. The unique dynamic of Burns's relationship with Frances Dunlop was explored in Ch.3. Within these constraints, the relationships which will be addressed are those with Jean Armour (wife), May Cameron (acknowledged pregnancy), Margaret Chalmers (romantic) Agnes McLehose (romantic), Jenny Clow (acknowledged child) and Anna Park (acknowledged child).

While each of these relationships could be looked at in turn, it is more revealing to take the same chronological approach as used in the previous section. As well as providing consistency in approach, this also allows the same phases of Burns's life - Edinburgh and Mossgiel (Nov 1786-May 1788), Ellisland (May 1788-Nov 1791), Dumfries (Nov 1797-Jul 1796) - to create frames within which the timings

of the relationships relative to each other and to episodes of clinically and sub-clinically abnormal mood can be appreciated.

### **November 1786-May 1788: Armour, Cameron, Chalmers, McLehose and Clow**

By the time of his trip to Edinburgh, Burns had faced a tumultuous summer with regards to women. He had formed an irregular marriage with an already-pregnant Jean Armour, a marriage subsequently rejected by her father who forced them apart, ahead of her delivery of twins in September 1786. During their enforced separation, he formed plans to emigrate to Jamaica, possibly accompanied by Mary Campbell who died before they could embark, before deciding in favour of Edinburgh to seek subscription for a new edition of *Poems*.<sup>330</sup>

During that first trip to Edinburgh, as well as experiencing an episode of depression, he may have attempted to initiate a relationship with Margaret Chalmers. Chalmers, known as Peggy, may have first encountered Burns in Mauchline, where her father took a farm, but they almost certainly met in Edinburgh where Chalmers would play piano for the blind Thomas Blacklock.<sup>331</sup> Few letters between the two survive, all of them written by Burns. The first, undated but sequenced by Ferguson and Roy to January 1787 (and not even certainly written to Chalmers), is clearly written in terms of romantic attachment; he refers to ‘the black story at home’ (Jean Armour’s pregnancy) rendering him, as he thought, ‘proof against the fascinating witchcraft’ (that he loves Armour and is immune to the charms of any other) but now finds himself jealous should Chalmers bestow a kind word or look on another, and desiring ‘to be with you ten minutes by yourself; though, what I would say, Heaven above knows, for I am sure, I know not’ (L76). If the dating is to be believed, this places Burns at a time where he is emerging from an episode of depression, still uncertain of the status of his relationship with Jean Armour. However, the lack of any further surviving correspondence between the two until October 1787

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<sup>330</sup> Robert Crawford, pp.229–31.

<sup>331</sup> Lindsay, p.84.

precludes any possibility of connecting this relationship, at this point in time, to his mood state.<sup>332</sup>

Regardless of the ongoing nature of any relationship with Chalmers during 1787, Burns by his own admission, had a sexual relationship with May Cameron, an Edinburgh house servant, towards the end of his first stay in the city. Returning to Ayrshire, via Dumfries, from his Borders tour with Robert Ainslie, Burns is met with a letter, dated 26<sup>th</sup> May 1787, from Cameron requesting financial support as she has been forced to leave employment as a result of her pregnancy.<sup>333</sup> Burns writes to Edinburgh-based Ainslie, asking him to take money to Cameron, indicating acknowledgement that they must have had sex as his parentage of her child is a possibility (*L346*).<sup>334</sup> Subsequently, Burns writes again to Ainslie, timing his dalliance with Cameron to the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> April, indicating that she ‘cannot yet have increased her growth much. I begin, from that, and some other circumstances to suspect foul play’ (*L116*).

That Burns should remember so specifically when he had sex with Cameron may seem surprising but may be due to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> April being the weekend immediately prior to the publication of his Edinburgh edition of poems, certainly a notable event for the poet. Nor does he indicate any other instances of sex with Cameron, suggesting this one event to be the sole possible point of conception.<sup>335</sup> The circumstances of their sexual encounter are unlikely to ever be known, but the evidence would point to Cameron attempting to snare the celebrity poet as a financial support for her child, perhaps anticipating his name and profits from publication as a means of putting him in a better position to provide for her than other candidates for father.

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<sup>332</sup> It is reported that Chalmers’s niece burned the correspondence between her aunt and the poet. How those that survived did so is unclear (Lindsay, p.85).

<sup>333</sup> Letter from May Cameron to Robert Burns, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1787 (Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.6167). As per the letter, the illiterate Cameron has had it transcribed by the wife of a shoemaker.

<sup>334</sup> Ferguson and Roy date this letter to 1<sup>st</sup> June 1788 on the basis of the reference to ‘that affair of the girl’ in *L252*. *L252*, however, is more likely to refer to Jenny Clow who was pregnant by Burns during the summer of 1788. Ferguson and Roy acknowledge *L246* may date to 1787, which would better fit with the timing of Cameron’s letter to Burns and Burns’s next letter to Ainslie on 25<sup>th</sup> June (*L116*), and thus is the dating presumed here.

<sup>335</sup> At the very least, this would seem to indicate the dating of the earliest sexual encounter between Burns and Cameron and thus, the earliest possible date of conception.

Regardless of the circumstances or the motives of either party, while this was undoubtedly an exciting time for Burns, there is nothing to indicate that he was under the influence of any prolonged episode of disordered mood which may have played a role in his engaging with Cameron.<sup>336</sup> Instead, it appears simply to have been a case of Burns being a young man with no wife in a big city, no prospect of his intended wife ever actually being so, being away from home and taking advantage of an opportunity which presented itself.

News of Cameron's pregnancy, and more importantly, Burns's possible involvement could not have come at a worse time for the poet. Upon returning to Ayrshire, he reunites with Jean Armour. Burns's letter to Robert Ainslie in late July certainly indicates the resumption of a sexual relationship with Armour, and she may have conceived again during the weeks between Burns returning from his tour of the Borders with Ainslie and setting out on his first tour of the West Highlands (*L122A*).<sup>337</sup> Again, there is nothing in Burns's correspondence or in other accounts which would indicate any role for disordered mood in influencing his rekindling of his relationship with Armour. The biggest influence appears to be, simply, Burns's geographical location. This is his first return to Ayrshire since he left in November 1786, so there has been no previous opportunity for him to seek her out. That he did so is not surprising, given she was mother to his acknowledged twins, nor is it any real surprise that the previous sexual attraction and intimacy should still be present.

By October 1787, although the situation with Cameron has been resolved, it is now certain that Armour is pregnant again, although her family seem to remain unaware of the fact (*L146*). Nevertheless, early in that month, he would undertake another short tour of Stirling and the surrounding area, including passing eight days at Harvieston with Margaret Chalmers. He would later write to

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<sup>336</sup> Burns's reference to Ainslie's commentary on Cameron's expanding girth points to a pregnancy having occurred. She had a writ issued against Burns but this was suddenly settled in August, which critics have argued suggests a stillbirth and would explain the lack of any record of a birth by Cameron. (Mackay (2004), p.319).

<sup>337</sup> The text of the letter is ambiguous – '...the Mother is certainly in for it again...' likely points to Burns and Armour having resumed their sexual relationship, but may indicate they know Armour is already pregnant again. The second set of Burns twins would be born early in March 1788. Conception during this summer between the Border Tour (ended 1<sup>st</sup> June) and second Highland Tour (started 25<sup>th</sup> August) would mean Armour's pregnancy lasted anywhere between 27 and 38 weeks.

Chalmers how he had ‘lived more of real life with you in eight days, than I can do with almost anybody I meet with in eight years’ (L272). Chalmers would also recount how, during those eight days, Burns proposed marriage, an offer she rejected as she was already secretly engaged.<sup>338</sup>

Although there is no evidence of a sexual relationship with Chalmers, Burns’s attempt to rekindle a potentially romantic relationship seems, as with his rekindling of his relationship with Armour, a result of geographical location. There is no extant correspondence from Burns or Chalmers written during that period of eight days, meaning there is no evidence in either direction of any possible influence of disordered mood in Burns’s actions during this time. Her rejection of his proposal, however, does not seem to entirely deter him; returning to Edinburgh following his tour, he writes at least two poems for her, seeking permission to submit them to James Johnson for publication in his *Scots Musical Museum* (L150). Chalmers refuses permission but the friendship with the poet persists, albeit on a more platonic note (L155). The cooling of Burns’s feelings for Chalmers, while certainly in part due to her refusal of his advances, is also likely due to the arrival of a new woman in his life.

On 21<sup>st</sup> January 1788, Burns will write to Frances Dunlop that his stay in Edinburgh has been ‘six horrible weeks, anguish and low spirits [have] made me unfit to read, write, or think’ (L184). Defined in Ch.1 as an episode of mild to moderate depression, this period is principally a result of being immobilised by a dislocated kneecap following a carriage accident. It also provides the backdrop for Burns’s relationship with the woman whom many consider to be his most significant romantic attachment - Agnes McLehose.

Only a year older than Burns, McLehose was a married middle-class woman living in Edinburgh in 1787. By this time, her husband had essentially deserted her, moving to the West Indies where he had taken a black mistress; McLehose, with her two sons, was living on a small annuity supplemented by occasional gifts from her uncle.<sup>339</sup> Through a tea-party hosted by her friend Erskine Nimmo,

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<sup>338</sup> Lindsay, p.85.

<sup>339</sup> Lindsay, p.229.

McLehose was able to engineer the introduction to Burns that she desired.<sup>340</sup> She would invite the poet to take tea with her a few days later but it was an appointment he would not keep, being confined to home for more than a month following the carriage accident (*L159*). Despite McLehose's superior social status and her marital status, her response teasingly encourages Burns in mentioning being led astray and 'little freedoms', and would give rise to what has been described as an intensely passionate correspondence but which M'Naught described as 'the verbal lava of the improvised Sylvander volcano', referring to the pseudonyms of 'Sylvander' and 'Clarinda' adopted by Burns and McLehose respectively.<sup>341</sup>

Burns describes his confinement as 'six horrible weeks' (*L184*). Yet the tone of the correspondence with McLehose rarely correlates with the episode of depression Burns is experiencing at this time. Burns's relationship with Frances Dunlop argue for his letters to her being genuine expressions of his mood state, so it must be assumed that the letters to McLehose represent a performance, both as a romantic suitor and as someone not subject to disordered mood at the time of writing. 'Fictionality', Dunnigan argues, 'is woven into the fabric of these letters.'<sup>342</sup>

Much has been written on the Clarinda correspondence, variously arguing it is representative of Burns's best and worst writing. McGuirk is particularly critical, commenting that 'his letters to her [McLehose] are deadened by excessive literary allusion'.<sup>343</sup> Burns admits himself 'I like to have quotations ready for every occasion.— They give one's ideas so pat, and save one the trouble of finding expression adequate to one's feelings' (*L178*). While Simpson highlights the 'back-handed compliment to Clarinda, mistress of his soul, to admit that she is beyond the compass of his originality', McGuirk argues that he doesn't even try, asserting that

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<sup>340</sup> McLehose, p.82.

<sup>341</sup> McLehose, p.84; M'Naught, p.7.

<sup>342</sup> Dunnigan, p.23.

<sup>343</sup> Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p.88.

Burns used literary allusions in his letters [...] to 'save' himself 'the trouble of finding expression adequate' to his feelings [...] this dependence on other writers [...] prevents Burns from exploring his own feelings.<sup>344</sup>

That Burns does appropriate direct quotation cannot be denied. What can be challenged, however, is that he does so to 'save himself trouble' in the sense of minimising the effort he puts into recognising and expressing his feelings and moods. Instead, it can be argued that Burns is only too aware of his feelings at this time, of the clinical depression which has stultified his thought processes and creativity, and that the trouble he is saving himself from is the painful process of trying to put this into his own words, opening himself up to criticism of being excessively emotional, particularly within the context of a relationship which might be considered only superficially intimate in comparison to that between Burns and Dunlop.

Consequently, Burns draws on the work of writers he admires to perform the role of a sentimental and sensible individual wooing the object of his affection. He redeploys the words of others to perform normality and hide his true mood state at the time. Looking across Burns's letters to McLehose from December 1787 to February 1788, spanning this stay in Edinburgh and its episode of lowered mood and depression, Burns is seen to increasingly quote from a range of writers as his mood moves towards depression in January then, conversely, less so as it begins to normalise towards the end of the month. He draws particularly on allusions to biblical quotation (also in acknowledgement of McLehose's strong religious convictions), as well as references to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the poetry of James Thomson and Edward Young.

Thus, Burns's mood state can be argued to have a role in driving the manner in which he performs the role of romantic suitor; he may complain to Dunlop of an inability to think but this is masked by his ability to deploy a range of literary references which serve the purpose of creating the voice of the lover which McLehose alternately welcomes and rejects. This raises questions about the nature and depth of Burns's attachment, at least initially, to McLehose. She is

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<sup>344</sup> Kenneth Simpson, 'A Highly Textual Affair: The Sylvander-Clarinda Correspondence', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 35.1 (2007), 258–69 (p.258).McGuirk, p.89.

clearly the instigator, and there is clearly a tension between what she wants from him and what she considers being socially and morally appropriate. For Burns, again placed among his social superiors in an urban environment, and this time confined to close quarters, it is arguably unsurprising that he falls into depression again, as he did during his previous visit to Edinburgh a year before. Given his correspondence with McLehose is so distinctly performative and unlike his other correspondence, it might be posited that he considered this relationship somewhat of a diversion. Just as his use of quotation saved him from finding adequate expression, his whole correspondence with McLehose may be a means by which he sought to distract himself from the impending lowering of his spirits.

As Burns recovers from his injury, he is able to venture out again, including making visits to McLehose's home.<sup>345</sup> At this time, the letters become increasingly intense in their tone and use of quotation; arguably, the intensity with which Burns focused on their correspondence as a distraction extends into, and is amplified in, his attempts to move their relationship from epistolary passion to physical consummation, and this is mirrored in the shifts in tone and use of quotation in the letters (*L174*, *L177* and *L179*). This intensity appears to dissipate as Burns's mood begins to normalise - there is less quotation in the letters, he appears more accepting of McLehose's resistance (principally on grounds of propriety and religious conviction, rather than a lack of attraction), and he starts to bring his friend Robert Ainslie when he visits, possibly in the role of chaperone.

At this same time, around the final week of January, when he writes to Dunlop of his 'six horrible weeks', McLehose indicates that she is using her maid, Jenny Clow, as letter carrier.<sup>346</sup> The content of most of McLehose's letters to Burns are known only through their publication in her grandson's volume, rather than manuscript, so there is no way to examine the documents for clues which may point to how often Clow carried letters in contrast to McLehose using the postal service. That McLehose felt it necessary to comment on Clow bringing this particular letter may indicate it is the first time this has happened but it is

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<sup>345</sup> *L177* would indicate these visits beginning around 12<sup>th</sup> January.

<sup>346</sup> McLehose, pp.166–67.

unlikely to have been the last, and certainly unlikely to have been the last encounter between Burns and the maid.

Burns's mood shifts from depression through mixed state and, as February progresses, it enters a period of abnormal elevation. Clow would give birth to a son in November 1788, his parentage acknowledged by Burns; assuming a 40-week pregnancy, this places the date of conception in February, and certainly before the 17<sup>th</sup> when Burns is known to have left Edinburgh. It is entirely possible that Burns saw Clow as a substitute for her mistress and took advantage of the access he had to her. His opportunistic relationship with Clow, while driven by McLehose's continued refusal of his sexual advances, would likely have caused McLehose great upset but Burns's lack of concern on this point, as well as his need for an outlet for his sexual frustration was influenced by his burgeoning hypomania and its associated symptoms - elevated mood, increased self-confidence, risk-taking behaviour, increased libido. Thus, just as Burns's lowered mood state is likely to have played a part in his approach to his relationship with McLehose, so too is his elevated mood state a potential influence on his relationship with Clow.<sup>347</sup>

Still in an abnormal mood state - high levels of energy, some irritability, neglect of his correspondence with McLehose incongruent with the supposed depth of their relationship - Burns would leave Edinburgh and travel to Glasgow where he would spend time with Richard Brown, his drinking companion and friend from his time in Irvine. He would then make his way back to Mauchline and Mossgiel farm where his mother and siblings still lived, and where he would also be reunited with Jean Armour. That reunion with Armour is also worthy of consideration within the context of Burns being in a state of abnormally elevated mood.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1788, Burns writes to McLehose that 'this morning, as I came home I called for a certain woman.— I am disgusted with her; I cannot endure her!' (*L210*). Even allowing for the fact he is writing to McLehose about another woman, Burns describes Armour in very unflattering terms, making grandiose

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<sup>347</sup> Burns would send money for Clow and, the following year, attempt to persuade her to give up the baby to his care but to no avail; otherwise, he makes no mention of Clow and thus, nothing can be said further about the nature of any relationship between them.

comparisons between Armour's 'farthing taper' and McLehose's 'meridian sun', and going on to assert 'I have done with her, and she with me.' In less than a week, the situation seems to have undergone a *volte face*. Burns writes on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1788 to Robert Ainslie, recounting finding a heavily pregnant Armour cast out by her family, reconciling her with her mother, then providing her with better lodgings where they again resumed their sexual relationship (L215). Burns describes these events in bawdy, crude terms, his description of how he 'took the opportunity of some dry horse litter, and gave her such a thundering scalade that electrified the very marrow of her bones' considered shocking in light of Armour's advanced state of pregnancy.<sup>348</sup> While there is no evidence to suggest Armour was an unwilling participant, the terms in which Burns describes the events might be consistent with an elevated mood state at the time, rendering it possible that his mood state also played a part in his attitude towards his reunion with Armour. Irritation seems apparent in his insistence that she make no claim on him as a husband or father of her children, while he seems to have no regard for either her heavily pregnant state nor the fact that it was her relationship with him that had led to her being thrown out by her own family. It would also go some way to explaining the inconsistency of his reporting events to McLehose and Ainslie, and even discussing McLehose in the same letters to Ainslie in which he describes his reunion with Armour (L215).

Only four days later, on the 7<sup>th</sup> March, Burns would also write to Richard Brown of being reunited with Armour. More generous in his description, and taking on the nautical language of Brown's profession as a ship's captain, he writes of finding Armour 'with her cargo very well laid in; but unfortunately moor'd almost at the mercy of wind and tide [...] have taken the command myself-not ostensibly, but for a time, in secret' (L220).<sup>349</sup> This runs directly counter to his

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<sup>348</sup> See also FN337337; Jean would give birth within a week of these events, purported by some as being a direct consequence of Burns's actions. Both baby girls would die within their first month of life. However, 60% of twin pregnancies deliver before 37 weeks (NICE, 'National Institute for Health and Care Excellence: Multiple Pregnancy: Twin and Triplet Pregnancies', 2013, p.32) so it is possible conception did not occur until Burns's return from the West Highlands, and L122A records only Armour's desire for another child (or at least willingness to continue sexual relations with Burns). In this situation, the March delivery of the twins may represent a premature arrival; the consequences of premature delivery, such as respiratory immaturity, would have been near-impossible to manage successfully in the late eighteenth century and so, premature birth must be considered as a possible factor in the death of both twins within the first month of life.

<sup>349</sup> Again, Burns uses nautical language when writing to Brown, as was discussed in Ch.3.

report to Ainslie about ensuring Armour would not claim him as a husband. Burns now appears to be taking what would be considered the honourable course of action, the course which is more fitting with his default character. It can be argued that McLehose is now increasingly out of sight and out of mind, that Armour's return to Burns's life is as much as distraction from McLehose as McLehose was a distraction from Chalmers. It should, however, also be noted that by this point Burns's elevated mood is returning to a euthymic state, adding weight to the argument that his description and treatment of Armour in the preceding days was influenced by his abnormal mood.

### **June 1788-November 1791: Armour and Park**

Regardless of the secrecy surrounding Burns's first reporting of his official marriage to Armour, he subsequently reports the event with a tone of pride.<sup>350</sup> The summer sees Burns fairly settled with respect to his relationships with women; he will only write another three letters to Chalmers before the end of 1788, not writing to McLehose again until March 1789, and while he does acknowledge responsibility for Clow's pregnancy, there is no evidence of him engaging in any intimate relationship with any woman other than Armour. He would divide his time between his wife and children in Mauchline, and preparing Ellisland farm for occupation, moving the family there in November 1788. Armour would be pregnant again within the month.

The next significant moment in Burns's relationship history coincides with the summer of 1790, identified in Ch.1 as a period of persistently elevated mood with episodes of hypomania, primarily evidenced by high levels of energy and activity, a persistent optimism, and a sharpness of thinking. At this point in time, Burns's work for the Excise was regularly taking him to Dumfries, whether to undertake duties, attend Excise court or collect his monthly salary. It is during these visits to the town that he likely encountered Anna Park, a local barmaid.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1791, Park would give birth to a daughter Elizabeth; only nine days later, Jean Armour would give birth to another son, William. Burns would

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<sup>350</sup> L242, L243 and L245 for example.

acknowledge Elizabeth as his own natural daughter and take her in to be raised by Armour with his other children. The close coincidence in the dates of birth of Elizabeth and William naturally point to the close coincidence there must have been in the dates of their conceptions, around late June and early July 1790. The most convincing scenario is that Burns's relationship with Anna (about which very little else is known) was simply one of opportunity - his Excise work took him away from home and he took advantage of that, although it is unclear when and for how long such an arrangement existed between Burns and Park. There is, however, no evidence of any other such relationships with women during his time at Ellisland when the same opportunities would have afforded themselves. Indeed, the period between May 1788 and November 1791 seems as settled in terms of his relationships with women as his mood state. This suggests the possibility that Burns's relationship with Park was short-lived and, in part, due to the influence of the symptoms of his persistently elevated mood during the summer of 1790. Just as his liaison with Clow in early 1788 can be argued to partly arise from the disinhibition of elevated mood, leading to engagement in risky and inappropriate sexual behaviour at a time of elevated mood, so too can it be suggested that the relationship with Park may be rooted in the same.

### **December 1791-July 1796: Armour**

Burns's time at Ellisland, although still stressful, was more settled than his life between November 1786 and May 1788, and so too were his relationships with women. Similarly, as the period between moving to Dumfries in November 1791 and his death in July 1796 was the most settled time of his life, marked by the most settled pattern of his moods, so too does it seem to be the most settled period with regards to his relationships with women.

Burns is known to have been creatively inspired by Jean Lorimer, whom he dubbed Chloris, and Jessy Lewars, who helped nurse him in his final illness, and the poetry produced by this inspiration would certainly point to some degree of attraction. There is, however, no evidence that this was acted on in any way other than creatively, Burns writing 'Do you think the sober gin-horse routine of existence could inspire a man [...] I put myself on a regimen of admiring a fine woman' (*L644*). Burns is a man who can fall in love for the purposes of stimulating creativity, but the emotional attachments which result from this are

superficial and short-lived. In the past, with correspondents such as Ainslie and Brown, Burns was open about his various relationships with women, but there is no such evidence in his correspondence during this period. In contrast, Jean Armour would become pregnant on a further three occasions, the spacing of which suggest her conceiving again very shortly after weaning each child; had Burns been engaging in relationships with other women, and given the openness with which he acknowledged resultant pregnancies, it is reasonable to expect that further claims of Burns's parenthood would have come to light.

Instead, as with the interaction between mood and his home and work lives, this period appears to represent a time of stability for Burns. With his home and work life more stable - a single employment, a single place of residence, family all living together, financial security of a steady income - there is less evidence of disordered mood and the associated behaviours, particularly the aspects of elevated mood which may have influenced his relationships with Clow and Park. Thus, there is little convincing evidence of romantic or sexual relationships with women other than Jean Armour.

### **'O thou, my Muse! guid, auld Scotch Drink!': relationship with alcohol**

The final aspect of Burns's life to be considered in relation to his mood state is his relationship with alcohol. Clinical literature indicates that as many as 40% of people affected by bipolar disorder will also be affected by a substance misuse disorder such as alcohol abuse.<sup>351</sup> Excessive alcohol consumption is an accusation which has followed Burns from before his death. As discussed in the General Introduction, this particular aspect of Burns's life is arguably the one which has been most (mis)represented by his various biographers, starting with the anonymous obituary published immediately after his death and consolidated by Currie's *Life* in 1800. Thus, examination of any potential connection between Burns's disordered moods and alleged abuse of alcohol is entirely justified.

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<sup>351</sup> Morriss and others, p.40.

With regards to his youth, Burns describes in his letter to Dr Moore how he considered defiance of his father in attending dancing school ‘one cause of that dissipation which marked my future years’ but goes on to qualify this with ‘Dissipation, comparative with the strictness and sobriety of Presbyterian country life’ (L125). This account ties with the later recollection of his brother Gilbert who commented

the praise he has bestowed on Scotch drink (which seems to have misled his historians), I do not recollect, during these seven years [of living in Tarbolton between the ages 19 and 26], not till towards the end of his commencing author (which his growing celebrity occasioned his often being in company) to have ever seen him intoxicated; nor was he at all given to drinking [...] His temperance and his frugality were everything that could be wished.<sup>352</sup>

Similar accounts given after Burns’s death attest to his attitudes to and his engagement with alcohol, repeatedly asserting that he drank very little and that from convention rather than desire, certainly far less than those he kept company with, and that he was not prone to alcohol-induced misbehaviour.<sup>353</sup>

This clearly contrasts with the representations of Burns’s relationship with alcohol that occupy the public consciousness, arising from those early biographies. Thus, this study will return to Burns’s correspondence and to first-hand accounts of those who knew him to extract what can be reliably said about Burns’s general drinking habits, as well as specific incidents of alcohol consumption, to explore any potential relationship with his mood state at any given time. Burns’s writing produced during that period and those third-party accounts employed for analysis in Ch.2 were examined for evidence of Burns consuming alcohol or engaging in behaviour under its influence, again with a mind to the purpose and intended audience of each report which might influence the degree of exaggeration or understatement in the account.

The immediately obvious finding is that, for a man who many believe drank himself to death, there are relatively few references to drinking in his correspondence. Where he does make mention of alcohol, Burns does not appear

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<sup>352</sup> Currie, pp.75–76.

<sup>353</sup> Currie, p.146; Peterkin, p.xciii; Ingram, pp.94–95; Lindsay, pp.360, 367.

reluctant to admit his behaviour or the extent to which he does drink. It would be ill-advised to suggest that these references represent *every* instance of Burns's taking alcohol, but it can be argued to be representational of the reality of his drinking habits, simply that there are actually relatively few instances where it was of such a level that it was worth commenting on and, as shall be seen, several of these references actually point to his dislike of excessive alcohol intake. This overview, however, does not address the question of any connection between his mood state and his alcohol intake. For this, a closer examination of the nature and timing of the references is required. To maintain consistency with the previous study of the interplay of his mental health on key life decisions and his relationships with women, this section takes a chronological approach using the same division of three time periods across November 1786 to July 1796.

### November 1786-May 1788

**Table 13: References to alcohol in Burns's correspondence between Nov 1786 and May 1788**

Source	Date	Mood state <sup>354</sup>	Letter score <sup>355</sup>	Comments
72	7/1/87	SCL	HYP	Partial letter, implies lots to drink previous night, '...claret was good...'
112	1/6/87	EU	HYP	Very drunk previous night; only letter completely in Scots
117	30/6/87	EU	HYP	Recounts lots of drinking, horse race with the highlander where he fell off
127	14/8/87	EU	EU	Drinking a bottle of port, alone in a garret
157	1787	NC	EU	Advising against excessive drinking; tongue-in-cheek, Hamilton possibly hungover from their last meeting
McLehose	9/1/88	DEP	n/a	'I wonder how you could write so distinctly after two or three hours over a bottle...'
186	24/1/88	DEP	EU	'I am here, absolutely unfit to finish my letter- pretty hearty after a bowl, which has been constantly plied since dinner, till this moment.'

<sup>354</sup> Overall mood state as recorded in Table 8: DEP – depression; SCL – sub-clinical lowering; EU – euthymia; SCE – sub-clinical elevation; HYP - hypomania. Where dating can only be narrowed to a year, mood state is considered not confirmed (NC).

<sup>355</sup> Mood state assigned to letter as per global spreadsheet (included as electronic appendix 2). Abbreviations as per those for mood state in preceding column. Letters written to Burns are not scored.

				I have been with Mr Schekti, the musician...' Recovering from depression by this point
191	1/2/88	DEP	EU	'I am miserably stupid this morning. Yesterday I dined with a Baronet, and sat pretty late over the bottle.' Recovering from depression by this point
209	22/2/88	HYP	EU	Drinking previous night with a friend; no evidence of hangover or excess
213	2/3/88	HYP	SCE	'been hurried with business and dissipation almost equal'
214	3/3/88	HYP	HYP	'I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this Country - to send every guest drunk to bed if they can.'
217	6/3/88	HYP	EU	'the savage hospitality of this Country spent me the most part of the night over the nauseous potion in the bowl', now very hungover
222A	8/3/88	EU	EU	'savage hospitality [...] I have sore warfare in this world'

Within this particular period of Burns's life, perhaps the most startling reference to alcohol comes in *L117*, where he recounts a night of drinking with friends while on his first highland tour. They encounter a mounted highlander, alcohol-induced bravado leads to him being challenged to a race and ends with Burns falling from his horse and incurring some minor physical injuries. The letter itself exhibits sufficient features to meet the criteria for hypomania but there is insufficient concurrent evidence to assess this as anything more than a single instance, certainly not a sustained period of abnormally elevated mood. Likewise, all letters from 1787 which reference alcohol point to similar circumstances of high spirits of limited duration, making it unclear whether the elevated mood at that particular time led to excessive alcohol consumption or whether the alcohol consumption led to the high spirits. Being consistent with the conservative approach taken throughout the thesis would dictate that the latter - that alcohol is causing the elevated mood - is assumed to be the more likely conclusion, with the ill-advised behaviour arising during such episodes being a consequence of the disinhibiting effects of alcohol rather than any mood disorder. What each instance does have in common, however, is that Burns is

drinking within a social context, either over dinner or as a member of a larger party, but with friends.

In contrast, the period covering late January to early March 1788 suggests some interesting insights into Burns's drinking habits and their connection with his mood state. Recovering from his 'six horrible weeks', it is immediately clear that he is socialising more widely, making seven different references to drinking between 24<sup>th</sup> January and 8<sup>th</sup> March. It is uncertain how many separate occasions of drinking these references cover but a minimum of five would be a conservative estimate.

The first two instances, again, are clearly social occasions, albeit with very different sorts of people (*L186*, *L191*). From this, however, a pattern begins to emerge. Burns's letter following his evening with Mr Shecti the musician, shows no evidence of any lingering effects or hangover, nor does his letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> February which also follows an evening drinking with a friend (*L186*, *L209*). In contrast, 'miserably stupid' *L191*, referencing drinking with a baronet, may indicate tiredness after a late night, a hangover after heavy drinking or a combination of both. What is significant, however, is the company in which Burns has been drinking.

His following letters make repeated reference to the 'savage hospitality' of visiting private homes where the intention seems to be 'to send every guest drunk to bed if they can', resulting in Burns being 'hurried with business and dissipation almost equal' (*L213*, *L214*, *L217* and *L222A*). This is telling in that it indicates that Burns is not drinking in a social capacity, as he does with Mr Schekti and other friends, but in a business capacity as he visits various socially superior patrons and acquaintances in their homes, and that he considers the level of drinking which occurs at such events as 'dissipation', implying he thinks himself, disapprovingly, that it is excessive.

This points to the difference in drinking culture between Burns's own rural working class background and those above him on the social ladder. Quite simply, those with money can afford to drink more and drink better; thus, their tables are furnished with a seemingly never-ending supply of good wine and port, rather than the small beer and cheaper wine that would be found in a

labouring class home. This means they become more accustomed to drinking a relatively large volume across the day, developing both a tolerance for the alcohol itself, and the ability to function under its influence. For individuals such as Burns, they would find themselves incapacitated after relatively smaller volumes and more likely to feel the after-effects the following day, particularly if this is compounded with a lower tolerance, as Burns reports.

What is also notable about Burns's reports of this 'savage hospitality' is that it falls within the window of an episode of hypomania. Whereas the incident with the highlander seemed to be a single point of elevated mood with any cause-and-effect relationship between alcohol and elevated mood being unclear, this is a sustained period. While Burns may have been drinking more than was normal for him during this period, it is very unlikely that he spent the entire time in a state of intoxication similar to that of the highlander incident.<sup>356</sup> Thus, it points to the elevated mood potentially impacting the drinking during this period rather than the converse. Burns is clearly very busy, indicating elevated energy levels typical of abnormally elevated mood. A component of this activity may be the increased seeking out of social interaction; the indication of an increased alcohol intake, as well as a potential by-product of this increased sociability, also points to lowered impulse control - he doesn't stop when he knows he probably should. Similarly, it indicates an elevated self-esteem and grandiosity, within which he considers himself just as 'good' as the people he is drinking with and thus is perfectly capable of keeping up with them. Thus, as with the analysis of this period in relation to Burns's work life and relationships with women, it can be seen that the elevated mood, including hypomania, experienced around this time may have had an influence on his decisions and behaviour relating to his alcohol intake.

## June 1788-November 1791

**Table 14: References to alcohol in Burns's correspondence between May 1788 and Nov 1791**

Source	Date	Mood state	Letter score	Comments

<sup>356</sup> Although Burns does report the drinking taking place at a 'Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion' (*L117*), which adds further weight to Burns's drinking more than he can handle while in the company of social superiors.

262	5/8/88	EU	SCE	Night of the Mauchline fair [...] can't 'keep [writing] well in a line' (and probably himself)
Dunlop	1/10/88	EU	n/a	Reports gossip of Burns being drunk on port then very sick; Dunlop attributes this to keeping poor company
291	22/12/88	EU	EU	Tried new cask whisky last night, discusses dilutions of cask strength
305	Jan 1789	EU	EU	'...sitting in a family way over a friendly bowl...'
316	21/2/89	EU	EU	'I love the social pleasures in moderation, but here I am impressed into the service of Bacchus'
Dunlop	1/4/89	EU	n/a	Suggesting he consider the new Chair of Agriculture at Edinburgh university; '...nor would a grave member of the College be so oft the prey of jolly Bacchus as an Exciseman, at least against his will'
399	6/6/90	?SCE	SCE	'The foregoing, tho' a shocking scrawl, is wonderfully well; considering that I have both dined & supped with the gentleman who does me the honor to frank this letter.'
Dunlop	22/7/90	?SCE/HYP	n/a	Referring to L399, envying his 'swallowing drunken libations of riot' while she nurses sick daughter
466	1/9/91	EU	EU	'But such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country [...] I was no farther over than you used to see me.'
482	?Nov 1791	EU	DEP	Very hungover (dating uncertain; may be more likely to be Feb 1792)

Unlike the previous period, May 1788-November 1791 contains no particularly notable episodes involving drinking on the part of Burns. One or two references indicate what may have been particularly heavy drinking sessions but there is no pattern to these that would indicate them being anything more than isolated incidents rather than sustained behaviour like that seen in March 1788. There does, again, appear to be a connection between points of elevated mood,

whether in individual letters or more globally, and heavier drinking but the incidence of these within this three-year period are few and spread out. While this means examination of the connection between alcohol intake and mood state for this period is inconclusive, in light of the evidence demonstrated between November 1786 and May 1788, it adds to the argument that there is a link. Again, however, the more conservative line of interpretation would argue for alcohol intake leading to elevated mood, rather than the converse.

As with the previous period, the drinking mentioned by Burns in letters is predominantly undertaken within social contexts, again pointing to the increased drive for social interaction typical of hypomania; furthermore, he also comments again on the pressure to drink more heavily while in the company of social betters while in Edinburgh (*L316*). This contrasts with *L466* which shows Burns in better control of his drinking than his social peers.

What is perhaps most notable about the references to drinking during this period are not those made by Burns but those coming from Frances Dunlop. In October 1788, she recounts a report from an unnamed gentleman of being two days in Burns company, the exact timing of which is not given. The gentleman spoke of Burns being very drunk on port then very ill the following day, an accusation which Dunlop rationalised as the result of Burns being in very poor company at the time as she had never encountered him behaving in such a manner.<sup>357</sup> More importantly however, is that this comment indicates rumours already beginning to circulate about Burns's alleged dissipation, little more than eighteen months after he had been the toast of Edinburgh literati.

The root source of such rumours may be inadvertently indicated by Dunlop in her letter of April the following year. In February, Burns had written of being 'impressed into the service of Bacchus' while in Edinburgh on Excise business (*L316*). In response, Dunlop suggests that Burns consider the possibility of taking up the newly inaugurated Chair of Agriculture at Edinburgh University, adding to her reasoning that '...nor would a grave member of the College be so oft the prey

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<sup>357</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.98. This would also go to further support the link between the type of company Burns keeps and the volume of alcohol he is drinking.

of jolly Bacchus as an Exciseman, at least against his will.’<sup>358</sup> The association between Excise officers and drunkenness was a common one, and it now seems to be enveloping Burns who has taken up his own commission. This may point to the origins of the stories which would be propagated and embellished in Burns’s final years such that any account of his life would seem incomplete without some reference to his alleged dissipation.

## December 1791-July 1796

**Table 15: References to alcohol in Burns's correspondence between Nov 1791 and Jul 1796**

Source	Date	Mood state	Letter score	Comments
Syme	?1791	NC	n/a	RBBM 3.6084f, when together Burns and Syme drink as much tea as wine
502A	Apr/May 1792	EU	SCE	‘I am just now devilish drunk...’
506	10/9/1792	EU	HYP	‘a nipperkin of TODDY’ while he writes, repeatedly toasting
529	31/12/1792	EU	EU	‘occasional hard drinking is the devil to me...’, describes the challenges of drinking in people’s homes
542A	?Mar 1793	EU	SCE	‘the Devil, taking the advantage of my being in drink [...] tempted to me to be a little turbulent [...] manic ravings of a poor wretch whom the powers of Hell, & the potency of Port, beset at the same time.’
584	8/9/1793	EU	EU	‘My head achs miserably [...] for last night’s debauch...’
608	Dec 93/Jan 94	DEP	SCE	Apology to Elizabeth Riddell for behaviour the previous night (‘Rape of the Sabine Women’ incident)
618	Feb 1794	DEP	EU	‘...drunken promise yesternight [...] drunken dissipated character [...] am nothing of this.’
Syme	15/6/94	EU	n/a	Reference to Burns drinking with Syme and his Irish friends
629	25/6/1794	EU	EU	Not specifically drinking but explains toasting ‘Mrs Mack’ when toast to a married woman is called.
631	?1794	NC	HYP	‘I was drunk last night...’

<sup>358</sup> Wallace, Burns and Dunlop, p.160.

657	7/2/1795	EU	SCE	Miserable night, snowed in at an inn, 'very drunk' to forget the miseries of being trapped with an awful fiddler.
Thomson	25/2/95	EU	n/a	Reply to L657, 'drunk or sober, your mind is never muddy'

This final period of Burns's life continues to demonstrate some features also found in the previous two periods: firstly, that Burns seems more likely to be in a state of elevated mood when he reports heavy drinking; secondly, that he still comments on the challenging nature of drinking in the private homes of his social superiors. In this second situation, he is also now commenting more explicitly on such episodes of drinking resulting in what is recognisable as a hangover, explaining to some extent the tension between his reluctance to participate and the pressure of social convention dictating that he does. It is also during this period that the rumours of dissipation really begin to take hold, connected with Burns's role as an Excise officer and the stereotypical depiction of such men drinking as much as they tax.<sup>359</sup>

L542A and L608 also point to a connection between excessive alcohol and Burns' engaging in disinhibited, inappropriate behaviour. L608 is especially notable here, being Burns's profuse apology for an incident which has become known as 'the rape of the Sabine women'. No first-hand account of the events of an evening at Friar's Carse, home of the Riddell family, exist but tradition holds that Burns and the other men of the party, following a great deal of post-dinner port, burst into the drawing room where the ladies had withdrawn and proceeded to enact the classical story of the Sabine women being kidnapped by the Roman invaders, a key event in the founding of what would become Rome and her empire.<sup>360</sup> Burns took things too far, profoundly offending Elizabeth Riddell, mistress of the house, and was promptly ejected.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Mackay (2004), p.633.

<sup>360</sup> Lindsay, p.265.

<sup>361</sup> J. DeLancey Ferguson, 'Robert Burns and Maria Riddell', *Modern Philology*, 28.2 (1930), 169–84 (p.174).

Whatever did happen that evening, it resulted in a rift between Burns and the Riddells, who had previously been good friends and staunch supporters of his creative work. It also testifies to another facet of Burns's reluctance to drink heavily; he seems to have been very aware that too much alcohol lead to ill-advised behaviour, something which will be familiar to many a modern reader. As the analysis of Burns's drinking in relation to his mental health points to him being more likely to drink in a state of elevated mood, when he was already more prone to risky and socially inappropriate behaviour, he now appears to be doubly exposed to risk if he drank excessively.

What is clear, from this and the previous two periods, however, is that such extreme incidents are unusual events because it is unusual for Burns to allow himself to get into such a state of intoxication. In contrast, his good friend John Syme writes of visiting the poet several times, where they would 'drink as much tea as wine'.<sup>362</sup> He is also seen to vehemently refute rumours akin to those Dunlop pointed at in April 1789; he writes that some in Edinburgh, particularly in the Excise Office, 'have conceived a prejudice against me as being a drunken dissipated character.— I might be all this, you know, & yet be an honest fellow, but you know that I am an honest fellow and am nothing of this' (*L619*). This is almost five years after Dunlop's report, indicating not only that Burns's name remains in the public consciousness but so too does its connection with excessive alcohol. The reality is that these persistent rumours could be only that. As testified by Alexander Findlater, Burns more than met the demands of his Excise duties.<sup>363</sup> His correspondence during this period shows him to be actively collecting and editing songs for George Thomson, as well as producing new compositions of his own. As stated by Findlater, successful completion of all these activities 'certainly was not compatible with perpetual intoxication', as the rumours would have Burns be.<sup>364</sup>

As has been shown across all three periods, he may have been more prone to excessive drinking during episodes of elevated mood or hypomania, which in turn

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<sup>362</sup> Letter from John Syme to Alexander Cunningham; RBBM 3.6084f. Letter is undated but is part of the group of thirty letters written between 1789 and 1797.

<sup>363</sup> Peterkin, p.xciii.

<sup>364</sup> Peterkin, p.xciv.

make him even more prone to inappropriate behaviour, but these occasions, by Burns's own account and the supporting testimony of others who knew him, show these to have been the exceptions rather than the rule. Furthermore, there is no substantial evidence to support the claim that Burns's melancholy was rooted in or exacerbated by his alcohol intake, as Currie argues in his biography.<sup>365</sup>

## Conclusion

Exploration of the impact of Burns's variations in mood state on specific aspects of his life has been restricted to his final decade by the same factors which largely restrict examination of the moods themselves to this period, namely the lack of sufficient reliable primary sources dating from prior to November 1786. It would be fascinating to explore key periods in his earlier life, such as the true extent of his dissipation during his time in Irvine in 1781/82 or the preparation of the first edition of *Poems* for publication and his somewhat non-committal planning to emigrate to the West Indies in 1786, to question whether these were the actions of a young man enjoying life as he sought to discover himself or whether they were, in some way, shaped by his disordered moods. Such a study at this time would, however, rely too much on supposition, rumour and third-hand accounts, providing no surer assessment than any that has come before, and run counter to the higher standard of evidence which this thesis seeks to apply.

Nevertheless, in Burns's life after November 1786, where significantly more first-hand evidence can testify to events, there are some interesting patterns to be noted in such an analysis, pointing to areas in which his disordered mood can be argued to have had an influence, sometimes in a profound and long-lasting manner. Burns talks more often of his lowered mood and depression than his elevated moods, pointing to the high depression-to-mania ratio of episodes typical of Type II bipolar disorder, yet this analysis demonstrates that it is the

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<sup>365</sup> Currie's representation of the connection between Burns's melancholy and his alcohol intake is discussed in the General Introduction.

episodes of elevated mood and hypomania which seem to have had the most significant effect on the course of his life. His depression is characterised by anxiety, social withdrawal and reduced activity levels, meaning he is less likely to commit to significant decisions or engage in social drinking during these times. In contrast, his hypomania is typified by elevated energy and activity levels, as well as increased levels of self-esteem, sociability and impulsivity. It is during such mood states that he has been shown to take courses of action which he has previously indicated he knows to be ill-advised, whether renting the poor soils of Ellisland farm, engaging in unwise sexual relationships or drinking more than he knows he can handle. At times, the consequences of these decisions lead to long-term situations which result in additional stress and precipitate episodes of lowered mood or depression. What Burns is always seen to do, however, is accept responsibility for his actions: he commits to Ellisland and tries to make a success, despite also having to learn his profession as an Excise officer at the same time; he acknowledges and takes responsibility, where possible, for his illegitimate children, even in the case of May Cameron where his paternity was not certain; he acknowledges and apologises for errors in judgment and transgressions of behaviour whilst under the influence of alcohol. This final point is particularly pertinent in adding weight to the argument that Burns was not an inveterate drinker, as the rumours and first biographies would portray. He was, it would seem, one of the 60% of individuals affected by bipolar disorder who do not abuse alcohol as an attempt to manage their condition.

What is also appreciable is that just as Burns's mood state has an effect on the course of his life, so too does his life affect his mood. This is particularly evidence in the Dumfries period, from November 1791 until his death. His life is more settled and less stressful - a fixed place to live, his family with him, a guarantee of sufficient income from his employment with the Excise, the prospect of promotion and further financial security, the opportunity for creative expression both in original composition and in collecting and editing for Thomson. All these factors combine to make the final four-and-a-half years of Burns's life the most stable in terms of his moods. The one major episode, depressive in nature, coincides with the life-threatening illness of his beloved daughter, adding weight to the argument that stressful situations are triggers for his disordered mood, as seen in the winters of 1786/87 and 1787/88.

On the whole, this analysis adds a new and intriguing dimension to the discussion of Burns's life, particularly with regard to his relationships with women, the nature and extent of his alcohol intake, and the precipitating factors for episodes of disordered mood. There is a clear interplay of mood affecting life and life affecting mood. It adds to the discussion within Ch.3 regarding Burns's own understanding and rationalising of his disordered mood, and his acknowledgement of responsibility for the consequences of his actions during such episodes, demonstrating the more implicit ways in which Burns appreciated the influence of mood in his life. This is particularly true of periods of elevated mood to which he only rarely alludes to in his writing. Taken together with the analysis of Ch.3, the findings of this chapter create a far fuller picture of the role Burns's mental health played in shaping his life and his thinking processes.

## Section 2 conclusion

This section opened with the argument that having Type II bipolar disorder as a diagnostic label to describe the episodes of disordered moods evident in Burns's biography was a useful framework on which to base an examination of their impact on aspects of his life. It provides a delineation of discrete episodes which can be symptomatically characterised, and within which concurrent behaviour and associated thinking can be explored. This is particularly true for those episodes identified as being sub-threshold shifts in mood, which facilitates inclusion of episodes of melancholy that do not meet the criteria for clinical depression to be included in the analysis. Thus, in keeping with Muramoto's functions of retrospective diagnosis, a better understanding of the influence of Burns's moods on his life and of his lived experience can be developed, while also addressing the concerns of critics such as Cunningham, Karenberg and Rosenberg around the historical contextualisation of any such study. This allows for the second research question to be addressed

What evidence exists to demonstrate the way in which Burns understood his disordered mood, and the extent to which these episodes may have affected aspects of his life, specifically his decision making, his drinking habits, and his relationships with women?

Chapter 3 tackled the first part of the research question by exploring how Burns understood his disordered moods. It particularly used his commonplace book as a source of evidence of his earliest thinking, especially with regards to his melancholy and to his attitudes towards his illness during his time in Irvine. It was clear from this that Burns recognised his moods as being tempestuous, that he considered them something to be feared as abnormal and potentially dangerous, and that he was unable to reconcile their place within his wider character, viewing them as a taint and a disease.

Development of his thinking and clarity of understanding would come through his confidential friendship with Frances Dunlop. In her, he found a sympathetic friend who could relate to his experience, who would validate his emotions and act as counsellor for his concerns, supporting Burns in evolving his thinking around his moods. Close study of this relationship emphasises the high degree of circumspection Burns displays in discussing his moods, never reaching the same

level of naked honesty with any other correspondent, particularly with regard to the darkest moments of his most severe episodes of depression. To date, Burns's relationship with Dunlop has been far less studied in comparison to those other relationships with women in his life. As a consequence, this study highlights the unique role of Dunlop in Burns's life, establishing a new appreciation for the importance of her friendship in the poet's life.

Chapter 4 then sought to address the second part of the research question, exploring the impact of Burns's moods on his life, specifically decisions relating to his profession and place of residence between November 1786 and his death in July 1796, his romantic and sexual relationships during those years, and his relationship with alcohol in the same period. While his lowered moods are discussed far more explicitly and more extensively in his correspondence, this analysis of Burns's moods in relation to these aspects of his life suggest his elevated moods and episodes of hypomania have a greater degree of influence. This is a novel finding which has arisen specifically from using modern clinical criteria as a framework for understanding the nature and incidence of disordered mood in Burns's life, allowing the elevated aspects of his moods to be more fully described and located within his biographical timeline.

As shown in Section 1, Burns's disordered moods did not dominate his life. He was found to be in a euthymic state most of the time, appearing to exhibit clustering of episodes within much longer periods of quiescence. Nevertheless, Burns's elevated moods and periods of hypomania were shown to have some potential influence in key decisions, particularly relating to his decision to take on the lease of Ellisland Farm despite his own better judgement. They were also shown to have some potential influence in Burns's engagement in sexual relationships with Jenny Clow and Anna Park, both of which occurred at times where he would be considered more committed to another woman, Agnes McLehose and Jean Armour respectively. There was, however, no evidence of influence of mood in his relationships with Margaret Chalmers or May Cameron.

His relationship with Agnes McLehose is also notable for coinciding with a period of moderate depression, particularly for the disparity in tone between his mood state and the tone of his letters to McLehose. These letters exhibit a higher use of quotation and allusion to other literary sources, suggesting Burns is

appropriating the words of other to allow him to perform the role of romantic suitor while in a depressive mood state, where facing his real emotions could cause him significant pain and distress. Arguably, the performative nature of Burns's correspondence with McLehose can be seen to be an act of manic defence, the expression of what might be considered symptoms of elevated mood as a means of avoiding the negative thoughts of depression.

Much has been made over the years of the link between Burns's mood and his alleged excessive use of alcohol, one feeding the other. The analysis of this aspect of Burns's life, however, shows no conclusive connection between the two. There does appear to be a coincidental connection in timing between the expression of symptoms of elevated mood and episodes of heavy drinking, which may be connected to the increased social drive of the elevated mood state, but there is insufficient evidence to support the more radical suggestion that disordered mood is driving alcohol intake. What the analysis has shown, however, and in support of modern scholarship on the matter, is that Burns was not an alcoholic. He seems to be drinking no more than those he associates with, and arguably less as a consequence of his desire to avoid the hangovers to which he knew he was prone.

Considering the findings of both chapters in combination allows research question 2 to be answered. His disordered moods can be seen to have an influence in some aspects of his life, and his understanding of this shifts over time. Episodes of abnormal mood never entirely disappear but they become less frequent, coinciding with his life becoming more stable. Consequently, the latter years of his final decade are more settled with regards to his relationships with women and with alcohol, as well as his understanding of his moods. His thinking matures and he becomes more accepting of his disordered moods as a component of his character. His melancholy particularly becomes something to be endured but not feared; he recognises that it is reactive in nature, suggesting that he may also have sought to make his life more settled as a means of lowering the likelihood of further episodes. Thus, it might be argued that, just as his moods might drive his behaviours and decisions at specific points in time, they also have a more general influence, playing a part in the decisions he makes to shape his life into something more predictable.

Unsurprisingly, these analyses are not without their limitations. As with Section 1, aspects of the study are hindered by the gaps in the evidence base and the need to work through the huge body of anecdote and hearsay which surrounds Burns, particularly with regards to the rumours and stories surrounding his drinking. Nevertheless, a consistently conservative approach to drawing conclusions affords confidence in the picture drawn of these aspects of Burns's life. Thus, the influence of disordered mood is played down in the face of more probable explanations for his behaviour. Disordered mood is never afforded complete responsibility for any given action or behaviour, emphasising that depression or hypomania will only ever play a part in shaping these events, that there is simply insufficient evidence to be able to argue them as the sole, or even the primary influences at such times.

Exploring these aspects of Burns's life has not involved making value judgements on his choices or their consequences, as has so often been the case, but accepting that his moods likely played some role in shaping some areas of his life. Therefore, whereas previous commentators, even Burns himself, might have characterised taking on Ellisland Farm as a mistake, or his involvement with Agnes McLehose as ill-judged, within the context of this study they must simply be seen as events that occurred as a result of some degree of influence of his disordered mood state at the time. And without these events, it is arguable that Burns would not have produced such acclaimed works as 'Tam o Shanter' and 'Ae Fond Kiss'. Whereas Burns's status as a drinker or a womaniser are prominent in popular perceptions of the man, nothing looms larger in the public consciousness than his status as a poet. Thus, no study of Burns's mental health and its influence on his life is complete without examination of the ways in which it may have shaped his creative output.

## Section 3 – ‘The characters & fates of the Rhyming tribe’: exploring the impact of mood on Burns’s creativity

### Connecting mood disorder and creativity

The concept of disordered mood, particularly the melancholic aspect, being connected with creative genius has persisted since classical times.<sup>366</sup>

Consequently, the apparently contradictory association of self-knowledge and mental disorder has permeated aspects of both scientific thinking and literary representation, the idea that the suffering of madness could both inspire the creative muse and destroy creative ability.<sup>367</sup> Historically, biographical case studies, such as those relating to Burns discussed in the General Introduction, have focused more on the depressed spirits, mirroring the tendency for creative individuals to write more frequently and explicitly about their melancholy whereas other aspects of disordered mood, such as hypomania, have been considered aspects of the creative or artistic temperament, rather than an additional aspect of a clinical condition.<sup>368</sup>

While clinical studies do not show any clear indication of an association between creativity and all psychopathologies generally, there is sufficient evidence to point to a connection between creativity and mood disorders specifically, particularly bipolar disorder.<sup>369</sup> Whitehead highlights issues with oft-cited studies such as Andreasen (1987) and Jamison (1993), particularly the generalisability of the findings due to small sample sizes and the lack of objective review of results.<sup>370</sup> He goes on to argue that the cultural connection between creativity

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<sup>366</sup> Frederick K. Goodwin and Kay Redfield Jamison, *Manic-Depressive Illness: Bipolar Disorders and Recurrent Depression*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.379.

<sup>367</sup> Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton, 'Introduction' *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-18 (pp.2, 5).

<sup>368</sup> Goodwin and Jamison, p.382.

<sup>369</sup> Erik Thys, Bernard Sabbe and Marc De Hert, 'Creativity and Psychopathology: A Systematic Review', *Psychopathology*, 47.3 (2014), 141–47 (p.146); O. J. Mason, H. Mort and J. Woo, 'Research Letter: Investigating Psychotic Traits in Poets', *Psychological Medicine*, 45.03 (2014), 667–69 (p.667).

<sup>370</sup> James Whitehead, *Madness and the Romantic Poet: A Critical History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.158; N. C. Andreasen, 'Creativity and Mental Illness: Prevalence Rates in Writers and Their First-Degree Relatives', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 144.10 (1987), 1288–92; Jamison, (1993).

and mental illness is driven by the ‘influence of Romantic cultural ideals and mythologies, vaguely defined’, and reinforced by studies which lack consistency in their definitions of insanity, genius and creativity thereby confounding results by allowing perceived connections to define these terms, ensuring that a connection will inevitably be identified.

Nevertheless, the evidence to support a connection has strengthened with the advent of large-scale clinical studies in the past decade. These have shown that individuals who work in creative areas have an increased likelihood of developing bipolar disorder.<sup>371</sup> Furthermore, mood swings have been strongly associated with creativity, with hypomania indicated as a ‘productive’ symptom, a ‘point of “optimal” psychiatric sensibility’.<sup>372</sup> This runs counter to the historical association between creative genius and melancholy but does reframe the depiction of more elevated mood states as high spirits and components of the creative temperament. That does not, however, negate the validity of such historical connections as these represent the context within which Burns lived, worked and viewed his own mental health.

These positive representations of melancholy found in the eighteenth century, as a component of the artistic temperament, do very much fit with the Romantic construction of the creative genius.<sup>373</sup> It is the mould from which Burns’s posthumous reputation has been cast.<sup>374</sup> Yet, these cultural perceptions do not necessarily fit with the reality of the situation. Houston points to

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<sup>371</sup> James H. MacCabe and others, ‘Excellent School Performance at Age 16 and Risk of Adult Bipolar Disorder: National Cohort Study’, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 196.2 (2010), 109–15; Simon Kyaga and others, ‘Creativity and Mental Disorder: Family Study of 300 000 People with Severe Mental Disorder’, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199.5 (2011), 373–79; J. H. MacCabe and others, ‘Artistic Creativity and Risk for Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder and Unipolar Depression: A Swedish Population-Based Case–control Study and Sib-Pair Analysis’, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 212.06 (2018), 370–76; Eva Burkhardt and others, ‘Creativity in Persons At-Risk for Bipolar Disorder—A Pilot Study’, *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 2018, 1–8. Further studies in this field are also highlighted in Jamison, (2017), pp.268–69.

<sup>372</sup> Burkhardt and others, p.6; Thys, Sabbe and De Hert, p.146. (Thys *et al.* use the term ‘sensibility’ here in the sense of emotional experience, akin to the strictly scientific definition of the eighteenth century but without the cultural connotations that later came to be associated with the term.) Despite adding to the evidence base which supports a connection between creativity and bipolar disorder, such studies have not yet been able to indicate the directionality of the influence.

<sup>373</sup> Goodwin and Jamison, p.379.

<sup>374</sup> See General Introduction for discussion of the construction of Burns’s posthumous reputation relating to his melancholy.

contemporaneous sources of those who dealt with the mentally ill, highlighting the hope for or relief at recovery, rather than evidence of any suggestion of benefit.<sup>375</sup> The accounts focus on day-to-day capability of an individual, not on any creativity emerging from disordered mood, very much in keeping with Ingram's assessment of James Boswell's attitude to his own hypochondria: 'All the genius in the world does not compensate for the misery caused by depression, even though the genius might be aided by the malady.'<sup>376</sup>

This very much fits with what was seen in Ch.3 regarding Burns's own view of his disordered moods - the 'diseased nervous system', the 'deep incurable taint'- as well as the far greater number of references to his melancholy than to his elevated spirits. As was shown, however, Burns also came to understand both aspects of disordered mood to be components of his creative temperament. It is, therefore, logical to also explore the connection between his moods and his creativity, to examine how he, and others, viewed the nature and consequence of this association within the realm of his poetry and songs.

## **Previous examination of Robert Burns's mood and his creativity**

Broadly, Burns offers some insight into his own understanding of the impact of his moods on his creative output. He highlights how '[a]utumn is my propitious season.— I make more verses in it, than in all the year else' and that, as a young man, '[m]y Passions when once they were lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet' (L577, L125). Conversely, in February 1794, he notes 'I have, all this winter, been plagued with low spirits & blue devils, so that I have almost hung my harp on the willow-trees' (L616). While he will also additionally identify specific events which stimulate his muse, Burns's recognition that his mood state has an impact on his creativity centres on the volume of his output.

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<sup>375</sup> Houston, p.150.

<sup>376</sup> Houston, p.151; Allan Ingram and others, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.34.

This aspect, however, is generally lost in subsequent biographical studies of his life, these tending to focus on identifiable events to which specific pieces can be tied. Thus mood, particularly melancholy, becomes that general marker of genius as would come to typify the Romanticised representation of Burns, with what might be considered only a superficial consideration of how this might shape the content of his work. Consequently, there is an increasing privilege given to the biographical detail which can be gleaned from his poetry, such that ‘the history of the man may be traced, step by step, in his own immortal writings’.<sup>377</sup> This comes at the cost of an appreciation of the underlying mood states which might shape the presentation of such material. Similarly, the influence of writing as an emotional outlet versus writing for publication is given little acknowledgement, such that the printed versions of poems become literal truth rather than crafted depictions. As Wilson observes, ‘[t]here is no delusion, no affectation, no exaggeration, no falsehood in the spirit of Burns’s poetry’.<sup>378</sup>

Wilson does recognise that Burns writes powerful visual descriptions while ‘under strong emotion’ but this offers no insight into the directionality of those emotions.<sup>379</sup> Lockhart had previously identified that Burns’s ‘merriment and satire were, from the beginning, Scotch’ but it is not until the mid-twentieth century that Daiches develops this idea.<sup>380</sup> Examining the contents of Burns’s first commonplace book, Daiches identifies the poet’s tendency to draw on English poetic traditions for works which convey low spirits while it appears that high spirits are required for Burns to effectively use Scots.<sup>381</sup> Daiches presents this as Burns-the-young-poet negotiating ‘the relationship between spontaneity and convention, between inspiration and control’, the balance between the impulse of the folk tradition and the craftsmanship of the genteel tradition.<sup>382</sup> Having examined the manner in which Burns appropriates the words and styles of others, particularly when in low mood, it will be argued that this tension Daiches detects is actually another example of Burns using what he already knows to

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<sup>377</sup> Lockhart, p.56.

<sup>378</sup> Wilson, p.viii.

<sup>379</sup> Wilson, p.xxiv.

<sup>380</sup> Lockhart, p.37.

<sup>381</sup> David Daiches, *Robert Burns’s Commonplace Book 1783-1785* (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1965), p.xxiv.

<sup>382</sup> Daiches (1965), p.xxii.

articulate his mood state, particularly where frank engagement with those moods would be painful.

Simpson identifies the important role of English poetic tradition in Burns's writing, arguing that it provides a range of personae that can be adopted by Burns.<sup>383</sup> For Simpson, 'language was to [Burns] the readiest weapon in personal or public battles', and his talent allowed him to adopt a diversity of voices.<sup>384</sup> Intimating the public desire to find Burns's real voice and story in his poetry which led to the literal reading of his works, Simpson argues that 'such is the range of Burns's voices, however, and such are the fluctuations of voice within individual poems, that it becomes virtually impossible to identify and categorise any voice as the original or authentic voice of the man himself'.<sup>385</sup> Costa draws on this position to argue that Burns's melancholy is, therefore, 'an affected literary pose', that while he is a poet of sentiment, Burns has too much energy to maintain the pretence of thoughtful sadness for any length of time, leading to fluctuations of mood between and within poems.<sup>386</sup> Effectively, Burns's melancholy is a performative stance that he uses to mock and satirise, and to play to the contemporary fashions that would ensure a receptive audience for his work.<sup>387</sup>

Such an argument, however, highlights the deficit of appreciation that has arisen from reading Burns's poetry as biography rather than as artefacts of biographical events, and from the previous lack of an objective examination of the nature and patterning of Burns's disordered mood states. The complex and contradictory character of Burns that has emerged in this thesis highlights that there should be no less contradictory complexity in Burns creative output, that his mood states should manifest themselves in his work. Neither should it be unsurprising to find that those strategies he employs in his correspondence to give voice to his disordered mood states should also emerge in his poetry. Thus, where Simpson argues 'it becomes virtually impossible to identify and categorise

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<sup>383</sup> Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p.209.

<sup>384</sup> Simpson (1988), pp.188, 186.

<sup>385</sup> Simpson (1988), p.198.

<sup>386</sup> Costa, pp.1, 6.

<sup>387</sup> Costa, p.6.

any voice as the original or authentic voice of the man himself', it can be suggested that these myriad voices do come together as a harmonious whole, not as jigsaw pieces which fit together in a single flat image, but as layers over layers creating a cohesive image of depth. Thus, examining Burns's poetry through the lens of his mood disorder addresses part of the first of Muramoto's functions for retrospective diagnosis - the impact of an identified condition of an individual's creative output.<sup>388</sup>

## Aims of the section

Chapter 5, the sole chapter within this section, takes a chronological approach to exploring Burns's creative output, using the framework of the same sub-divided periods of time employed in the analysis of the impact of mood on Burns's life. For each of the three periods -Edinburgh (November 1786-May 1788), Ellisland (June 1788-November 1791), and Dumfries (December 1791-July 1796) - an overview of the quantity and content of Burns's creative output for that time is given. This then moves into a closer examination of works produced around any periods of abnormal mood, focusing on patterns and themes in language, form and imagery, and includes case studies of individual works worth separate close analysis where the contents can be seen to be particularly pertinent to Burns's mood state at the time of writing.

In addition, the period covering Burns's time in Irvine (July 1781-March 1782) is included with the intention of exploring Burns's creative output in response to this first significant episode of depression. Furthermore, the months between March and November 1786 are also explored, during which Burns was preparing and publishing the Kilmarnock edition, planning for his intended emigration to Jamaica, and his subsequent decision to pursue a second edition of *Poems* in Edinburgh. For the period March-November 1786, there is little extant epistolary evidence. The creative output of these months will be examined against the backdrop of features found in works produced during or in response to known episodes of disordered mood. This is intended to act as a demonstration of how

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<sup>388</sup> Muramoto, p.9.

Burns's poetry might be used to hypothesise about his general mood state at a time in his life where there is little extant correspondence or first-hand evidence.

In its entirety, this chapter offers a deeper insight into the impact of Burns's mood state on his creativity, both in terms of his original composition and his song-collecting and editing practices, thus addressing the third and final research question:

What evidence exists to demonstrate an impact of affective state on the quantity, quality and content of Burns's creative output, and how does this reflect or add to what is known about the links between affective disorders and creativity?

## Chapter 5 – Impact of mood state on creative output: a chronological approach<sup>389</sup>

While it is ill-advised to read every one of Burns's poems autobiographically, bearing in mind he often wrote for a specific audience or with the intention of publication and that works underwent various degrees of editing, that is not to say that none of his works can be read in this way. Largely neglected, however, is a reading of Burns's works which moves beyond a superficial correlation of his mood state and poetic tone. A more considered reading would examine how this might shape the quantity of his output, the content of that output, the motifs and techniques he employs when writing in a particular mood state, and thus what the poetry might add to the overall picture of the nature and features of his disordered moods. This chapter undertakes both a broad overview of the impact of Burns's moods on his overall creativity and a specific focus on certain works which can develop further understanding of those moods.

The same periods of time examined in Ch.4 - his time in Edinburgh and Mossgiel, his time in Ellisland, and his time in Dumfries - are again used as a framework of organisation for the examination of his creative output. In addition, Burns's time in Irvine, from July 1781 to March 1782 and shown in Ch.2 as a time of significantly disordered mood, is also included as the period during which the earliest pieces included in *Poems* were written. Furthermore, the chapter also considers the creative output between March and November 1786. Covering the period during which Burns compiled and published *Poems*, attempted to marry the pregnant Jean Armour, made plans to emigrate to Jamaica (possibly with Mary Campbell) and then planned to seek patronage for a further edition of his poems, this is a hugely significant period, both personally and creatively. By connecting with patterns of creativity evident in the other periods of Burns's life, examination of the songs and poems produced during this period offer potential insight into his mood state during this time and thus how mood may have influenced a pivotal period of Burns's life.

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<sup>389</sup> As sections of this chapter make frequent use of the *K* number for referencing poems from Kinsley's volume, the reader may find the list of most commonly referenced poems on Page 9 helpful.

The chapter begins with a broad overview of the quantity of creative output between March 1786 and July 1796, illustrating the overall pattern of production during each of the various stages in Burns's life.<sup>390</sup> Following this overview, each of the chronological periods are examined more closely. Attention is paid to the quantity and the pattern of production of output within the period, exploring how Burns's circumstances may have affected his creativity including any notable increase or decrease in production in relation to the occurrence of episodes of abnormal mood. A broad study of the content of works within a period explores any patterns in themes, language, images and tone, and how these patterns might relate to episodes of abnormal mood. Attention is also paid, where appropriate, to the balance between original compositions and the collection and editing of existing works, such as was undertaken for James Johnson and George Thomson, talking to the way in which Burns's creative activities were directed at the different stages of his life.

Examination of each period concludes with focused discussion of a specific work or group of works of particular significance within a period where, for example, their production clearly coincides with abnormal mood and their content can be seen to offer insight into Burns's mindset, his attitude to his mood state or the role that his creativity played in allowing him to develop his understanding of his abnormal moods.

As discussed in the introduction to Section 3, caution must be sounded in examining the influence of Burns's mood state on his creative output. Where there is no explicit connection made by Burns between his mood state and specific works, it is all too easy to conflate the artist with his work, reading into the content and themes of any given poem more autobiographical influence than might be justified. By taking a wider overview of the work produced within any given period, examining stylistic features shared across works and with Burns's letters, and considering the rate of output at various points within such a period, this approach allows for the accumulation of evidence from a range of works and the creation of a stronger argument that the presence of such features is an artefact of Burns's mood state at the time of writing, and not the performance

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<sup>390</sup> The Irvine period of July 1781-March 1782 is not included in this overview as the evidence relating to Burns's total creative output during this time is scant.

of a persona. Considering works as individual components within a greater whole, and how they relate individually to each other within that whole, affords greater confidence in the understanding gained of the interplay between Burns's disordered moods and his creative activities.

## Overview of creative output

Trying to objectively quantify how creative an individual such as Burns has been within any given period of time presents a range of challenges. Nevertheless, even crude measures, if due caution is exercised, can yield interesting data. One such measure which provides an objective overview is a simple calculation of Burns's average monthly output of new compositions within each of the chronological periods to be examined.

The primary challenge presented in this approach lies in the imprecise or incomplete dating available for the initial composition of many poems, and the fact that Burns would subsequently edit works several times. In terms of dating, the chronology of composition laid out in Kinsley's volumes provides an initial timeline, making clear where a particular work's production cannot be precisely pinpointed.<sup>391</sup> Drawing on this, only those works up to *K525* ('Fairest maid on Devon banks') were considered for the purposes of this study. *K526* ('To Mr. S. McKenzie') onwards, which consist 'Last Songs for *Scots Musical Museum*', 'Undated Poems and Dubia' and an 'Appendix' of works which have been 'admitted at various times to the canon of Burns's work, either wrongly or on inadequate evidence' have all been omitted on grounds of the impossibility of narrowing dating down to a particular period in Burns's life or on the grounds of questionable authorship. This information has been cross-checked with more recent scholarship to account for changes in dating and/or attribution

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<sup>391</sup> This chapter of the thesis bases its chronology of Burns's output on Kinsley's sequencing, as the most recent reliable scholar volume of Burns's poetry currently available. Similarly to the limitations of using Roy's volume of *The Letters of Robert Burns*, lack of evidence on the dating of individual works introduces the issue of periods on the timeline where an accurate dating and sequencing of output is challenging, if not impossible. Where required, this is acknowledged in the analysis. As with Roy, Kinsley will be superseded by a new edition in the near future where some issues of dating and sequencing may be clarified on the basis of evidence which has emerged in the years since Kinsley published.

subsequent to Kinsley's publication. In particular, Pittock's and McCue's volumes on the songs for Johnson and Thomson respectively provide the most up-to-date work on both the timing and extent of Burns's work with two publishers, works which make up a substantial proportion of Burns's total catalogue.<sup>392</sup> Together, these provide valuable information about Burns's editorial activities and how they balance with the volume of original authorship he produced around the same time.

A further limitation of quantifying Burns's creativity by average monthly output lies in the fact that this approach is effectively 'one poem, one vote'. Thus, the eight lines of *K42* ('The Mauchline Belles') are given as much weight as the 224 lines of *K321* ('Tam o Shanter'), as is *K223* ('Written in Friar's Carse Hermitage on the banks of the Nith') which clearly undergoes significant revision at various points in time. While an approach which involved counting lines could be employed to give better representation of individual poems, additional more complex calculations would be required to account for editing activity, calculations which are beyond the scope of the thesis.

Nevertheless, calculation of Burns's average monthly output for each chronological period does lead to discernible patterns (Table 16):

**Table 16: Average monthly output of poems by Burns**

Period	Location	Duration (months)	New composition <sup>393</sup>	Average monthly output
Mar 1786 - Oct 1786	Mossgiel	8	44	5.5
Nov 1786 - May 1788	Edinburgh and Mossgiel	19	76	4.0
June 1788 - Nov 1791	Ellisland	42	104	2.5

<sup>392</sup> Murray Pittock, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns: Volumes II and III - The Scots Musical Museum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Kirsteen McCue, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns: Volume IV - Robert Burns's Songs for George Thomson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in press).

<sup>393</sup> As per Pittock's classification, Categories I-IV are considered new composition and any songs within these categories are included in the count (Pittock (2018), p.3). Where the commentary for a song is borderline on authorship (ascribed a mixed category), the more conservative category is assumed. Other works excluded are described above. Whereas Pittock's volumes reproduced a scholarly edition of the complete *Scots Musical Museum*, McCue has chosen to focus only on those songs written by Burns for *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*. This eases the process of calculating the rate of new output but poses a challenge in discerning the balance between new composition and editing of existing work.

Dec 1791- Jul 1796	Dumfries	56	160	2.9
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The months during which Burns was preparing *Poems* for publication in Kilmarnock then prevaricating between marriage, emigration and pursuing publication of an Edinburgh edition is the most quantitatively productive period considered in terms of original composition. This is also the period during which he shared tenancy with, and thus responsibility for, Mossgiel with his brother Gilbert, something which afforded him the freedom to be away from the farm and its workload for extended periods of time. Similarly, his rate of output remains relatively high from the time of his first visit to Edinburgh in November 1786 until he moved to Ellisland in June 1788 when, again, he had the freedom to be away from the farm to visit Edinburgh or undertake one of his various tours. His output can be seen to fall off following his move to Ellisland to less than half of that during March-October 1786. Over the course of this three-and-a-half year period in Ellisland, Burns would have responsibility for his own family, his own farm and his own Excise district. While these demands clearly eat into his time, he is also involved with the editing of *Scots Musical Museum* with James Johnson, an activity which provides a creative outlet without necessarily resulting in original composition. Likewise, Burns's creativity in terms of original composition during the Dumfries period remains significantly lower than the months between March 1786 and May 1788. As with Ellisland, he has family and professional commitments to satisfy, although these are now limited to employment with the Excise. Similarly, he is heavily involved in editing for George Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, as well as continuing his work with Johnson, giving him several opportunities for creative activities without producing new material of his own.

While giving a useful overview for each stage of Burns's creativity during the final decade of his life, this approach to measurement masks the nuance of his levels of activity, and thus potential influence on mood state, during individual weeks or months within each period, particularly for the later periods which cover years rather than months. Therefore, for each of the periods of interest, there will be a closer look at potential clustering of composition or editing activity, and at the content and themes of these outputs, particularly around

periods of disordered mood. This will tease out patterns which might point to conclusions which may be drawn regarding the impact of Burns's bipolar disorder on his creative life.

## July 1781-March 1782: Irvine

As previously discussed in Ch.2, Burns's time in Irvine is marked by a relative lack of primary evidence regarding his activities in the town, the details mostly constructed through subsequent second-hand accounts augmented by the later addition of rumour and myth. Nevertheless, one detail which is attested to by Burns is the importance of this period in the development of his creativity. It is during this time that he would first encounter Robert Fergusson's poetry, stimulating Burns to '[string] anew [his] wildly-sounding rustic lyre with emulating vigour', by demonstrating the possibilities of Scots language as a medium of composition (*L125*).<sup>394</sup> It was also during this time that Burns would become acquainted with Richard Brown. As well as introducing the young poet to the pleasures of alcohol and female company, Brown was probably the first audience for Burns's newly inspired works and instrumental in planting the idea of having them published (*L168*). As a result of these events, it has been asserted that while Alloway gave birth to Burns the man, Irvine gave birth to Burns the poet.<sup>395</sup> It is also arguable that Irvine gave birth to Burns the hypochondriac, it being the place where Charles Fleeming first diagnosed and treated the condition. Thus, it is a period worth examining for early evidence of the interplay between Burns's mood and his creativity.

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<sup>394</sup> Crawford suggests that Burns's first poem in Scots (*K24* – 'The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie, the Author's only Pet Yowe') was written as early as 1782, immediately after poet's return from Irvine. (Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Glasgow: Humming Earth, 1960), p.77) Certainly manuscript evidence and the supporting account of Gilbert points to the earliest draft being composed by 1783. (J.C. Ewing, "'Poor Mailie's Elegy": An Early Manuscript', *Burns Chronicle*, 1932, 25–27 (p.25); Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Burns's Scots Poetry Contemporaries', in *Burns and Other Poets*, ed. by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.39–52 (p.39). As well as being written in Scots, Burns makes use of the Habbie stanza, both of which are prominent features of the work of Fergusson, suggesting an almost immediate influence on his creative output.

<sup>395</sup> Irvine Burns Club, 'Robert Burns in Irvine 1781', *Irvine Burns Club* <<https://irvineburnsclub.org/burnsroom2.php>> [accessed 21 September 2018].

Kinsley identifies eight poems - *K10* ('Winter, A Dirge') and *K12-K18* ('To Ruin', 'A Prayer, in the Prospect of Death', 'Stanzas on the same Occasion', 'A Prayer, Under the Pressure of Violent Anguish', 'Though fickle Fortune has deceived me', 'O raging Fortune's withering blast', 'O why the deuce should I repine') - certainly or likely written during or shortly after Burns's time in Irvine while Crawford adds *K19* ('The First Psalm') and *K20* ('The First Six Verses of the Ninetieth Psalm') to this list.<sup>396</sup> Kinsley's dating of the poems is fairly broad, so there is little that can be said about any pattern in the timing of the writing beyond tying them to late 1781/early 1782. Likewise, it is almost impossible to comment on the poems in quantitative terms, the clear gaps in the primary evidence from this period meaning there is no way of knowing how many other early works were written during this time and have now been lost, preventing any measurement of how typical a volume of output this represents for Burns at the time. What can be signalled, however, is the value that Burns placed on at least seven of these known works. *K10* and *K13-K17* were all transcribed by Burns, with accompanying commentary, into his first commonplace book between 1784 and 1785. Similarly, *K12* was included in the Kilmarnock edition, pointing to it being a piece Burns perceived as having literary merit.<sup>397</sup>

The likely reason for his including *K10* and *K12-K17* is evident in the mood and themes of the poems and made explicit in the accompanying commentary Burns adds with the transcriptions (*OEWRB1*, p.39). His experience of depression in November 1781 is clearly something that stays with him, as is the creatively stimulating effect of the episode. Furthermore, the recent death of his father has shaken him, and is an event which could trigger a further episode of depression. Consequently, Burns acknowledges the value he places on 'a song to sooth my misery', foreshadowing the later discussions he would have with Frances Dunlop about both the necessity of this aspect of his temperament to his creativity and the role that writing his experience can play in treating his

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<sup>396</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.13. *K19* and *K20* are listed by Crawford as being 1781-2 while Kinsley is uncertain noting only that they have been collated with the 1787 Edinburgh edition (pp.24–25). Kinsley also identified *K8* ('It was upon a Lammas night'), *K9* ('From thee, Eliza, I must go') and *K11* ('On Cessnock banks a lassie dwells') as being written pre-1782 but likely before early 1781 and almost certainly before Burns had moved to Irvine (pp.1010–12). The dating for *K18* is Currie's conjecture on the basis of line 3.

<sup>397</sup> *K10* and *K13* were also included in the Kilmarnock edition. *K14*, *K15*, *K19* and *K20* would all be added to the first Edinburgh edition.

disordered mood (*OEWRB1*, p.68).<sup>398</sup> Consequently, although there is no way of knowing the original order in which these seven poems were composed, the timing of composition in relation to each other, or the degree to which Burns may have edited them as he transcribed them into his commonplace book, they can clearly be seen to relate to each other thematically and, in some cases, stylistically.

### **‘Those ills that wring my soul’: early poetic expressions of disordered mood**

Acknowledged by Burns as written ‘just at the close of that dreadful period’ in Irvine, *K17* (‘O raging Fortune’s withering blast’) employs a single sustained image to effectively portray the low mood, bleak outlook and sense of ill-fortune which likely marked the episode (*OEWRB1*, p.68).<sup>399</sup> While Kinsley’s sequencing might suggest *K17* to have been one of the last poems arising from that period, it can be argued that it was one of the earliest and marked the beginning of a sequence which demonstrates Burns using his creativity to unpick his understanding of what had happened to him emotionally in those final months of 1781.

Within *K17*, Burns presents himself in natural terms - a tree in full blossom, the prime of its life and full of the promise of a fruitful harvest. This is abruptly quashed, however, by ‘luckless Fortune’s northern storms’, evoking the idea of the poet being the victim of natural forces outwith his control. It is no stretch to see this particular poem as a metaphor for the 22-year-old Burns intending to move to Irvine, full of plans to gain skills which would allow him to further profit from his investment in flax-growing. Before he left, he was shaken by the rejection of his marriage proposal by Alison Begbie.<sup>400</sup> Afterwards he found the warmth of the family home replaced by the dark, lonely surroundings of the heckling shed, accompanied by financial hardship. It was only made worse by a severe episode of hypochondria, before having his misfortune compounded by

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<sup>398</sup> See *L265* and *L267* as examples of Burns’s discussion with Dunlop on this topic.

<sup>399</sup> *K16* and *K17* appear in the first commonplace book without titles. In such cases, or where a text is titled ‘Song’, ‘Extempore’ or similar and offers no means of distinguishing from other texts also so titled, the convention of using the first line will be followed where a poem is first introduced.

<sup>400</sup> Mackay (2004), p.91.

the destruction of the heckling shed in the Hogmanay fire. The poem finishes on the same hopeless note on which it opens, the tree's leaves and blossom destroyed, no prospect of a productive season. Burns feels just as helpless in the face of his depression, as subject to the storms of his emotions as the trees are to the cold northern winds, and with no prospect of recovery of those fortunes.<sup>401</sup>

The image of depression as an approaching storm can be seen again in *K12* ('To Ruin'), where Burns presents it as a weapon of a 'destruction-breathing' deity (l.2). Despite his loyalty to this god, Burns despairs the storm 'thick'ning, and black'ning/ Round my devoted head' (ll.13-14). This time, the sense of inevitability is not in the face of uncontrollable nature but in the face of a vengeful god, a god who is hailed in terms which echo Young's *Night Thoughts*, a work he is also seen to draw on in letters written around periods of depression and lowered mood.<sup>402</sup> There is an acceptance of the gathering clouds, the inevitability of the oncoming depression - 'the *Storm* no more I dread[...]No more I shrink appall'd, afraid' - but the helplessness of *K17* has now become hopelessness (l.11, l.18). Burns pleads

I court, I beg thy friendly aid,  
To close this scene of care!  
When shall my soul, in silent peace,  
Resign Life's *joyless* day?

(ll.19-22)

He sees death as the only possible relief from his predicament. Even this, however, seems a choice between the lesser of two evils, the prospect of the 'cold embrace' of the afterlife sounding no more desirable than the current '*joyless* day' (l.28, l.22). In December 1781, Burns wrote to his father

The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind that I dare not, either review past events, or look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety, or perturbation in my breast, produces most unhappy effects in my whole frame.

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<sup>401</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the image of a storm is a recurrent one used by Burns in discussion of his moods, particularly episodes of lowered mood. Such imagery is also a feature in several poems discussed throughout this chapter.

<sup>402</sup> Kinsley, p.1012.

These lines capture the helplessness of *K17* and the hopelessness of *K12*. The seriousness of the episode is further evidenced as Burns continues

[M]y principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment is looking backwards & forwards in a moral & religious way— I am quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, & uneasiness & disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it, and, if I do not very much much [*sic*] deceive myself I could contentedly & gladly resign it.

(L4)

Within this context, Burns's shift in *K12* toward ascribing a divine origin for his disordered mood can be seen to be part of this 'employment' and his desire to 'Resign Life's *joyless* day' entirely in keeping with the sentiments he expresses, down to explicit expression of suicidal thinking in the repetition of the idea of 'resigning' life (l.22).<sup>403</sup> Similarly, the concerns with the nature of the afterlife, whether pleasant or otherwise, as expressed in *K12* would also re-occur within Burns's later correspondence around his most severe depressive episodes.<sup>404</sup>

Given that *K12* describes itself as 'a wretch's prayer' before its plea for relief through death, *K13* ('A Prayer, in the Prospect of Death') seems like a natural sequel. Employing the rhythm of the metrical psalms with which Burns was more than familiar, it maintains the religious connotation introduced by *K12*, and again shows him drawing on what was already familiar to create a voice for himself at a time of creative difficulty, in this case both following an episode of depression and as a relatively new and inexperienced poet. Similarly, the god therein is still the 'Almighty Cause/ Of all my hope and fear' (ll.1-2). Burns, however, introduces a tone of defiance in this prayer, arguing that his god must accept at least some responsibility for the 'Passions wild and strong' to which the poet is subject, it being God who gave them and thus created the opportunities for 'their witching voice' to lead him into sin (ll.9-12). This seems to mark an evolution in Burns's early thinking around his disordered mood,

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<sup>403</sup> Burns would return to this image during a later episode of depression (*L184*).

<sup>404</sup> See *L374* as an example of this during the depression of December 1789.

shifting them from being natural in origin to being divine. Thus, he is not the victim of unavoidable misfortune arising from uncontrollable external factors but the subject of internal impulses which, to some extent, might be controlled and resisted through the use of his God-given free will. As a result, Burns appears to reach an agreement - he will accept responsibility '[w]here with *intention* I have err'd' but where sins inadvertently occur as a result of these divinely-given passions, God should '[d]elighteth to forgive' (l.17, l.20). In doing so, Burns invokes a more liberal God than that found in the Presbyterian doctrine of predestination, creating the possibility of absolution and redemption, and thus contrasting the hopelessness of *K12*. He both voices and implicitly dissents against the tradition in which he had been raised.

*K15* ('A Prayer, Under the Pressure of violent Anguish') offers a similar tone of defiance in the face of the prospect of a vengeful god of predestination. This prayer opens with an acknowledgement of humility, of the unknowable nature of God, and invocation of past devotion.<sup>405</sup> Special emphasis is placed on his status as a wretch and his on-going devotion despite being under the influence of many ills. *K15* then goes on to echo *K12*, asserting that this prayer cannot be addressing a vengeful god but a benevolent one, and expressing a desire for relief from those ills, either by God lifting them or by death. Yet, again, Burns takes a turn that appears to testify to both the evolution of his thinking and his recovery process. He now considers the possibility that 'I must afflicted be,/ To suit some wise design' and defiantly asserts that he will 'bear and not repine' (ll.13-14, l.16). Thus, while he hopes God is not vengeful, Burns accepts his suffering may be part of an as-yet unknown plan, that to bear the suffering which arises from those divinely-given passions is, in some way, godly and righteous.<sup>406</sup> This shift in *K13* and *K15* towards religious faith as a source of some comfort during episodes of lowered mood can again be seen to be one strategy which Burns develops to help him deal with his disordered mood, and particularly when episodes of melancholy threaten to engulf him (*L306*).

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<sup>405</sup> *K53* ('Holy Willie's Prayer') can be seen to open in a similar fashion of humility, devotion and obedience to God's plan. Of course, this isn't difficult when you believe you are a member of the Elect.

<sup>406</sup> *L512* shows Burns using this same argument in his comforting of Frances Dunlop following the death of her daughter Susan in September 1792.

*K16* ('Though fickle Fortune has deceiv'd me') shares the same defiant tone as *K15* but takes a more pagan viewpoint in presenting Fortune as a female deity, declaring 'Then come Misfortune, I bid thee welcome, / I'll meet thee with an undaunted mind' (ll.7-8). This returns to the idea of *K17*, where his moods originate from a more primitive source, something less definable than the Christian God of the other poems and perhaps more akin to the muse later found in *K62* ('The Vision. Duan First'), possibly indicating an early understanding of some connection between mood state and creativity. Nevertheless, the similar tone of determination that Burns will accept what comes is continued, although it does again carry an inference of inevitability. Thus, through the course of these poems, Burns can be seen to come to some internal recognition that his disordered moods, whether originating naturally or divinely, are something which must be, and can be endured. It could be argued that over the course of the sequence of *K17*, *K12*, *K13*, *K15* and *K16*, Burns can be seen to move through the hopelessness and despair of depression where only death will bring relief to the beginning of a recovery where his faith provides some solace to a more defiant phase where he realises that he can survive such episodes, no matter how dark they may have seemed. This defiance, as expressed in *K15* and *K16*, along with the ideas of divinely-imbued passions and pagan ideas of nature and fortune culminate in 'the earliest of my printed pieces', *K10* (*L125*).

Echoing the images used in *K17* and *K12*, the three eight-line stanzas of *K10* ('Winter, A Dirge') explicitly connect Burns's lowered mood with winter storms, a connection which he further develops in his commentary accompanying the transcription of the poem in his commonplace book.<sup>407</sup> The opening stanza engages the senses of sight, hearing and touch to evoke the experience of a stormy winter day, the repetition of the plosive 'b' sound emphasising the noise and violence of the roaring wind and the rushing river. As might be expected, the conditions drive all beasts to shelter, safe from the 'heartless day' which does not discriminate in who it affects (ll.1-8). Yet the second stanza brings an unexpected development. Re-emphasising the lack of positive emotion in the 'joyless winter-day', Burns welcomes the conditions, 'to me more dear / Than all the pride of May' (l.10-12). He goes on to describe the comfort and solace he

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<sup>407</sup> See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of Burns's recognition of the seasonal nature of his disordered mood, and his use of storm-related imagery in his correspondence.

finds in the raging storm, and his perception that he shares a fate with the trees left bare and vulnerable, buffeted by the winds of winter that they cannot control, in the same way he is buffeted by the merciless winds of Fate (ll.13-16). This very much matches the sentiment of Burns's commentary accompanying this poem in his commonplace book and the subsequent annotation by John Syme, and correlates with the sense of acceptance within *K15* and *K16* (*OEWRB1*, pp.44-45).<sup>408</sup> It may mark the beginning of Burns's explicit realisation that the extremes of emotion that were his disordered moods were also powerful stimuli for his creativity.

The final stanza, however, shifts back from the idea of Nature's power being responsible for his fate and fortune to the idea in earlier poems in the sequence of a 'POW'R SUPREME' (l.17). This invocation of what can be inferred as God explicitly repeats the idea of *K15* of Burns's 'woes' being inevitable '[b]ecause that are *Thy Will!*' (l.8, l.20).<sup>409</sup> In *K10*, however, Burns appears to return to an acceptance of predestination. Whereas *K15* suggested a benevolent God who had it within his purview to end Burns's troubles, *K10* makes no such suggestion; instead, Burns accepts that God has already made a decision '[s]ince to *enjoy* Thou dost deny' and requests that God '[a]ssist me to *resign!*' (ll.23-24). Within this context, 'resign' takes on an ambiguity. Burns's fate, both mortal and immortal, has been predetermined so it would appear pointless to be requesting God assist him in resigning life as he did so in other poems written around this time. This opens up the possibility that Burns is asking God to assist him in resigning himself to his fate, i.e. accept and bear those events which must come to pass such as further griefs, woes and episodes of melancholy, further underscoring the tone of defiance evident in *K15* and *K16*.<sup>410</sup> McIlvanney, although describing the Irvine works as a 'series of pious and somewhat po-faced religious poems' identifies this same tone of resignation, pinpointing it as an early example of 'a bristling, defensive belligerence' where the ambiguity arising from the use of 'resign' shows Burns to be both voicing and dissenting

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<sup>408</sup> Leask also notes Kinsley's observation of the influence of Thomson's *Seasons* in the tone of exultation evident in the poem, the influence of which is also evident throughout Burns's letters.

<sup>409</sup> Burns's subsequent capitalisation of 'Thou' and 'Thy' further point to this power being God.

<sup>410</sup> It is also worth noting that for the final line of the final stanza of *K15*, 'resign' is arguably a better fit than Burns's choice of 'repine' but carries a greater connotation of powerlessness which would spoil the defiance apparently being expressed, particularly if deployed as the last word of the poem.

against ‘the complacency of the pious’, a dissent that would become the criticism of religious hypocrisy that would flow through his Kirk satires.<sup>411</sup>

The clue as to which definition of ‘resign’ Burns intended perhaps lies in the final poem of this group under examination, *K14*. Entitled ‘Stanzas on the same Occasion’, the commonplace book indicates that the occasion in question is a reference to *K13*. Kinsley notes varying titles for *K14*: ‘Misgivings in the hour of Despondency - and prospect of Death’ (commonplace book), ‘Misgivings of Despondency on the approach of the gloomy Monarch of the Grave’ (Stair MSS), and ‘Reflections on a Sickbed’ (British Museum MSS), all of which are clear indicators of Burns’s preoccupation with the possibility of his death, a classic feature of clinical depression.<sup>412</sup>

The poem opens with a series of rhetorical questions indicating that he is, in fact, unwilling to leave this life. Although it has been a life consisting of ‘[s]ome drops of joy with draughts of ill between;/ Some gleams of sunshine mid renewing storms’, it is not the thought of leaving this which causes his reluctance but the prospect of ‘approach[ing] an angry GOD,/ And justly smart[ing] beneath his sin-avenging rod’ (ll.3-4, ll.8-9). The poem has returned to the idea of the vengeful, judgemental god of *K12* and *K10*, a god to be feared. The second stanza captures the sense of conflict within Burns, a man who wishes the forgiveness of his god but knows the futility in any promise to sin no more. He realises that

[S]hould my Author health again dispense,  
Again I might desert fair Virtue’s way;  
Again in Folly’s path might go astray;  
Again exalt the brute and sink the man

(ll.12-15)

His ‘Author health’, his creative passions, is explicitly linked with the idea of sin but within the context of *K13*’s attribution of their divine origin, there is a potential for tension here between aspects of what Burns feels are an inherent

<sup>411</sup> Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002), p.145.

<sup>412</sup> Kinsley, p.21. Unlike *K13*, *K14* was not included in the Kilmarnock Edition, although it was added for publication in the first Edinburgh edition, immediately following *K13*. It should not, however, be assumed that both poems were written sequentially and closely together in time.

component of his character and the role his health has to play in maintaining resolve and control, a tension between animalistic passion and human reason.<sup>413</sup> Thus, ill-health such as his depression becomes a sinful and abnormal state, emphasised by the alliteration of 'f' throughout the second stanza, connecting 'fain', 'forgive', 'foul' and 'folly' together in a subconscious question of whether the sins arising from these passions are forgivable, particularly when he knows he is destined to repeatedly commit them.<sup>414</sup> This leads into the explicit voicing of this concern, a tone of fear arising as Burns questions whether he can seek 'Heavenly Mercy' and whether it might be available from the vengeful God he will face (ll.16-18).

In the face of this, the final stanza sees Burns adopt a humble tone - 'If I may dare a lifted eye to thee' - and seek help in preventing his sinning in the first place, rather than having to seek (and possibly not receive) forgiveness after the fact (l.20).<sup>415</sup> Again, he associates his state of disordered mood with the 'tempest' of a storm and the 'tumult of the raging sea', akin to the winter winds and roaring burn of *K10*, images which he is seen to employ repeatedly in later poetry and correspondence (ll.21-22). Now, however, rather than attempt to ascribe responsibility for his actions arising from those 'headlong, furious passions', he seeks divine intervention in controlling them such that anything contrary to 'th' allowed line' is prevented (l.24, l.26). Implicit in this plea for help is an acceptance of the divine will behind both the passions themselves and the woes and griefs consequent to their expression, as is also appreciable in *K10*. Thus, *K10*'s closing on the idea of resignation within the context of *K14*'s opening with questioning any desire to leave this life combined with the appeal for support in managing his condition can be seen to refer to the idea of acceptance of his lot, acceptance of the tempestuous aspect of his character arising from his mood disorder. This final stanza of *K14* also cements the role of faith in Burns's management of his condition, recalling the same idea present

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<sup>413</sup> This line can, however, also be read as Burns's 'author', i.e. God, choosing to take away his good health, adding a further note of helplessness and inevitability about the chance of future recurrences of both disordered mood and associated sinful behaviour.

<sup>414</sup> This is also an observation that Burns makes on several later occasions, not least in his description of his melancholy as a disease.

<sup>415</sup> As with *K12*, Kinsley highlights that this line demonstrates the influence of Young's *Night Thoughts* on Burn's thinking at this time, again showing his use of other voices in times of difficulty.

within *K13* and *K15* and foreshadowing his chosen therapy during times of ‘philosophic melancholy’ (*L182*).

In the face of the restrictions resulting from the limited primary evidence relating to Burns’s time in Irvine, the poems as a group add testimony to the severity and long-lasting psychological impact of the November 1781 episode of hypochondria. While a psychological autobiographical reading of these poems is not new - Burns’s own framing of the texts within his commonplace book arguably make it difficult to read these works in any other way - the readings presented here are predicated on the findings of the previous chapters of the thesis. They draw on aspects of Burns’s correspondence which complement these interpretations, either through explicit comment or correlating use of images or references in his letters. Thus, they bring together several strands of Burns’s early thinking in relation to the nature and management of his disordered mood. Even at this early stage, within weeks of his recovery from what was likely his first significant episode of depression, Burns’s sense that this is a natural but unhealthy part of him is evident, as is his understanding that he has little control over its onset, that it is difficult to bear, and that he needs support to do so. In tracing these strands through the various poems in the group, it is possible to propose an alternative sequence - *K17*, *K12*, *K13*, *K15*, *K16*, *K10*, *K14* - which arguably demonstrates Burns’s earliest thinking in relation to his mental health and tracks the progression of his recovery from that first depressive episode, moving from the bleak despair of the lowest point through rationalisation to a degree of acceptance of disordered mood in his life, with his religious faith providing some degree of comfort within that journey.

However, what they also show is Burns as a fledgling poet, flexing his creative wings. As Crawford observes

[i]t was a dark time, but Burns wrote himself out of it[...]if death and ruin continued to be among his muses, there was also a sometimes desperate resolution to discover in poetry and song a purgative or antidote even stronger than ipecacuanha or cinchona.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Robert Crawford, p.122. Note that here, Crawford relies on the earlier possibly erroneous interpretations of Fleming’s prescriptions and their purposes.

Thus, they encapsulate lines which are ‘poetically worthless’ but also lines which show flashes of the creative skill exhibited in the subtler exploration of disordered mood found in later works.<sup>417</sup> They also offer early evidence of the way in which Burns’s creativity would be affected by his disordered mood, demonstrating features which will be seen again in later work arising from such episodes. Written in English and drawing on various English influences which will persist into later works, they sit firmly within Daiches argument that Burns tends towards these modes in times of low spirits. Burns’s use of religious and natural language, particularly relating to storms, seasons and winter, foreshadow those same features found in later correspondence and creative output.<sup>418</sup> Awareness of the presence of these features in Burns’s work thus becomes a valuable tool in using his poetry and songs as indicators of his potential mood state during periods of his life for which there is little extant correspondence. One such period of particular interest runs from March to November 1786.

### **March-November 1786: Mossgiel**

Mackay identifies the period between July 1785 and the beginning of March 1786 as the ‘most prolific period of Robert’s entire life’.<sup>419</sup> While this is not reflected in the crude measure of average number of poems produced per month (3.125), what is certainly true is that it produced some of Burns’s best known and most respected works, the works on which the majority of his reputation arguably rests. Over those eight months, his output included *K71* (‘The Twa Dogs, a tale’) which would open *Poems*, *K72* (‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’) which would attract the attention of Frances Dunlop, *K69* (‘To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest’) and *K83* (‘To a Louse, on Seeing one on a Lady’s Bonnet at Church’) which contain probably his most often quoted lines, as well as a further nine works which would be included in *Poems*. Mackay argues that this period of immense creativity was ‘broken only by the crisis over Jean Armour’ but Kinsley’s listing of Burns’s output in the eight months between March and November 1786 - from the Armour ‘crisis’ until Burns’s first trip to Edinburgh -

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<sup>417</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.16.

<sup>418</sup> Chapter 3 discusses these features as they appear in Burns’s correspondence.

<sup>419</sup> Mackay (2004), p.232.

would suggest otherwise.<sup>420</sup> During these months, Burns would produce a further 12 works which would be included in *Poems*, which would be published on 31<sup>st</sup> July, among a total of 44 pieces, representing an average production rate of 5.5 poems/month. This suggests that Burns's creative productivity, if affected by events with Jean Armour, was only temporarily so. This observation is tempered by the fact that many pieces are incompletely dated, Kinsley often only indicating the season in which they were likely written, and some pieces attributed no further than to 1786. Thus, it is difficult to fully comment on any patterns in levels of production. Nevertheless, even those pieces dated only to a season can still prove useful in exploring Burns's potential mood state at various points between March and November 1786.

This was a period of great upheaval and change for Burns. By early March, he knew Jean Armour was pregnant (*L21*). Tradition holds that the couple formed an irregular marriage, signing their names to a document stating their freedom to marry and their willingness to do so.<sup>421</sup> Armed with this document, Jean informed her parents of her pregnancy yet, by the 2<sup>nd</sup> April, found herself with family in Paisley, where she would remain until early June, out of the sight of church elders and local gossip.<sup>422</sup> Her father would present the offending document to lawyer Robert Aiken to have the names excised, purportedly to break any contract therein. Burns would react badly to what he saw as Jean's rejection and betrayal, and to the destruction of the 'unlucky paper' (*L25*). In the weeks between Jean's departure and return to Mauchline, Burns would form an short-but-intense attachment to Mary Campbell (Highland Mary), decide to emigrate to the West Indies to earn a steady wage which might support his child, and resolve to publish a volume of his poetry to raise the funds to cover the cost of his sea passage to Jamaica. Despite being a key period in Burns's life, both personally and professionally, it remains somewhat shrouded in uncertainty through a lack of extant contemporaneous evidence. Even what would seem straightforward and uncontroversial aspects, such as how Burns became

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<sup>420</sup> Mackay (2004), p.232.

<sup>421</sup> Mackay (2004), p.181. Mackay questions whether this document went so far as to form, or even promise marriage, given that its production before the Kirk Sessions would have quickly cleared up any problems. Furthermore, upon serving his three-Sundays' penance, Burns would be furnished with a certificate confirming his status as a single man.

<sup>422</sup> Mackay (2004), pp.186–87; *L31*.

acquainted with Kilmarnock printer John Wilson and how they came to agree publication of Burns's volume, cannot be known for certain. Thus, educated guesses, stories and myths have arisen which both fill in the blanks and mythologise some aspects of this crucial summer in Burns's life.

Nevertheless, with regards to Burns's mental health during this period, there are some tantalising clues. Lockhart reports that following Jean's apparent rejection, Burns was on the 'verge of absolute insanity'.<sup>423</sup> Wilson similarly identifies him as being 'tormented by many violent passions' at this time.<sup>424</sup> These claims are rooted in Burns's own representations in his correspondence at the time. Sending John Kennedy a copy of *K92* ('To a Mountain-Daisy') on 20<sup>th</sup> April, Burns remarks that

I am a good deal pleas'd with some sentiments in it myself; as they are just the native, querulous feelings of a heart, which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, "Melancholy has marked for her own".

(L28)

Around the same time, he writes to John Arnot with a more detailed account of his emotional state in recent weeks

There is a pretty large portion of bedlam in the composition of a Poet at any time; but on this occasion, I was nine parts & nine tenths, out of ten, stark staring mad.—At first, I was fixed in stuporific insensibility, silent, sullen, staring, like Lot's wife besaltified in the plains of Gomorha [*sic*].—But my second paroxysm chiefly begs description.—The rifted northern ocean, when returning suns dissolve the chains of winter, & loosening precipices of long accumulated ice tempest with hideous crash the foamy Deep— images like these may give some faint shadow of what was the situation of my bosom.—My chained faculties broke loose; my maddening passions, roused to tenfold fury, bore over their banks with impetuous, resistless force, carrying every check & principle before them.— Counsel, was an unheeded call to the passing hurricane; Reason, a screaming elk in the vortex of Moskoe strom; & Religion, a feebly-struggling beaver down the roarings of Niagara.

(L29)

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<sup>423</sup> Lockhart, p.92.

<sup>424</sup> Wilson, p.xxxiii.

Both *L28* and *L29* would point to Burns suffering some degree of lowered mood in the wake of Jean's departure, while *L29* indicates this was very quickly followed by a period of elevated mood. While it would be very tempting to see these as episodes of depression and hypomania, further adding to the argument that Burns was affected by Type II bipolar disorder, there is insufficient information to gauge range, severity and duration of symptoms to allow objective assessment against the clinical criteria. The inclusion of *K92* with *L28*, and the clear autobiographical indicator provided by Burns, however, points to this and other works produced around April 1786 (*K92-K99*) as potential sources of additional information on the nature of the moods during this period, if read against those works which were produced during known episodes of abnormal mood.

### **'By Love's simplicity betrayed': poetry as evidence of disordered mood**

The eight poems of interest appear to have been written between April and early May. As with the Irvine poems, reading them as a group suggests a sequence which differs from that laid out by Kinsley and which may illustrate Burns's emotional journey through this time. Burns's report of an episode of melancholy in *L28* suggests there may have been a period with little or no creative output of consequence, and that it was only with the improving of his lowered mood that he meaningfully took up the pen again, producing *K92* ('To a Mountain-Daisy') which he would send to John Kennedy. He describes it in the enclosing letter to Kennedy as 'just the native, querulous feelings of a heart, which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, "Melancholy has marked for her own".' (*L28*) As with the Irvine poetry, Burns's own direction appears to intimate this text should be read, at least in part, as a mirror of his mood state.

Following its inclusion in *Poems*, Henry Mackenzie praised it fulsomely for its depiction of nature and as an example of the 'tender and moral'.<sup>425</sup> More recent criticism has been less kind, with Fitzhugh stating that it 'reeks with overcharged benevolence and carefully calculated appeals to our tender feelings' while Crawford feels it to be 'artificial, second-rate, perhaps even

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<sup>425</sup> Low, p.69.

insincere'.<sup>426</sup> Both these assessments also compare *K92* unfavourably with *K69* ('To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest'), written around six months previously, and of which there are clear echoes. Apart from the obvious similarity in title and that both works are written in the Habbie stanza, *K69* is also shot through with contemplation of the poet's lucklessness, the vagaries of fate, and the gloominess of futurity that comes with the power of human foresight. *K92* is also inspired by the destruction of a small and vulnerable living thing by the plough; in this case, however, it remains focused on the poet and his particular set of circumstances rather than opening out to a more universal message. Set against the context of Burns writing in the vicinity of a period of melancholy, *K92* is neither 'overcharged' nor 'artificial, second-rate' work but arguably a further example of Burns expressing his extremes of emotion and writing himself out of a disordered mood state, echoing his behaviour in the period following his depression in Irvine in 1781/82.

Further similarities with the Irvine period are also evident in *K92*. As with *K10*, *K12* and *K17*, Burns employs the image of the storm-ravaged ocean to represent his vulnerability in the face of Fate, describing himself as a 'simple Bard/On Life's rough ocean luckless starr'd[...]Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,/And whelm him o'er!' (ll.37-38, 41-42). As with *K10*, it creates a sense of inevitability about the onslaught of the storm, an image which he uses to represent his depression, thus suggesting either the severity of disordered mood experienced in April 1786 or Burns's fear that it would be as severe as that Irvine episode. He is also seen to draw, again, on the works of Beattie, Thomson and Young, using them to shape his writing and give voice to his mood; the significance of the fact that he is also clearly drawing on himself, in echoing *K69*, should not be under-emphasised, pointing to the embryonic development of his own personal vocabulary, including the use of some Scots, which will allow him to be less dependent on the words of others to express himself.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.164 (also citing Fitzhugh).

<sup>427</sup> Kinsley, pp.1011–12. Although this might be considered 'early' Burns, where he is still shaping his poetic voice, this practice of echoing others is a strategy he would repeatedly fall back on at times of low mood, for example as discussed in relation to the Clarinda letters in Ch.2.

*K94* ('Despondency, an ode') can also be seen to echo *K69*, again musing on the gloominess of hindsight and the terror that comes with foresight, the inevitability of ill-luck and poor fortune. The pessimism inherent as:

Dim-backward I cast my view,  
 What sick'ning Scenes appear!  
 What sorrows yet may pierce me thro'.  
 Too justly I may fear!

(ll.7-10)

immediately calls to mind the sense of self-pity and, arguably, resentment that emerges in *K69* that the mouse should be fortunate enough not be afflicted with foresight. The speaker foregrounds the 'sons of Busy-life' who 'No other view regard' and their 'envious, early days,/When dancing thoughtless Pleasure's maze,/To Care, to Guilt unknown!' (ll.15,17, 57-59) This provides a sharp contrast to the opening lines of the poem which present a speaker 'Oppress'd with grief, oppress'd with care,/A burden more than I can bear.' (ll.1-2) The intensity of the inevitability evident in *K92* is amplified to hopelessness in these lines, further suggesting their origin in something more than a simple sadness. He sees no potential for release or relief from his mood state, the hopelessness rendering him

Unfitted with an *aim*,  
 Meet ev'ry sad-returning night,  
 And joyless morn the same.

(ll.23-25)

He points to aimlessness, loss of pleasure and, potentially, disturbed sleep patterns, adding to the suggestion that this work emerged from an episode of true depression.

The suggestion of sleeplessness is made more explicit in *K93* ('The Lament. Occasioned by the Unfortunate Issue of a Friend's Amour'). The poem opens as 'care-untroubled mortals sleep', suggesting the speaker is both troubled and sleepless (l.2). Watched over by the moon, he is 'a wretch, who inly pines', calling to mind the wretch who prays in *K12*. Again, *K93* carries a sense of hopelessness, that the speaker has been abandoned but there is now a sense of defiant irritation emerging; he has been sincere in his actions and intentions

The *plighted faith*; the *mutual flame*;  
 The *oft-attested Powers above*;  
 The *promis'd Father's tender name*;  
 These were the pledges of my love!

(ll.21-24)

rendering his rejection and abandonment unjustified. Thus, the poem becomes an expression of an internalised sense of persecution, somewhat self-pitying and wallowing. As a result, where the speaker does lay blame for his predicament, it is tinged with bitterness and resentment, and it is entirely clear that this blame lies with one with 'so base a heart, / So lost to Honor, lost to Truth' that, in contrast to the speaker's heart-felt pledges, she has betrayed him with 'A *faithless women's broken vow*' (ll.33-34, 80). He does not deserve the current treatment to which he is being subjected, especially when he was prepared to swear on all that was holy that he would do the right thing; assuming that the speaker is Burns, this would be his intention to marry the pregnant Jean and her subsequent rejection and desertion of him, leading to this episode of lowered mood.

This sense of betrayal continues into *K95* ('Jeremiah, 15<sup>th</sup> Ch. 10V. '), suggesting some fixedness of thinking on this topic. In drawing on a biblical source, he also points again to a religious bent in his thinking, further suggesting that he might see the 'faithless vow' as a betrayal of God as well as himself. Again, woman is also blamed for his misfortune, it being 'Mother dear' who has birthed 'A man of strife' (ll.1-2). While this religious line of thinking would correlate with previous evidence during the Irvine depression of Burns turning to religion at times of lowered mood, this suggestion of a dual betrayal and female responsibility more heavily weighs towards a sense of rising anger. This is compounded in *K95* by the ongoing and, by now somewhat melodramatic, expression of his blamelessness in the current circumstances

Yet I, a coin-denied wight,  
 By Fortune quite discarded,  
 Ye see how I am, day and night,  
 By lad and lass blackguarded.

(ll.9-12)

The 'stuporific insensibility' that yielded *K92* and *K94* appears to be giving way to the 'second paroxysm' where 'chained faculties broke loose' and 'maddening passions, roused to tenfold fury' (*L29*). Consequently, Burns produces works which increasingly rail against what he sees as an injustice. This is not the resignation and acceptance of fate that was seen in the Irvine poetry where Burns has a strong sense that he was to blame for his depression and that he had to learn to endure it until it passed. Instead, it appears to be someone who has again emerged from the introspective state that accompanies his melancholy but this time with an infuriated sense of injustice and betrayal in a set of circumstances where he is the innocent party.

Perhaps the clearest indicator of this sense of injustice and betrayal emerges in *K99* ('Extempore to Gavin Hamilton: Stanzas on Naething'). Written to a close friend and never published in Burns's lifetime, as was likely his intention, this piece is arguably the most honest of the eight pieces considered during this period of 1786. Crawford notes that while Burns is being satirical it is unusual to see such 'nihilism' in his work, although it is 'redeemed' by some bawdy lines which refer to Jean.<sup>428</sup> That Crawford might interpret this piece as nihilistic is understandable as it does appear to argue there is no purpose in any human activity, whether ambition, religion or love. Read within the context of Burns's shifting mental health during this period, however, the piece takes on an alternative meaning. The poet had already written to Hamilton on 15<sup>th</sup> April, alternately raging against the 'perdition' and 'perjurious perfidy' of Jean and the more appeasing plea that 'God bless her and forgive my poor, once-dear, misguided girl.- She is ill-advised', perhaps evidencing the mixed mood state to which Burns was prone as he recovered from periods of lowered mood (*L25*). Roy places *K99* later in date than *L25*, perhaps as late as May.<sup>429</sup> *K99*, written in Scots, immediately seems to have a more positive tone than the earlier letter and the previous poetic pieces of this period but this is superficial, masking a remaining thread of resentment that runs through the piece. Instead, this poem is Burns again using his friend as an outlet for the increasing irritation he feels in response to the actions of various individuals and groups. Some appear to be

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<sup>428</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.156.

<sup>429</sup> Roy dates *K99* to April-May 1786, sequencing it as *L30A*, after *L30* to John Kennedy with a date of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1786,

more general gripes - those who scrape and grovel in the hope of advancement (ll.13-16), the ongoing tension between religious factions (ll.17-20). Others, however, are much closer to home - those who would criticise him for his poetic ambition (ll.5-8), the failure of his muse despite his best efforts (ll.25-28), the attention of Kirk elders (ll.41-44). It can be argued that this irritation and anger represents a rising of his mood to an abnormal level. Even those lines which Crawford read as bawdy (ll.33-40) take on a tone of irritation, railing against the pressure to commit to a permanent relationship. Across the piece, there is a sustained sense of Burns feeling he is the unfortunate victim of so many others, being blameless for his part. Thus, the 'naething' which constitutes the purpose of these various activities is not nihilistic but an angry plea to be left alone, that others focus on themselves and their own behaviour, a theme which would appear again within various works of Burns, and particularly his Kirk satires. He is, in his mind, inconsequential and not worthy of the excessive attention he appears to be garnering, and this provokes the manifestation of that irritability that typifies his episodes of elevated mood. Consequently, what appears to be a reference to his plans to sail for Jamaica

And now I must mount on the wave,  
My voyage perhaps there is death in;  
But what of a watery grave!  
The drowning of a Poet is naething.

(ll.45-48)

creates a sense of his desire to escape the attention, regardless of what the consequences may be, only being a lowly poet. Arguably, this then becomes a suggestion that his period of lowered mood has not yet completely passed and, as has already been suggested in relation to *L25*, that he is actually experiencing a mixed mood state with features of both lowered and elevated aspects, and thus the image of a dangerous sea and sense of finality in that 'journey' points to Burns anticipating a further episode of lowered mood or depression.<sup>430</sup>

Any such apprehension, however, appears to have dispelled by the time he writes *K96-98* ('Epitaph on a Henpecked Country Squire', 'Epigram on said

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<sup>430</sup> Alternatively, these lines might suggest this piece was written prior to the episode of melancholy which Burns reports in *L28* and *L29*, Burns showing an awareness of the symptoms of an approaching episode, as he would again demonstrate towards the end of 1786.

Occasion' and 'Another'). Each of these pieces is short, no more than eight lines, and very pointedly railing against an individual, in this case the wife of the eponymous squire. While *K96* is cruel and biting, *K97* and *K98* are simply nasty. Burns moves from criticising her for dominating her husband to calling for her death in place of her husband's and accusing her of cannibalism as a means of saving money. The three pieces move beyond satirising an individual to vitriolic censure, arguably compounded by Burns's inclusion of them in *Poems* later that year, itself potentially evidence on an ongoing state of abnormally elevated mood.<sup>431</sup> Their brevity and focus suggests an extempore production. Key to these pieces, however, is the opening lines of *K96*:

As father Adam first was fool'd,  
A case that's still too common

(ll.1-2)

Whilst Burns might appear to be criticising the squire's wife, this generalisation which opens the sequence cannot help but point to the fact he was likely still angry by his perceived ill-treatment by Jean and her family. As with *K93*, he quite firmly places the blame at the feet of the woman in the relationship, thus within this context, these epigrams become a further expression of the anger he feels in relation to his situation, possibly compounded by the irritation that accompanies the rising of his mood state.

As with the Irvine poems, considering these works through the lens of Burns's mental health offers a new layer of interpretation in their reading to sit alongside previous readings, as well as additional evidence for Burns's mood state at the time of writing. The earlier poems in this sequence of eight demonstrate several similarities with those works produced in response to the Irvine depression and, as will be shown, work stimulated by later episodes of lowered mood and depression, such that there is a strengthening case for Burns having been affected by some degree of lowered mood in late March or early April 1786.<sup>432</sup> Moving through the sequence, there is evidence of Burns moving into a mixed mood state, with irritation becoming evident in his temperament at

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<sup>431</sup> They were not, however, included in subsequent editions.

<sup>432</sup> There is still insufficient evidence of the duration of the suggested symptoms to allow any degree of confidence in identifying the episode as clinical depression.

the time. By the final pieces, this irritation has become outright anger but there is little suggestion that the ‘maddening passions’ were abnormally elevated mood associated with hypomania, simply that they were ‘tenfold fury’ as he came to terms with his mistreatment in the Armour affair despite apparently making his best efforts to do what was morally and socially right by taking responsibility for both Jean and her pregnancy. Thus, where there is clear evidence that particular works by Burns can be read autobiographically, either by explicit identification within the work or supporting evidence within his correspondence, it is possible to tease out detail relating to his mental health such that suspected episodes of abnormal mood can be both deemed more or less likely to meet the criteria for clinical significance.

### **‘The consequences of my follies’: May-November 1786**

By the time Burns writes a further verse epistle to Gavin Hamilton on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May (K102 - ‘To Mr Gavin Hamilton, Mauchline’), he is clearly in a far better state of mind. Writing in broad Scots, he is recommending a boy for Hamilton to take on as a clerk, and there is no indication of Burns’s recent troubles or mental turmoil. One factor which might explain the resolution of his lowered mood and the disappearance of his seething anger is the beginning of his relationship with Mary Campbell. ‘[S]cant and scattered surviving evidence’ points to it lasting no more than a month.<sup>433</sup> Burns makes very barely any mention of events in his correspondence.<sup>434</sup> Currie’s treatment of that period is simply to quote L125 and Gilbert’s later account addressed to Frances Dunlop, meaning there is no mention of Campbell.<sup>435</sup> It is Cromek who gives life to the story, quoting Burns’s preface to K107 (‘The Highland Lassie O’) transcribed in Robert Riddell’s copy of *Scots Musical Museum*.<sup>436</sup> Subsequently, the story is embellished with tales of a betrothal and gifting of bibles, and a significant mythology around this

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<sup>433</sup> Robert Crawford, p.214.

<sup>434</sup> Pauline Mackay and Murray Pittock, ‘Highland Mary: Objects and Memories’, *Romanticism*, 18.2 (2012), 191–203 (p.191).

<sup>435</sup> Currie, pp.54, 77.

<sup>436</sup> R.H. Cromek, p.237. This particular page was later removed from the Glenriddell volume, resulting in Cromek being long censured for fabricating the material. It was not until the twentieth century that Cromek was vindicated when the missing page re-surfaced, now held by the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. (Gerard Carruthers, ‘Robert Burns’s Interleaved *Scots Musical Museum*: A Case-Study in the Vagaries of Editors and Owners’, *Essays and Studies*, 66 (2013), 78–96 (pp.84–86); Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.6149).

relationship emerges.<sup>437</sup> According to Fitzhugh's transcription of the Train manuscript, what has been portrayed as the tragically curtailed romantic devotion of Burns and Campbell is misplaced as '[t]ruth deprives her history of much of its charm.— Her character was loose in the extreme'.<sup>438</sup> Reliable evidence relating to the relationship is so lacking that the truth will likely never be known. With an awareness, however, of Burns's mood state at the time he encountered Campbell, it might be suggested that it was her influence, or simply her presence as a distraction, that worked to soothe his spirits and bring him out of an episode of lowered mood which threatened to become something far more severe.<sup>439</sup> Haunted by the trauma of his Irvine episode, and fearing aggravation of the same as a consequence of recent events with Jean and her family, had Burns perceived Campbell to be responsible in some way for his recovery, this might go some way to explain his clear and prolonged emotional attachment to a woman with whom he had what appears to have only been a very short relationship.<sup>440</sup>

Regardless of Campbell's actual status in Burns's life, the truth is that by early June, Jean Armour had returned to Mauchline and, as far as can be discerned, Burns had returned to a normal mood state. He was still clearly hurting over the way he was treated and seemed to think there was no chance of a future together for them (L31). Nevertheless, Burns's attempts to forget her were in vain; as her pregnancy progressed, Burns still struggled between his wish to be with her and the pain caused by what he saw as her disloyalty to him (L37). To compound this, he was now also in hiding, having been made aware that James Armour now had a writ for his arrest raised to prevent Burns leaving the country (L36).<sup>441</sup> Armour had likely heard that the poet was about to make some money, money which could provide for his child and its mother. This money was to come from the impending publication of *Poems* by John Wilson. Wesling argues that

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<sup>437</sup> Mackay (2004), pp.203–8; Mackay and Pittock, p.191.

<sup>438</sup> Robert T. Fitzhugh, *Robert Burns: His Associates and Contemporaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), p.54.

<sup>439</sup> It could be argued that this foreshadows the similar distracting nature of Burns's relationship with Agnes McLehose in the early months of 1788, as discussed in Ch.4.

<sup>440</sup> The similarly therapeutic roles in his life might also explain why Frances Dunlop was one of very few people to whom Burns would mention Campbell.

<sup>441</sup> It may have been Jean herself who warned Burns of her father's actions.

This great book [*Poems*] opens with an abject Preface, and ends with the imagined epitaph of a poet[...]hope for the italics-emphasized quality of "self-controul". The contents of this book, between these wobbling-tone brackets, often lead us to think that Burns is a combustible person who would say anything. There is the element of danger and instability.<sup>442</sup>

That so many pieces in *Poems* - 15 out of 37 - were written at least in part-response to episodes of abnormal mood, it is no surprise that Wesling observes an instability. The reality is that Burns, in assembling his edition, likely recognised the power of the work that originated in such powerful emotional experiences. Situating pieces written in 1782 alongside those written in recent months may also point to his recognition of the similarities of the two episodes - their precipitation by stressful life events, the role of his writing in developing his understanding of their nature, and in moving him towards a resolution of his symptoms. Thus, among the humour and the satire sits an essence of a man who struggled with his demons but was also capable of turning them to his advantage. He may not yet have a complete understanding of the nature of those moods, nor of their place within his personal and creative lives, but he does have an innate sense that they have a place, a sense that would be made more concrete as time passed and, particularly, through the support of Frances Dunlop.

From the time of publication of *Poems*, Burns had repeatedly postponed his sailing to Jamaica such that by October, and now the father of twins, he is entirely undecided as to what he should do. The possibilities of a second edition of his poetry and of a post in the Excise service have both now been raised, offering him alternative courses of action. He writes to Robert Aiken

I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within, respecting the excise. There are many things plead strongly against it; the uncertainty of getting soon into business, the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and besides I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of

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<sup>442</sup> Donald Wesling, 'Moral Sentiment from Adam Smith to Robert Burns', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 30.1 (1998), 147–55 (p.151).

the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad; and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances everything that can be laid in the scale against it.

(L53)

The ‘rotations and movements’ that affect Burns, however, are the naturally conflicting emotions of a man who wants to provide for his children but knows that the best path to achieve this is found miles away, that no matter how popular his *Poems* has been, it is not enough to maintain a family. Over the course of the summer, Burns has continued to compose additional new material. Some of those are clearly autobiographical, charting his plans to leave Ayrshire for the West Indies (*K104* (A Bard's Epitaph'), *K115* ('The Farewell. To the Brethren of St. James's Lodge, Tarbolton')) while others continue in the bawdy or satirical veins of earlier works which he would only circulate among a select group of trusted friends (*K108* ('Address of Beelzebub'), *K109* ('Libel Summons')). Nothing he produces, however, is as emotionally charged as those pieces produced in April. Echoing features of the Irvine poetry and foreshadowing aspects of works yet to come, Burns managed both write himself out of his disordered mood state and into the arms of the Edinburgh elite, where that second edition would become a reality.

## **November 1786-May 1788: Edinburgh and Mossgiel**

The 19 months between November 1786 and May 1788 represent the first period in Burns's life where there is substantial epistolary evidence underpinning the assessment of Burns's mood state. Thus, examination of patterns within his creativity during this time can be more confidently linked to his moods, as opposed to the creative output itself forming part of the evidence base for episodes of disordered mood as was seen in the treatment of the Irvine 1781-82 and Mossgiel 1786 periods.

Table 8 shows that between November 1786 and May 1788, during which the poet split his time between Edinburgh, Mossgiel and tours of the Borders and Highlands, Burns was affected by an episode of mild depression in December

1786, a mild to moderate depression in the winter of 1787/88 and a period of hypomania in February 1788. Over this same period, Kinsley lists 76 new compositions, a slightly lower average rate of production than that between March and October of 1786. What is also evident, but not surprising, is that this rate of production is not steady throughout this period.

The opening of this period coincides with the final weeks of preparation ahead of Burns's first trip to Edinburgh, travelling to the city between 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November 1786. Kinsley definitely dates *K130* ('A Winter Night') and *K134* ('Rusticity's ungainly Form') to these weeks, with *K131-K133* ('Extempore Reply to an Invitation', 'Lying at a Reverend Friend's house one night', 'The Night was still') likely being written earlier in the autumn. *K130* is particularly interesting - known to have been completed within two weeks of a detectable episode of depression. The poem contains hints of Thomson's *Seasons*, makes explicit use of images of winter and storms which call to mind those early poems from the Irvine period, and is preceded by an epigraph quoted from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a key theme of which is madness.<sup>443</sup> It is to this work that the case study for this period will return.

Burns's arrival in Edinburgh is marked by the composition of two works, *K135* ('Address to Edinburgh) and *K136* ('To a Haggis').<sup>444</sup> Both these works are celebratory in tone, relating respectively to the city and the company in which Burns now finds himself, and are congruent with the letter he writes to Gavin Hamilton applauding the reception he has received from the capital's society (*L62*). Also congruent is the creative silence which then occurs, in keeping with the gap in his correspondence which follows his letter Hamilton. As far as can be discerned, Burns produces no new poems until 1<sup>st</sup> January 1787 (*K139*: 'To Miss L---'). Undoubtedly, this will have been in part due to Burns's busy social schedule as he sought to meet and spend time with those in a position to support publication of a further edition of his poems - *K139* itself is a short piece written to accompany a gift for a friend of Frances Dunlop - but it cannot be discounted

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<sup>443</sup> Kinsley, pp.1216–18.

<sup>444</sup> Kinsley, pp.1219, 1221.

that the mild depression, and the factors which precipitated the episode, also inhibited his creativity.<sup>445</sup>

Although Burns's depression lifts towards the end of December, he persists in a lowered mood state until February 1787; alongside *K139*, he almost certainly writes *K140* ('There was a lad'), and possibly writes *K138* ('Again rejoicing Nature sees') before the end of January. Even beyond this, up until May, there is very little definite new composition by Burns. There is arguably some significance, however, that as he emerges from this period of depression he undertakes to arrange the raising of a headstone for Robert Fergusson, writing an epitaph as well as two short pieces which memorialise the poet, rail against society's neglect of such genius and, significantly, draw a direct line of connection to Burns

O thou, my elder brother in Misfortune,  
By far my elder Brother in the muse,  
With tears I pity thy unhappy fate!  
Why is the Bard unfitted for the world,  
Yet has so keen a relish of its Pleasures?

(*K143* ('On Fergusson'), ll.3-7)

At the time of writing. Burns is only just emerging from an episode of depression, and fully aware of Fergusson's unfortunate demise in Edinburgh Darien House hospital, the capital's mental asylum. Burns's celebration of Fergusson makes explicit that he is happy to emulate his predecessor's poetic success but also makes use of the recognisable poetic trope of the solitary poet to mourn the loss of his inspiration. Against the backdrop of Burns's own mood state at the time, however, it can also be argued to take on a tone of concern that not only does he emulate Fergusson's poetic talent, Burns's propensity for melancholy also predisposed him to the same solitariness and, potentially, premature and mentally tortured demise that Fergusson experienced.

Producing little else by way of new material, Burns's creative activity in the first quarter of 1787 seems to have been predominated by correction of the printing proofs for the new Edinburgh edition of *Poems* which was to be published in April. Just as Burns's correspondence has shown lowered mood leading to an

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<sup>445</sup> See Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of the factors which likely fed into the onset of this episode.

increased use of the words of others, and later discussion will show that any creative activity will tend towards editing rather than new composition during periods of disordered mood, it would seem that even correcting his own words is sufficient, or all that he can manage at such times.<sup>446</sup> It is also worth noting that, of the 19 new poems which expanded the Edinburgh edition, seven of these are notably depressed in tone and furthermore, four of these are poems written as a consequence of his period of depression in Irvine in 1781-82 (*K14*, *K15*, *K19* and *K20*).<sup>447</sup>

By May, Burns has seen his new edition published and has left Edinburgh to return to Mossgiel. On the 5<sup>th</sup> May, he sets out on his tour of the Borders with Robert Ainslie, later followed by a tour of the West Highlands (June) and wider Highland area (August-September, with William Nicol). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> August, in the window between his West Highland and Highland tours, Burns writes to Dr John Moore, attempting to ‘divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of Ennui’, his autobiographical letter wherein he comments that ‘Virgo [is] a month which is always a carnival in my bosom’ (*L125*). Years later, Burns would write in similar terms to George Thomson, observing ‘Autumn is my propitious season.—I make more verses in it, than in all the year else’ (*L577*). This is certainly evident in the output originating from Burns’s Highland tour. It consists of a mixture of extempore informal short verses, not always written on paper (*K165* - ‘Verses written on a window of the Inn at Carron’), and more crafted works such as *K172* (‘The Humble Petition of Bruar Water to the Noble Duke of Athole’) which would find a place among his most well-known poems. Many of the pieces are marked by a close focus on the sights and sounds of the natural world, especially those relating to water.<sup>448</sup> The flurry of new material emerging from these trips is a remarkable contrast to the relative dearth of the first four months of the year. Burns’s exit from the high-pressure urban setting of Edinburgh, which had triggered that episode of depression in December 1786, into what might be considered a retreat to the extreme rurality of the more outlying areas of

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<sup>446</sup> See Chapter 3 for discussion of Burns’s use of quotation and allusion during periods of lowered mood, exemplified in his correspondence with Agnes McLehose in the winter of 1787/88.

<sup>447</sup> The others are *K122* (‘The gloomy night is gath’ring fast’), *K130* (‘A Winter Night’) and *K138* (‘Again rejoicing Nature sees’).

<sup>448</sup> Among the works of this period, as well as Bruar Water, appearances are made by the Falls of Foyer, the birks of Aberfeldy, the banks of Castle Gordon and many other named and unnamed rivers, streams, falls and burns.

Scotland, and to a place more akin to his native habitat, is clearly a decision which has a positive impact on his mood and mindset, and thus his creativity.<sup>449</sup>

In October 1787, Burns returns to Edinburgh. He becomes heavily involved in editing for Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*. The vast majority of K194-K218 would appear in Volume II, published in February 1788, pointing to Burns spending much of the latter quarter of 1787 in the combination of composition and editing of those works to which he can be connected. It is, in most cases, challenging to tie his activity on any particular piece to a specific point in time or to identify the sequence in which he worked on the pieces, Kinsley taking his sequence predominantly from the order in which they were included in *Scots Musical Museum*. Several of the pieces can be connected with Jacobite tradition and it is tempting to suggest that Burns is working on songs which he picked up while on his Highland tour earlier in the year.<sup>450</sup> While this is not impossible, there is no conclusive evidence to support this claim, and one must be wary of what Pittock describes as romanticist ethnology.<sup>451</sup> What may be possible is that, in working on songs with Jacobite connections, these represent for Burns the far more positive time, and more positive mood state, of his Highland tour, and that working on these pieces is not about creating a mythological representation of Highland culture but a strategy for attempting to fend off his feelings of depression, similar to other activities of manic defence in which he engaged.

One such activity is also found during this period in Edinburgh, between October 1787 and March 1788, in the other significant output of these months - the Clarinda correspondence, the sequence of letters with Agnes McLehose themselves a creative act. The extensive use of quotation and implicit drawing on the works of others is an artefact of the impact of depression on Burns, psychologically as he finds ways of expressing his emotion while avoiding the pain of confronting the true nature and severity of his state of mind at the time,

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<sup>449</sup> Priscilla J. Kucik, 'The Physical and Psychological Vacation Tours of Robert Burns in 1787', *Burns Chronicle*, 2000, 113–16 (p.116).

<sup>450</sup> See K206 ('Hey tuti tatey'), K209 ('To daunt me') and K211 ('Over the water to Charlie') as examples of songs within this group with a Jacobite flavour.

<sup>451</sup> Pittock (2018), p.3.

and creatively as he uses the words of others to perform a role at odds with his mood when his ability to produce originality is dampened.<sup>452</sup>

Certainly during this time, Burns was engaged in editing for Johnson, indicative that at least some of this creative work was of a similar fashion - reworking the words of others (or editing his own previous composition) rather than producing new material. Of the seven items which can be specifically dated between December 1787 and Burns's departure from Edinburgh at the beginning of March 1788, the earliest (*K189* ('A Birthday Ode')) was written 31<sup>st</sup> December, indicating that much of the month, while affected by the 'anguish and low spirits [which have] made me unfit to read, write or think', was unproductive in terms of new material (*L184*). Other than two pieces of a Jacobite tone (*K188* ('My heart is wae and unco wae') and *K190* ('Hunting Song')), the other dateable work in this period consists of two pieces of editing for poems written by McLehose (*K210* ('Interpolation') and *K214* ('Revision for Clarinda')), two new poems (*K192*, ('Anna, thy charms my bosom fire') about the fiancée of his friend Alexander Cunningham, and *K217* ('To Clarinda') and an edited version of *K218* ('The Winter it is Past'). This final poem, although not an entirely new Burns work, is interesting in its image of the emerging spring. By February, Burns was shifting from his depression through a mixed state towards an episode of hypomania. It is tempting to think he was inspired to rework this particular song as his mood lifted, the lines matching that seasonality evident in the pattern of his disordered moods. There is, nevertheless, little information available on the timing of Burns's work on this piece which would support such a proposition, its placement in Kinsley's sequence dictated by its placement within *Scots Musical Museum*. This leads into March where Burns will agree the lease on Ellisland farm, return to Ayrshire and finally succeed in marrying Jean Armour (despite his apparent devotion to Agnes McLehose). It is also a month marked by hypomania. Other than *K219* ('To Clarinda'), between March and moving to Ellisland in May, Burns would produce only two other new poems. Indeed, he is energised as he prepares to move to Ellisland and ready the farm to receive his new wife and family, but 'crazed with care' as he is at this time, it would seem that his energy is not directed into creative activity (*L228*, *L233*). One might speculate

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<sup>452</sup> See discussion of the Clarinda correspondence in Ch.2 for more relating to Burns's use of the words of others as a mechanism of manic defence.

that the distractibility and restlessness which accompanies hypomania, leading to increased disorganisation, made it difficult for Burns to focus for the sustained periods required to produce new compositions.

In terms of the connection between Burns's mental health and his creativity, what this 19-month period does show is that both poles of his mood disorder potentially impact the quantity of his original creative output. Both lead to a reduction in the amount of new material produced, a rate which then steadily improves as Burns returns to a euthymic state. The summer of 1787 points to the productive impact that a positive, but not abnormally elevated, mood state has on Burns's output, stimulated as he is by immersion in the rural scenery of the Borders and, especially, the Highlands. What is also evident is that where Burns is affected by lowered mood, either as he approaches or recovers from such an episode, he can be seen to draw on other works he has read and images he has previously deployed as representative of his emotional state, an approach particularly evident in *K130*, 'A Winter's Night'.

### **'Wha bide this brattle o' winter war'?: poetic contemplation of impending depression**

At the time of writing *K130* in mid-November 1786, Burns had emerged from the months of uncertainty which followed the Kilmarnock publication of *Poems*. He would, however, have also been aware that he was approaching another period of equal significance and potential upheaval as he prepared to travel to Edinburgh. As will be discussed, he may also have been aware that he was approaching a further episode of depression, a turmoil which is as appreciable in the lines of *K130*, and arguably equal to that which surrounded his future as a poet.

Fiona Stafford has previously argued convincingly that *K130* is a poem which explores the tensions within a poet who has found fame yet still fears for the security of his future.<sup>453</sup> She highlights the manner in which *K130* echoes Burns's own previous works and draws on traditions of English poetry. This stresses the conflict between what he naturally writes and what polite society finds

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<sup>453</sup> Fiona Stafford, *Starting Lines in Scottish, Irish, and English Poetry: From Burns to Heaney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.65–90.

acceptable, the knowledge that he now writes for public consumption. Nevertheless, considering the works that he does echo - *K62* ('The Vision'), *K64* ('Man was Made to Mourn, A Dirge') and *K69* ('To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest') - and that *K130* itself is prefixed by an epigraph from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a key theme of which is madness, and the timing of the writing of the poem in relation to the onset of an episode of depression, this suggests a previously unappreciated psychological perspective to the poem which sits alongside readings such as Stafford's. Other features within the poem recall aspects of the works generated as a consequence of both the Irvine depression and the melancholy of April 1786, and thus point to *K130* being a representation of Burns's understanding that his mood state was moving towards a depression, and his contemplation of what that would bring.

*K130*'s epigraph is Act 3, Scene 4, Lines 28-32 of *King Lear*.<sup>454</sup> Act 3 is dominated by Lear's mad raging on the storm-ravaged heath as Gloucester and the Fool try to shepherd him into shelter. Having agreed to take shelter, these lines which form the epigraph to Burns's poem are taken from the prayer Lear makes before he enters

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pityless storm!  
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,  
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these—

(3.4.28-33)

In deliberately choosing to prefix the poem with these lines, Burns is actively setting the scene for his own work which follows. This is the point at which Lear is becoming aware of the wider world around him, realising the concerns of those who he has previously considered insignificant, and developing a sense of pity for those less fortunate. This is an idea which Burns had previously explored in relation to the unfortunate mouse of *K69*. The notion therein of a social union between man and lowly animal becomes, and is as effectively presented as, the dynamic between the landed and the labouring classes. While Lear goes on to

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<sup>454</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R.A. Foakes, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 1997). All subsequent references relate to this volume and will appear as in-line citation.

acknowledge that he has neglected his responsibility to those less fortunate, so too does *K130* close with the idea that '[t]he heart benevolent and kind/ The most resembles GOD' (ll.95-96).

This, however, is to neglect the context within which Lear speaks, a context which Burns is deliberately evoking. Lear, as the man who has asked 'Who is it that can tell me who I am?' comes to this point as a result of his experience in the storm, of arguing that it is less painful than the disorder of his mind and that 'this tempest in my mind/ Doth from my senses take all feeling else' (1.4.221 and 3.4.8-12). The macrocosm of the storm is a natural representation of the microcosm of Lear's disordered mind. This use of the image of a storm is, as previously discussed, prevalent in Burns's poetry originating from the Irvine depression and is an image he will be seen to use again and again in relation to his mental health, both in his letters and in his creative output. This, therefore, points to a further novel interpretation of Burns's work which is opened up by considering his mental health and its role in shaping his life and creativity. That Burns chooses not to quote from Lear at his most raving but from a moment of quiet contemplation during a lull, a moment at which Lear is on-stage alone and isolated, can be seen to implicitly signal Burns's own sense of being in a lull of calm within a storm and feeling isolated, perhaps that same introspective isolation that has accompanied previous episodes of lowered mood. This sense of isolation during periods of disordered mood can also be directly connected to those early explorations of disordered mood within the commonplace book which, again, were associated with winter storms (*OEWRB1*, pp.44-45). For Lear, the storm creates a calm by drowning out his own thoughts; Burns arguably uses these words of others to similar effect, creating a 'storm' of material which he can use to drown out the pain of his own mood state.

In quoting *King Lear* at this point, Burns also chooses to highlight the moment at which Lear is starting to see life more clearly. Lear's madness, while a process of suffering, has also been a process of learning. Presenting this learning as a prayer exemplifies 'Protestant teaching about the value of adversity[...]. Suffering and patience is a token of wisdom.'<sup>455</sup> Again, this evokes the attitude of Burns's Irvine poetry and is an idea to which he would return, particularly in his

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<sup>455</sup> Shakespeare, p.273.fn28-36.

counselling of Frances Dunlop around the time of her daughter's death in 1792 (*K10*, *K12-K20*; *L512*). Within this context of repeated allusion to his own prior thinking, *K130* now opens up as a further contemplation on disordered mood at a time when he faces a further period of 'considerable mental stress' where he will be required to '[assume] a deliberate disguise in order to storm his way into high society.'<sup>456</sup> As Burns is becoming aware, however, this is not just a mask which will allow the rustic ploughman poet access to Edinburgh high society, it is a mask which will hide those depressive symptoms which are already clouding his mind, and he can arguably be seen to play with that mask in *K130*, simultaneously contemplating the security of his position as a poet as he enters Edinburgh society, as argued by Stafford, and the security of his mood state as he potentially enters another episode of depression.

The poem itself is intricate in its form; drawing on the tripartite structure of the Pindaric ode, it sandwiches English verse between Scots stanzas, with the English verse consisting of three stanzas which also emulate the Pindaric ode themselves, almost creating a poem within a poem.<sup>457</sup> Although Daiches argued that Burns required high spirits to write in Scots, which would not hold up here, it does suggest that Burns might use Scots at times as a linguistic marker of writing *about* times of normal, if not elevated mood; Crawford describes this as a disruption of the harmony between the Scots and English sides of Burns while Stafford considers it a 'rich linguistic hybrid'.<sup>458</sup> Through the lens of Burns's mental health, this structure can be argued to be a formal representation of the poet's lived experience of disordered mood. His native Scots where he feels most comfortable and can fully express himself bookends stanzas in English which represent his mood at its most disordered and when he is least able to face engaging with its realities - a combination of his own voice and the voices of those he must appropriate when depression dampens his creative ability. The control evident in the structuring of the work as a 'poem within a poem' is also arguably indicative of Burns's understanding of these moods as a part of himself, a smaller version of his whole but integral to his overall character. Thus, while

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<sup>456</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.198.

<sup>457</sup> Kinsley, p.1216. Shakespeare uses the correlating dramatic structure of a play within a play on various occasions, perhaps most notably in *Hamlet*, his other great exploration of the human mind. Burns quotes this play in several of his letters.

<sup>458</sup> Daiches (1965), p.xxiv; Thomas Crawford, p.199; Stafford, p.37.

the poem can be read as a tension between what Burns wants to write to be faithful to himself and what he needs to write to be successful, or as the tension between the Scottish and English aspects of himself (which might be read as the rustic and refined), it can also be read as an expression of the tension emerging in his ongoing attempts to reconcile the pain of his disordered moods within the context of his life and their influence on his creativity.

The opening section of *K130* sets the scene for the poem. The standard Habbie stanza form and Scots language signal it not only as a Burns poem but also a poem where Burns can be considered the speaker of the lines, just as was the case in *K62* and *K69*. The ‘leafless bow’r’ is subject to ‘biting *Boreas*’ (the north wind) and the ‘short-liv’d glow’r’ of Phoebus (the sun god Apollo) immediately creating a sense of vulnerability in the face of the ‘[d]im-dark’ning’ of winter and its storms, and recalls Burns’s earlier use of storm imagery as a representation of his lowered moods, as well as linking to the epigrammatic scene from *King Lear* (ll.1-5).<sup>459</sup> This sense of Burns as speaker, subject to the winter storms is consolidated in the self-referential second stanza where

[...] burns , wi’ snawy wreeths up-choked,  
Wild-eddying swirl,  
Or thro’ the mining outlet bocked,  
Down headlong hurl.

(ll.9-12)

Just as the flowing streams are increasingly obstructed by the mounting snow, so too is Burns the poet increasingly unable to express himself creatively, his flow impeded by the rising depression. Alongside this creative block, his lowering mood affects his sleep patterns, thus while everyone else ‘sweet in sleep was locked’, he lies awake contemplating the previously inconsequential subject of the animals in the field (l.8, ll.13-16). The subsequent stanzas see this open out to birds and wild animals, demonstrating an unhealthy preoccupation with a single subject which is typical of depression. As Stafford identifies, birds are a traditional literary representation of the poet.<sup>460</sup> Thus, within this preoccupation with animals, Burns further inserts himself in scene and, in doing so, shares both

<sup>459</sup> The north wind is a further image which Burns repeatedly deploys in relation to his lowered mood and depression.

<sup>460</sup> Stafford, p.71.

his current understanding of his mood and his concern. The ‘happing bird’ that sings in the ‘merry months o’ spring’ (perhaps also indicating Burns’s awareness of the seasonal patterning of his elevated mood and the flighty restlessness that accompanies it) is notable in its specificity (ll.19-20). The use of the definite article and singular noun suggests Burns has a particular bird in mind, as opposed to the undifferentiated plurals of ‘ourie cattle’, ‘silly sheep’ and unnamed wild animals from ‘savage homes’, suggesting that the bird does indeed represent his poetic self, silenced by the onslaught of the winter of depression (ll.14-15, l.26). Burns is aware of the accumulating signs of the onset of depression and worries about repetition of previous episodes which near drove him to give up his ‘wildly-sounding, rustic lyre’ (L125). Within the context of his upcoming trip to Edinburgh - *K130* can be understood to be a poetic manifestation of Burns’s concerns around the pressures to be accepted by the elite, to adequately perform the role that will encourage them to subscribe to a further volume of poetry, and the need to produce new material for that volume - concerns which he voices in those letters written during the early weeks in Edinburgh (L63-L66). Within the additional context of Burns’s mental health, however, *K130* can also be understood to encapsulate Burns’s fears that these pressures are precipitating factors for another depressive episode.

Burns re-emphasises his sleeplessness and preoccupation in the final stanza of the opening section while also introducing a new voice

Still crouding thoughts, a pensive train,  
 Rose in my soul,  
 When on my ear this plaintive strain,  
 Slow-solemn, stole—

(ll.33-36)

The exact identity of this voice is unclear but the narrative structure of the poem - a voice coming to the poet as he is lost in thought during a sleepless winter night - mirrors that of *K62*. In that instance, the voice was that of Coila, Burns’s embodiment of his rural muse. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that in mimicking the structure of *K62*, Burns also intends that the roles of the two voices are also mirrored. In the case of *K130* however, Burns gives no description of the physical appearance of the new speaker, contrasting the detailed description of Coila, such that it is impossible to state whether this new voice is

male or female, young or old.<sup>461</sup> Similarly, whereas Coila addresses Burns with ‘a whisp’ring *throb*[...]Of kindred sweet’, the voice of *K130* is only a ‘plaintive strain’ (*K62*, ll.135-136; *K130*, l.35). This would point to the new voice of *K130* being a muse of some kind but not Coila, an argument strengthened by the fact that, although the voice uses English, as does Coila, it does so in the irregular lines of the Pindaric form, rather than the regularity of the Habbie form which Coila adopts. Cumulatively, Burns evokes memories of Coila but introduces enough difference that a clear distance is created between the two voices; where a physical description cannot be given, this voice is melancholic and barely heard, speaking in contrasting diction and in a contrasting form, and a pale imitation of the prior inspiration of Coila. Its disembodiment is the embodiment of Burns’s concern that his creativity will become similarly distant and difficult to capture in words as, both as the pressures of his fame increase and as his shift into depression ensues, and that what will result is a voice unrecognisable as his own, as irregular as his current mood state.

Thus, as the poem shifts from the first section, written in Scots, to the second section which uses English, and marks the poem within the poem, the reader is aware that the voice is not Burns, either creatively or in reality. This is pointedly marked, both by the use of single quote marks throughout this second section which continually remind the reader this is not Burns’s own voice, and by the opening lines

Blow, blow, ye Winds, with heavier gust!  
And freeze, thou bitter-biting Frost!  
Descend, ye chilly, smothering Snows!

(ll.37-39)

This again reminds the reader of Lear as he rages at the storm, serving also to point again to the disordered mood, both Lear’s and Burns’s, which underpins these lines (3.2.1-9). Furthermore, this thinly-veiled appropriation of Shakespeare’s lines connects directly across the range of Burns’s writing where he is more frequently seen to draw on the words of others to express his feelings during times of abnormally lowered mood, temporarily incapable and/or

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<sup>461</sup> While muses tend to be female, the subject of the lines the voice speaks might be considered more typically male. Thus, to enable an open interpretation and fluidity of expression, the gender-neutral third person will be adopted here.

unwilling to find his own way of articulating his experience of depression. This is particularly emphasised by the image of being smothered by snow. The ensuing sense of being entirely enveloped, sound muffled as the individual is suffocated imitates the all-encompassing sense of isolation and distance that accompanies a clinical depression, the onset of which Burns currently suspected and feared.

Having called down the full might of the winter storm, the voice grieves the cruelty people will inflict on each other, very much in the tone of ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ of *K64* (l.55). *K64* specifically references the upper classes growing rich on the backs of the hard-working, precariously living poor, the ‘simple, rustic Hind’ (l.54). This draws the parallel between the suffering of man and the suffering of animals as seen in *K69*, as well the parallel between the ‘poor naked wretches’ of Lear’s prayer and the animals of the forest and field of the opening stanzas of *K130*. In doing so, Burns is clearly making use of either the words of others or his own previous composition, recycling this material rather than generating new work. Furthermore, this middle section of *K130* is where he ‘most plainly’ imitates Thomson’s *Seasons*, something which he was seen to do in the Irvine poetry and will be seen to do again in both composition and correspondence.<sup>462</sup> Thus, most of the actual content of the muse’s words do not refer directly to Burns’s mental health in the same way that previous works have been seen to do, and can be read, as Stafford does, as indicative of Burns’s contemplation of other pressure. However, the manner in which they draw so heavily on pre-existing material can also be argued to point directly to the shift in Burns’s creative practice at times of depression. Consequently, the substance of his output is very different to that originating from periods of normal mood, in the same way that the voice of his muse in this current state of lowered mood is very different to the voice of Coila with whom he is more connected. The exception within this is, arguably, the final lines of the muse’s speech

But shall thy legal rage pursue  
The Wretch, already crushed low  
By cruel Fortune’s undeserved blow?  
Affliction’s sons are brothers in distress;  
A Brother to relieve, how exquisite the bliss!

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<sup>462</sup> Stafford, p.82. See Kinsley, pp.1217–18 for details of the allusions to Thomson within the poem.

Use of 'wretch' connects back to the Lear's prayer which prefixes the poem but also recalls *K12* and *K15*, both of which would appear in the 1787 Edinburgh edition of *Poems*, alongside *K130*.<sup>463</sup> This reference, along with the capitalisation of 'Wretch' personalises the epithet to Burns and makes a direct connection with the mental anguish in the two earlier poems. Thus, the desire to relieve affliction becomes not only a prayer for the better treatment of fellow man, but the prayer of both *K12* and *K15* for relief from the distress of the disordered mood which affected Burns around the time of their composition, and which threatens him again at the time of writing *K130*.

At the point *K130* calls for the exquisite bliss of relief, it comes in the form of the cockcrow and the closing of the poem. The language returns to Scots diction and a regular rhythm, immediately signalling that Burns has found his voice again. There is a resilience in this shift, a sense that he knows he will both succeed in his poetic ambitions and return to a normal mood state. That he is awakened by a bird also carries a significance; the worries about the 'happing bird' are dispelled by the 'cottage-rousing crow' of the cockerel. As one bird replaces another and retakes control of the narrative, so too will Burns emerge from his depression, '[shake] off the pouthery snaw' of the episode to regain his poetic voice and control of the originality of his output (l19, l.90, l.92). This represents a continuation from the Irvine poetry, from the questioning of the justice of his suffering to the acceptance that it will come to pass, contrasting the sense of injustice evident in the later poetry from April 1786. While this doesn't necessarily point to Burns feeling he is to blame for this impending episode, it does suggest he does not blame anyone else, indicating a sense of some development in his understanding that his disordered mood is an inherent aspect of his character. It may also suggest further understanding on his part that his creativity is key to his recovery and so, his success in overcoming the fears and pressures outlined by Stafford are directly connected to him overcoming his fear of further episodes of lowered mood or depression.

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<sup>463</sup> Along with *K130*, *K12* would be a new inclusion in the first Edinburgh edition of *Poems*.

This idea of no blame being ascribed is expanded in the final stanza as Burns notes the lesson of this particular vision, the godliness of the ‘heart benevolent and kind’ (ll.95-96). There is an ambiguity created in the reference to ‘all his works abroad’, where it may be thought to refer God who has the final word in the poem. The lack of capitalisation, however, creates the possibility that it refers to Burns himself, highlighting that some of his most successful work has been that which advocates for such benevolence and understanding towards all men. While these lines can, therefore, be read as a commitment to continue this line in his poetry, they can also be read as a quiet reiteration of that desire in the commonplace book for someone to understand and be kind to him in his darkest moments. In light of this, it is worth noting that Burns makes barely a handful of references to *King Lear* elsewhere in his writings, all innocuous bar one exception.<sup>464</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> February 1788, he writes to Frances Dunlop, misquoting that he is ‘more fool than Knave’ and thus the ‘luckless victim of wayward Follies’, the ideas of victimhood and folly being terms deployed elsewhere in relation to his disordered mood and associated behaviour.<sup>465</sup>

Consequently, when *K130* was published in the new edition of *Poems* in April 1787, immediately preceded by *K69*, Burns’s audience would have read the poem with its epigraph from *King Lear* and made the clear connection between the messages of compassion in the two poems. They would likely also have made the connection in content with *K64* and in structure with *K62*. It would, however, only have been a select few who may have been, or would later become aware of the alternative reading which centres on Burns’s experience of disordered mood. As a new episode of depression threatens at a crucial time in Burns’s life, it is unsurprising that he echoes Lear in asking ‘Who is it that can tell me who I am?’ He finds a creative outlet to attempt to answer that question, both in terms of his status as a poet and the inner self who is afflicted by these apparently uncontrollable episodes of disordered moods. The result, *K130*, perhaps gets no closer to either answer but it does show Burns’s increasing understanding of the impact of his abnormally lowered moods on his creativity, and of his understanding that, to some extent, he has to simply push through the

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<sup>464</sup> See *L172*, *L228A* and *L646* for the other references to *King Lear* in Burns’s correspondence.

<sup>465</sup> Burns had also previously written to Gavin Hamilton that ‘I am indeed a fool, but a *knave* is an infinitely worse character than any body, I hope, will dare to give’ (*L25*).

trials that both the question of his status and his mental health present. Consequently, *K130* particularly shows the intertwining of Burns's creativity and his mental health, this new perspective offering a valuable novel augmentation of previous readings such as those of Stafford. It also foreshadows the arrival of Frances Dunlop in Burns's life, the one person who would understand his experience and offer that sympathy he so clearly sought. As a result of her insight, particularly during further episodes of abnormal moods, the next phase of Burns's life would be marked by his development of a profound understanding of the nature of his condition, expressed in a unique fashion.

### **May 1788-November 1791: Ellisland**

Emerging from the episode of hypomania that marked March 1788, Burns prepares to move to Ellisland, the 'sequester'd romantic spot' he had leased from Patrick Miller (*L78A*). He would take up residence in early June, spend the summer preparing the land and building a family home before Jean and the children moved down in November, and they would then spend the next two years there, living, working and further expanding the family. Alongside managing and working the farm, in July he would receive his Excise commission, adding additional workload in the form of a 10-parish district. Two distinct periods of mental ill-health mark Burns's time in Ellisland- a mild to moderate depression between December 1789 and February 1790, then a prolonged period of elevated mood over the summer of 1790 with at least one episode of hypomania towards the end of August. For the 42 months between May 1788 and November 1791, when Burns would relocate his family to Dumfries, Kinsley lists 104 new compositions, a significantly lower average monthly rate of production than either of the periods during which Burns called Mossgiel home. This is not unexpected; with his new professional and domestic responsibilities, Burns would naturally have less time to devote to an activity which generates little reliable income for the family. Nevertheless, as was observed in the previous period, the pattern of Burns's composition is not uniform throughout this Ellisland period - there are points where his output suggests greater levels of time and inspiration.

This period of Burns's life opens with a fairly steady output for the first six months. In keeping with the sense of autumn being creatively productive for him, a cluster of new material appears in August 1788. These poems, like those written almost immediately upon his arrival at Ellisland point to Burns having a sense of finding his 'sequestered romantic spot'; the contents of *K223* ('Written in Friar's Carse Hermitage on the banks of the Nith - June 1788'), *K227* ('I love my Jean'), *K228* ('O, were I on Parnassus Hill') and *K229* ('The Banks of the Nith') all point to the contentment and inspiration Burns finds in both his new surroundings and new domestic arrangements- for the first time, he and Jean can live together as a married couple without the disapprobation of her family or the wider community.<sup>466</sup> *K223* particularly talks to Burns settling into his lot, accepting that there will be ups and downs - both in life and in mood - showing a development in his thinking as he has come to understanding that he should '[h]ope not sunshine every hour, / Fear not clouds will always lour' (ll.7-8). The poem builds on the sense of inevitability of those clouds, and the resolve required to bear them, a hopeful message which advises

For the FUTURE be prepar'd,  
Guard, wherever thou canst guard,  
But thy utmost duly done,  
Welcome what thou canst not sun:-  
...  
Stranger, go! Heaven be thy guide!

(ll.19-20, l.31)

Similarly, *K227* and *K228* talk to a man in the honeymoon period of his marriage, full of love for his wife and hope for their future, and to a poet who sees the inspiration of nature eclipsed by the inspiration provided by 'the bony Lassie' (*K227*, l.3). Alongside this, Burns is editing again for Johnson with several of the works produced during this period appearing in the third volume of *Scots Musical Museum* which would be published early in 1790.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Friar's Carse was the home of Robert Riddell and his wife Elizabeth, visible from Ellisland. Riddell and his family, including his sister-in-law Maria, would become good friends and patrons of Burns. The Hermitage was a folly built by Riddell which he allowed Burns to use as a secluded spot for composition.

<sup>467</sup> Pittock (2018), p.16.

By the time Burns has settled his wife and family in their new home, he is clearly content. In February 1789, he writes to John Geddes that he is

stationary in the serious business of life; and have now, not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions, what I am, where I am, and for what I am destined.

(L308)

He also points to the positive effect that his situation is having on his creativity, returning Geddes's copy of the Edinburgh 1787 edition of *Poems* which he has augmented with new pieces, commenting

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith.—Some larger Poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are then in Edinr, I shall have about the beginning of March.

(L308)

He is turning out an average of just under three new poems a month and this is a rate which continues throughout the bulk of 1789, again supplemented by editing for Johnson. Works produced in this time again include notable pieces such as: *K257* ('Afton Water') where Burns seems to dwell on the loss of Mary Campbell which perhaps suggests a lowering of mood not otherwise evident; *K259* ('On Seeing a Wounded Hare limp by me') which again sees Burns's empathy for both man's barbarous treatment of animalkind and the upper classes' treatment of those less fortunate and more vulnerable, as he did in *K69*; and *K258* ('Ode to the departed Regency-bill, 1789') and *K260* ('A new Psalm for the Chapel of Kilmarnock') which see Burns turn to current affairs for his inspiration. He also produces *K265* ('To Mr Graham of Fintry, On being appointed to my Excise Division') at what will become a turning point in his life, providing him with as secure an income as he's ever had. With it, however, also comes the additional burden of the physical and administrative demands of fulfilling his new duties. It is then unsurprising that the rate of production begins to slow in the latter third of 1789, his appointment coinciding with the harvest season and the preparation of Ellisland for overwintering.

This drop-off in production also coincides with the onset of a more serious episode of depression; ‘groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous system’, both his creative and epistolary output become fitful, no more than five poems which can definitely be dated to the duration of the episode between December 1789 and February 1790, and points where more than a week will pass without a letter being written (*L374*). The poems vary in length and subject but, notably none deal with more introspective or personal matters in the way that those produced in the previous months in *Ellisland* do; just as is seen in previous depressive episodes, Burns withdraws from himself, with the bulk of any additional creativity again in the form of editing for Johnson.<sup>468</sup>

Although Burns has recovered from his depression by March 1790, his creative output appears to remain low throughout the remainder of the year, only nine poems dateable to composition between March and December. Again, by the springtime, *Ellisland* is preparing for ploughing and planting, and Burns has his Excise duties to complete. Furthermore, as shown in Ch.1, he likely spends most of his time between Mid-July and mid-September in a state of sub-clinical elevated mood, experiencing at least one episode of hypomania late in August. He produces no new material that can be definitely dated to this period, despite his previous assertions of the guaranteed creative productivity of August and the autumn. As was evident in the previous period’s discussion of his hypomanic episodes in February and March 1788, Burns’s output of new material while in this mood state is negligible. Again, it may suggest that while he is full of energy, the distractibility and restlessness of the mood state renders him unable to sustain focus enough to channel that energy into new work.

Yet, this episode is still incredibly important creatively. Coming on the tail of the moderate depression of the previous winter where he was carefully and empathetically counselled by Frances Dunlop, this episode of elevated mood seems cut-off by physical illness - a ‘malignant squinsy’ - which forces his mind to re-focus and process Dunlop’s advice within the context of having experienced prolonged episodes of both lowered and elevated mood states

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<sup>468</sup> Kinsley allocates *K284-K314* to this first 18 months in *Ellisland*. Pittock identifies a near 50:50 split between original work and edited across this range of songs. It is impossible to argue definitively, but it is entirely possible that the editing activity was more weighted towards the end of this period, coinciding with Burns’s periods of disordered mood.

within relatively quick succession.<sup>469</sup> Out of this, by 1<sup>st</sup> November, he has produced what has come to be considered his *magnus opus* - *K321*: 'Tam o Shanter'. While many interpretations of this poem exist, relating to the message it might carry about the dangers of drinking, of women, and of the supernatural, there has been little consideration given to the very personal psychological aspects of the work. There is certainly nothing in relation to Burns's understanding of and relationship with his mental health, so it is to that perspective of this seminal work that the case study will return, arguing that the poem can also be read as Burns finally reconciling the nature of and balance between his lowered and elevated moods, and their place within his life.

In part, Burns's depression of the winter of 1789/90 was likely driven by the impact of what he had always known - that the Ellisland lease was a bad bargain for him (*L77*, *L324*, *L381*). The soils were poor, requiring greater work to generate an adequate return. In the autumn of 1790, he had made the decision to give up the farm in favour of the steady income and promotional prospects of his Excise work. Nevertheless, it would be November 1791 before he would leave Ellisland, moving the family to Dumfries. Although recovered from his depression and subsequent period of elevated mood in the summer of 1790, the impact on his creative output seen during these episodes does not resolve. Only 15 new works are known to have appeared between November 1790 and November 1791. Six of these come in the autumn of 1791, fitting with Burns's own sense of that being the time of year when he is most productive. It is, however, evident that the ongoing strain of Ellisland, while not lowering his mood to a level of clinical significance, does impact his ability to produce any great quantity of new material. Kinsley identifies a significant number of pieces which are edited for the fourth volume of *Scots Musical Museum*, published in August 1792 but, as with previous tranches of such material, dating of the time at which Burns worked on these is uncertain, although it is likely that he did work on at least a small number of them before he left Ellisland.

Nevertheless, the truth of Burns's creative time in Ellisland is clear. It started positively with a considerable amount of new material being produced within the context of a busy time for the poet. Again, the quantity of that output is

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<sup>469</sup> See discussion in Chapter 3 of Dunlop's role in counselling Burns during this time.

impacted by his mood state, both lowered and elevated. While the crude measurement of average output never really recovers before he leaves the farm, this masks the fact that his recovery from these two significant episodes of disordered mood during this period led to the production of one of his longest and most celebrated works.

### **‘O’er a’ the ills o’ life victorious!’: ‘Tam o Shanter’ as a creative representation of Burns’s disordered mood**

Burns’s narrative poem ‘Tam o Shanter’ (K321) is 224 lines of rhyming couplets which tell of Tam’s night-time ride from Ayr to his home in Alloway. It tells how a drunken Tam happens upon a witches’ dance in the ruins of Alloway Kirk, presided over by Satan himself. Tam, unable to contain his joy and excitement at the sight, reveals his presence and finds himself pursued by the witches. Drawing on the old tradition that witches are unable to cross running water, Tam is only narrowly saved by the speed of his horse, Maggie, who manages to make it over the bridge crossing the River Doon but at the cost of her own tail, ripped off by a young witch making one last grasping attempt to catch Tam.

In 1789, Burns was first introduced to Francis Grose, an English antiquarian travelling Scotland with a view to producing a Scottish volume to follow his *Antiquities of England and Wales*, which had been published between 1772 and 1776. Burns encouraged Grose to include Alloway Kirk, where his father was buried, with Grose agreeing on the condition that Burns write something to accompany the entry. In June 1790, Burns sent a letter to Grose, recounting three different tales relating to Alloway Kirk (L401). Two of the three tales can be seen to contain the core of the story that would become ‘Tam o Shanter’. Lockhart gives an account of the poem being written in a single day as Burns wandered the banks of the River Nith.<sup>470</sup> By November 1790, a first draft of the poem had been sent to Frances Dunlop, with an edited version sent to Grose on the 1<sup>st</sup> December (L427, L427A). It was likely first published in the part-work issue of Grose’s *Antiquities of Scotland* in late December 1790 or early January

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<sup>470</sup> Lockhart, p.211. Lockhart’s account was provided by Jean. While some doubt has been thrown on the veracity of this story, Cromeck also records Burns commenting that ‘All my poetry is the effect of easy composition, but of laborious correction’, a process which allows for both Jean’s account to be accurate and for the existence of multiple copies of the poem in various stages of editing (Cromeck, p.158).

1791.<sup>471</sup> Thereafter, it was republished in March and April 1791 by the *Edinburgh Herald* and *Edinburgh Magazine* respectively, in Volume II of the volume-edition of *Antiquities of Scotland*, also in April 1791, and then included by Burns in his second Edinburgh edition of *Poems* in February 1793.<sup>472</sup> Burns described it as ‘my standard performance in the Poetical line...a force of genius & a finishing polish that I despair of ever excelling’ (L443). Post-publication reviews endorsed this, generally agreeing with Alexander Fraser Tytler’s description of Burns having displayed ‘a power of imagination Shakespeare himself could not have exceeded’.<sup>473</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge would observe that

genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty while it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission.<sup>474</sup>

Currie would observe that K321 ‘affords an instance’ of the

singular faculty [Burns] possessed of mingling in the same poem, humorous sentiments and descriptions, with imagery of a sublime and terrific nature [which] enabled him to use this variety of dialect [Scots] with striking effect.<sup>475</sup>

At its most superficial, K321 can be considered a specific warning against the dangers of excessive drinking and the temptations of attractive women, Whyte highlighting the argument that as a comic poem, it is ‘commonly held to have no hidden or deep meaning.’<sup>476</sup> This is evidently an argument which has held no water, with ‘multiple layers of meaning’ being identified by critics as they argue variously the poem is an exploration of the tensions between the physical and metaphysical, realism and the supernatural, and male sexuality and fear of the feminine.<sup>477</sup> These readings are valid and have been rigorously supported by the

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<sup>471</sup> Bill Dawson, ‘The First Publication of Burns’s “Tam o Shanter”’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 40.1 (2014), 105–15 (p.109,113).

<sup>472</sup> Dawson, p.113.

<sup>473</sup> Low, p.95.

<sup>474</sup> Low, p.110.

<sup>475</sup> Low, p.151.

<sup>476</sup> Christopher Whyte, ‘Defamiliarising “Tam o” Shanter’’, *Scottish Literary Journal*, 20.1 (1993), 5–18 (p.5).

<sup>477</sup> Dunnigan and Carruthers, White, and MacLachlan all offer various readings of K321 according to some of these differing central themes. (Sarah Dunnigan and Gerard Carruthers, ‘Two Tales of “Tam o Shanter”’, *Robert Burns Lives*, 2013

evidence within the text, but that does not discount the additional possibility of a further reading of the poem through the lens of Burns's mental health. The influences of Burns's temperament and of biographical events around the time of writing, particularly the summer of elevated mood and hypomania contributes, to the introspection and exploration of self which underlies the dramatic narrative in the same way that these factors were shown to contribute to the composition of *K130*.<sup>478</sup> Considering *K321* from this perspective constructs a novel alternative reading of the poem as a compelling creative expression of Burns's experience of his disordered mood.

Perhaps as a consequence of the reductive reading of the poem as no more than a warning against drinking and womanising, perhaps as a consequence of the privileging the poet's biography over his works, *K321* has also been reduced to an over-simplified autobiographical representation of Burns himself. Burns is somewhat impulsively equated with his mock-hero Tam as he represents a clear parallel with Burns's posthumous reputation for an excessive fondness of both alcohol and women.<sup>479</sup> Burns has, however, also been read as the narrator of the tale, and thus separate to Tam. This is not an unreasonable position based on the scene set by the opening lines; the first-person plurals used in these lines imply the narrator joining Tam and his cronies as part of a warm and merry gathering within the pub at the end of a market day. The collective description of how 'we sit bousing at the nappy' also serves to draw the reader in and make them too a part of the gathering, joining the narrator's audience as he observes the scene and begins his tale (l.5).

Some previous readings of the poem which focus on the degree to which the narrator particularly represents Burns do draw on an element of psychological analysis, unwittingly pointing to the bipolar nature of the poet's character. Weston argues that '[b]y exaggerating the details of his own divided personality

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<[https://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns\\_lives179.htm](https://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives179.htm)> [accessed 27 August 2018]; Kenneth White, "'Tam o' Shanter': An Interpretation", *Scottish Literary Journal*, 17.2 (1990), 5–15; Christopher MacLachlan, 'Point of View in Some Poems of Burns', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 13.1 (1986), 5–20).

<sup>478</sup> Just as *K130* is argued by some to reflect the tensions in Burns between Scots and English, Weston also argues this about *K321* (John C. Weston, 'The Narrator of Tam o' Shanter', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 8.3 (1968), 537–50 (p.545).)

<sup>479</sup> Weston, p.538.

in the character of the narrator in 'Tam o Shanter', [Burns] created a burlesque of his own contradictory mind'.<sup>480</sup> This division is represented by the range of voices taken on by the narrator - Tam's friend, pub-philosopher, story-teller, moralist, observer and participant in the story - and are, for Weston, 'an essential structural feature to the cumulative 'meaning' of the poem'.<sup>481</sup> Simpson later agrees with the centrality of the function of the narrator, describing him as 'someone who knows Tam well enough to drink with him but who can distance himself sufficiently from Tam to see the wider significance of his experiences and responses.'<sup>482</sup>

There are, however, subtle pointers that this separation may not be the case, that the focalisation of the narrative points to the narrator and Tam being not just alike, but one and the same person. While the continued use of the first person plural in the opening section further establishes the sense of Tam and the narrator both ignoring thoughts of the journey home, it then almost imperceptibly switches to the singular - only one wife, one 'sulky sullen dame' waits at home (l.10). Without upsetting the sense of the lines, Burns subtly hints that there is only one wife because there is only one husband, that the narrator and Tam are the same person, and thus he is recounting his own story. Weston's observation that 'all voices in the poem, no matter how contradictory, are quite sincerely parts of Burns' comes close to this, furthered by Pittock's acknowledgement that Tam is a surrogate for Burns coupled with the reminder that the reader should not forget that it is Burns who is telling this tale.<sup>483</sup>

This naturally raises the question of why Burns might choose to have narrator-Tam tells his own story yet do so in the third person. The key to this lies in Simpson's observation of the importance of the narrator having distance and the ability to appreciate the significance of Tam's experiences. Tam and the narrator are, literally and figuratively, a multiplicity of voices from a single source. All written by Burns, the diffusion of Tam's personality caused by the

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<sup>480</sup> Weston, p.539.

<sup>481</sup> Weston, p.538.

<sup>482</sup> Simpson (1988), p.203.

<sup>483</sup> Weston, p.548; Murray Pittock, 'Robert Burns, "Tam o' Shanter"', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp.329-37 (p.331).

disinhibiting effects alcohol - where usually suppressed or tightly-controlled aspects of the self emerge - can also be argued to represent aspects of Burns and his fragmented self as defined by the polarity of his moods akin to Weston's identification of the contradictory voices coming from the same source. Burns's correspondence from the winter of 1789/90 and the summer of 1790 show a man who is coming to understand better the nature of his moods and accept them as part of who he is as a man and as a poet; the narrator represents Burns at the time of writing the poem, a man who has had time to reflect on how his moods affect his life and shape his behaviour, telling the story of his earlier self caught in the immediate experience of abnormally elevated mood. Thus, Burns creatively depicts his own experience while also reflecting on his own growth as a person, demonstrating the insight and self-knowledge he now possesses. Tam is the subject of the hypomanic chaos of elevated moods while the narrator combines this with his knowledge of the impact of abnormally lowered moods to create a fuller picture that reflects his lived bipolar experience. Thus, *K321*, amongst other things, becomes one of those instances where a poem emerges from 'a highly inconsistent man's battle with the world [...] its function was to body forth some mood or trait or experience of his own'.<sup>484</sup>

If Crawford's position here is considered in conjunction with Weston's argument regarding the voices in the poem all representing aspects of Burns, it is possible to identify other aspects of the poem which can be argued indicative of Burns's creative representation of his journey with and understanding of his mood disorder. This is particularly true of the other figures who loom large in the work - the women, specifically Tam's wife Kate and the young witch Nannie who triggers Tam's loss of control.

As mentioned, in previous readings of the poem, Kate and Nannie have been variously represented as an exploration of the fear of the feminine and its ability to emasculate, and as an overt criticism of the propensity for women to only ever be either lusty temptresses or nagging shrews. Dunnigan and Carruthers argue that Tam is assaulted by a fantasy version of the feminine world, as embodied in Nannie, because he cannot see the reality that is the warmth and safety of Kate for fear of her (possibly justified) anger at his drinking and late

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<sup>484</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.ix.

return home.<sup>485</sup> These are certainly readings of the poem which can be supported - neither woman is presented in a particularly flattering light, neither as something that is attractive as a long-term prospect, as the ideal life partner. This is, however, arguably a repetition of the same reductive reading evident in taking the comic tale at face value, equating Tam with Burns because of apparent similarities in their stories, in assuming that it can have nothing serious to say. Instead, caution should be sounded as 'the poem takes these stock situations and manipulates them.'<sup>486</sup> Consequently it is possible to read a further meaning in the female figures within the text.

Kate, as Tam's wife, is unsurprisingly introduced within the context of the domestic setting, sitting at 'hame' (ll.9-10). She is, as previously mentioned however, not presented as a warm welcome but as a 'sulky sullen dame,/ Gathering her brows like gathering storm,/ Nursing her wrath to keep it warm' (ll.10-12). Reading *K321* through the lens of Burns's mental health and drawing on the repeated images found in both the poetry discussed previously within this chapter and in the correspondence discussed elsewhere in the thesis, this reference to gathering storms immediately points to the depressive aspect of Burns's disorders moods, the impending threat of the onset of an episode of lowered mood or depression. Presenting 'stormy' Kate within the domestic setting serves to strengthen this association, calling to mind the various points in time where Burns complains that the glowering storm of his melancholy has rendered him unfit to even leave home.

In contrast, Nannie is presented as attractive and free but ultimately dangerous. Her wild dancing in the kirkyard is uninhibited and leads directly to Tam's own loss of control. The subsequent similes deployed in describing Tam's pursuit by Nannie draw on images of primitive, animalistic behaviour and mob mentality (ll.193-200). Set as a feminine contrast to Kate as Nannie is, she can also be set as an emotional contrast; thus, where the stormy Kate is impending depression, the impulsive Nannie can be seen as an embodiment of the hypomanic aspects of Burns's disordered moods. Her influence leads to Tam's irresistible impulses

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<sup>485</sup> Carruthers (2009), p.154; Dunnigan and Carruthers (2013).

<sup>486</sup> Dunnigan and Carruthers (2013).

being triggered by his loss of reason just as Burns's behaviour can be disinhibited by the onset of an episode of elevated mood or hypomania.

Kate and Nannie are brought together in the mind of the reader, and thus signalling how they sat together in the mind of Burns, at two points in the tale. Firstly, as Tam is ensconced in the warmth of the pub, the narrator recounts Kate's predictions that Tam will meet with some misfortune, perhaps at Alloway Kirk (ll.31-33). Although her prophesy suggests warlocks rather than witches, it still points towards that contrasting representation of herself, a supernatural presence that contrasts her earthly one. Thus, just as Kate represents an inevitable storm, an inevitable depression, so too does her prophesy represent an inevitable encounter with a very different but equally dangerous situation. Kate and Nannie are again collocated in the narrative when Burns invokes the memory of Kate, the cipher of depression, as Tam is pursued by the Nannie and her coven of witches (ll.203-204). The reader is reminded of Kate's prediction, highlighting how close she came to the truth, how Tam is now anything but 'glorious'. In again situating Kate and Nannie together within the narrative, Burns consolidates his earlier equating of the negative aspects and potentially serious consequences of both poles of his disordered mood. While the depression is clearly threatening, he points to the fact that what may initially seem pleasant and fun can also turn for the worse, whether it is the consequences of the disinhibited behaviour emerging from the elevated mood state or the idea that seemingly positive experiences can actually be precipitating factors for depression, just as his first visit to Edinburgh in the winter of 1786 where he was welcomed and celebrated was actually a stressful situation that provoked such an episode.

Thus, while the women can be read as those archetypes of the feminine which men fear, the women who challenge their masculinity, who threaten to cause nothing but misery whether through the bonds of marriage or the freedom of sexual expression, they can also be seen to represent aspects of Burns's own emotional self.<sup>487</sup> Kate and Nannie, as well as being exaggerated embodiments of the two poles of womankind, become embodiments of the two poles of Burns's abnormal mood states, moods personified by the female because they

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<sup>487</sup> Whyte, p.19.

are irrational, subjective states of being; Kate who scolds, derides, harangues and belittles Tam represents the loss of pleasure, self-esteem and confidence associated with depression, while Nannie's provocative attractiveness, disinhibition and sheer pleasure in her dancing is the irresistible chaos of hypomania which can turn to terror in the face of the loss of control. They are both embodiments of forces which can repress or even destroy.<sup>488</sup> Tam spends most of the poem trying to escape either depressive Kate or manic Nannie, whereas he could have taken more care about his action and avoided the wrath of both.<sup>489</sup> The immature psyche of Tam which Carruthers and Dunnigan argue leads to his misunderstanding of women echoes the immature understanding the younger Burns's has of his disordered moods - they are only inescapable if care is not paid to avoiding the potential triggers of an impending episode.<sup>490</sup> Thus, particularly when reading *K321* through the lens of Burns's mental health, Carruthers and Dunnigan's argument that 'the feminine holds the key to the poem' carries more weight as Kate and Nannie represent those aspects Burns moods which are 'subversive, anarchic, destructive of stability.'

Working within these argued positions - that Tam and the narrator represent Burns both in the midst of and reflecting back on episodes of disordered mood respectively, and that Kate and Nannie represent the two poles of those disordered moods - and armed with the knowledge of Burns's life during the summer of 1790, as laid out in Chapters 1 and 4, superficial similarities between events in the poem and Burns's activities are immediately apparent: the landlady's 'favours, secret, sweet, and precious' call to mind Burns's affair with barmaid Anna Park; the 'fast and furious' activity of the witches' dance echoes Burns's own activity levels as he farmed Ellisland and fulfilled his Excise duties; 'Maggie's mettle' that allows Tam to escape surely parallels Burns's furious riding in late August that allowed him to complete the 200 miles of his Excise round in four days and then make it to Dumfries for the 'vortex' of the Excise Court (ll.48, 144 and 214; *L419*). These parallels, however, relate entirely to physical activity. The representation of Burns's psychological journey through

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<sup>488</sup> Dunnigan and Carruthers (2013).

<sup>489</sup> Dunnigan and Carruthers interestingly go so far as to comment that Tam 'maniacally evades' Kate's advice, inadvertently drawing further attention to what can be seen as the mood-related opposition of these two figures.

<sup>490</sup> Carruthers (2009), p.153.

life with his disordered moods lie in the correlations with the characters laid out here. A closer reading through the sequence of the poem reveals this more sophisticated layer of Burns's artistry, showing how the perspective of Burns's mental health might add a novel interpretation of the poem to those already described by previous critics.

The opening scene set by the narrator is one of convivial drunkenness, warm and sociable, with the elevated mood pointing to the feel-good nature of Burns's own mood as it rises. It is noted '[t]hat frae November till October, / Ae market-day [Tam] was nae sober' indicating a pattern in Tam's drinking and pointing to the pattern in such moods that Burns had noted himself (ll.21-22).<sup>491</sup> It is an all-together pleasant scene; Tam is enjoying himself just as Burns enjoys both convivial drinking with his own friends and his periods of elevated mood such as that experienced during the summer of 1790. It has not reached the point of hypomania, the point where it might be considered abnormal or dangerous. Nevertheless, it is not a scene purely of pleasure. It is overshadowed by the constant threat of depression. This is initially embodied in the stormy threat of Kate, haranguing Tam, her shrew-like nagging and doom-laden predictions assailing him as relentlessly as the storm which batters the pub where Tam is ensconced (ll.19-32). At this early point in the poem, the narrator is in complete control of the pace and flow of the narrative, able to interpolate the scene-setting with this additional information at his own whim. This interpolation of darkness and foreboding into scenes of warmth and merriment might also echo the way in which Burns exhibited mixed mood states during periods of depression and hypomania. The rhythm and rhyme scheme is tightly regulated, that creation of anticipation by foreshadowing future events further indication of the control which Burns wields over his work at this point.<sup>492</sup>

Burns, however, also points to what he might consider an advantage of a mood state that is becoming abnormally elevated, in that it drowns out the noise of the constant fear of entering a depressed state. So, we see Tam, warm and happy in the pub, ignoring the 'counsels sweet' and 'sage advices' of Kate, and

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<sup>491</sup> Letters 125 and 168 include examples of Burns's awareness of the seasonality of his elevated moods.

<sup>492</sup> Whyte, p.7.

although ‘[t]he storm without might rair and rustle,/ Tam did na mind the storm a whistle’ (ll.34-35, ll.51-52). The distance created by time and the use of the third person affords the narrator the ability to demonstrate his hindsight. Thus, he is able to reflect that indeed, in such elevated mood states ‘Care, mad to see a man sae happy,/ E’en drown’d himself amang the nappy’, elevated mood leads to disinhibition of even the most careful and conscientious individual, foreshadowing Tam’s later total loss of reason (ll.53-54). In declaring that ‘Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,/ O’er a’ the ills o’ life victorious!’, he recognises the exaggeration and grandiosity that comes as the severity of the elevation moves towards hypomania (ll.57-58).<sup>493</sup> Yet, he also reminds us that, while the noise of the storm of depression is quietened by the hypomania, it does not mean that the threat has disappeared. His hindsight allows him to appreciate the transient nature of the elevated mood, the state of denial it brings and the sense of longing experienced after the episode has passed, encapsulating it in an extended simile

But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
 You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
 Or like the snow falls in the river,  
 A moment white - then melts forever;  
 Or like the borealis race,  
 That flit ere you can point their place;  
 Or like the rainbow’s lovely form  
 Evanishing amid the storm.

(ll.59-63)

The careful control of the four rhyming couplets contrast with the outburst of the preceding lines, immediately turning the mood of elation to one of sombre reflection. The shift from Scots-English to standard English creates a more serious and constrained tone, echoing the switch seen in *K130* that signals restrictions in thinking and activity that Burns experiences during his melancholy and hypochondria. The use of the extended simile, while focusing on the single idea of the transience of pleasure which might be indicative of the fixity of pessimistic thought present in depression, can also be argued to represent an over-writing of the idea which is symptomatic of the mental fluency which

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<sup>493</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary notes that this usage of ‘glorious’ is the coining of the word as a euphemism for a state of drunkenness (Oxford English Dictionary, ‘Glorious, Adj.’, *OED Online*, 2019 <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/79119?redirectedFrom=glorious#eid>> [accessed 5 January 2020]), but its use here, in combination with ‘victorious’, also echoes the lyrics of ‘God Save the King’, adding to the sense of grandiosity about Tam.

accompanies hypomania, reminding the reader that the narrator and Tam are one and the same, both affected by elevated mood but also pointing to the fact that both can be affected by lowered mood. Both states can exist at the same time in the same person, as evidenced by Burns's periods of mixed mood state.

This is further drawn out in the use of natural comparisons which continue to recall Burns's use of similar language in his discussion of his lowered moods in his correspondence and in other poems such as *K130*; particularly pertinent are the snow which invokes the idea of winter and the seasonal nature of his depression, and the image of the final couplet returning to the idea of an approaching storm. The image of the storm is immediately followed by the adage that 'Nae man can tether time or tide', an idea Burns also explored in his *Irvine and April 1786* poetry, pointing to the inevitability of both Tam's need to brave the storm to get home and the onset of another episode of melancholy (l.67). Thus, Tam's exit into the wind, the rain and the darkness which swallows the 'speedy gleams' of the pub might be analogous to the onset of depression, the way in which it consumes all joy and pleasure, leaving darkness and fear (l.75).

As Tam sets out on his journey, Burns uses the narrator to dramatize his attempts to resist the slide into depression. Tam pushes on '[d]espising wind, and rain, and fire', focusing on returning to his home comforts (l.82). Among the noise of the storm, he creates some sound himself, 'crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet', referencing another example of manic defence - the therapeutic comfort Burns finds in poetry and song - and using it to focus his mind and cancel out the darker thoughts that enter his head (l.84).<sup>494</sup> The narrator knows that Tam is constantly 'glowring round wi' prudent cares', again signalling how they are one and the same person, and showing that Burns is using this writing to demonstrate that he is aware of the different forms the threat of another episode of depression might take (l.85). He knows it is out there and he does what he can to ensure he sees it coming such that he can act to ward it off. One such signal of which Burns is aware is his tendency towards thoughts of death and the afterlife during periods of depression, thus he echoes this journey by

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<sup>494</sup> See Ch.2 And Ch.4 for discussion of further examples of Burns using strategies of manic defence.

having the narrator turn to another over-writing of detail which dwells on the many ways in which people have died on the route that Tam takes, the over-writing itself echoing the fixedness of thinking that accompanies Burns's depressions (ll.89-96). As he does so, 'near and more near the thunder rolls', near and more near the depression approaches, seemingly unavoidable now (l.100). Yet hope does come, the nearby 'Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze'; there is potential comfort and relief in religion, just as Burns is advised in his correspondence with Frances Dunlop (l.102).<sup>495</sup>

With the introduction of the beacon of light that is Alloway Kirk, the mood of the poem immediately shifts again. The narrator's exclamation of 'Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!' immediately reminds the reader that Tam is drunk and pulls the narrative back to the warmth and conviviality of the pub in the opening scene, and the association with elevated mood (l.105). The dark foreboding of Tam's ride has been a temporary interlude, akin to the previous stormy references juxtaposed against the pleasures of the pub. Thus, Burns's crafting of the poem's structure again echoes the instability of his moods. For the purposes of a dramatic narrative, Burns creates stark contrasts between the light and the dark; however, the shifts from episodes of hypomania to episodes of depression, and vice versa, are rarely sharply delineated in real life but within the poem this works to emphasise the polarity of the two states. Yet, he also creates a prevailing mood which is subtly scattered with aspects of the opposing state to draw attention to the interplay between two, to the reality that while one state may predominate, there will often be aspects of the opposing state appreciable in his mood and behaviour, particularly during those periods of mixed mood state.

Now, however, the poem enters a phase which is almost entirely indicative of a shift into an elevated and subsequently hypomanic mood state. The narrator's invocation of John Barleycorn, in reminding the reader of Tam's drunken state, also reminds the reader of the disinhibition that accompanies such a state (l.105). Thus, within this particular reading of the poem, the state of drunkenness becomes a metaphor for elevated mood and hypomania; while the pleasant intoxication of elevated mood is enjoyable, the excesses of hypomania

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<sup>495</sup> See *L362* as an example of Burns's citing religion as a comfort in times of melancholy.

are less so. Furthermore, the narrator again employs the first person plural 'we' in describing the full extent of such disinhibition, subtly reminding the reader that he is Tam and that the experience he recounts is his own (ll.107-108). This disinhibition that leads to participation in risky behaviour is immediately evident in Tam's desire to investigate the activities in the kirkyard further, counter to the better sense of his horse Maggie

The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,  
 Fair play, he car'd na deils a boddle.  
 But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd,  
 Till, by the heel and hand admonish'd,  
 She ventured forward on the light;

(ll.109-113)

Tam's actions at this point can be read as a moment of desperation, pursuing the light to escape the darkness of an approaching depression, regardless of the potential risks, perhaps reflecting Burns's fear of another debilitating episode of depression.

The joy and energy of the witches' dance mirrors that experienced in the pub, presenting a scene which Tam recognises, but also foreshadowing that the pleasures of the dance will be as transient as the poppy-like pleasures of the pub.<sup>496</sup> Although previously cautious, Tam's drunkenness means this caution evaporates in his encounter with the supernatural. Likewise, it points to Burns's own recognition of oncoming episodes of abnormally elevated mood, the contents of the scene recognisable as aspects of that mood. Burns had already come to recognise during the previous winter that he suffered not fashionable 'nervous affections' but genuine 'diseases of the mind' (L374). Thus, it may be read that the witches dancing traditional Scottish dances and not new fashionable French choreographies suggest Burns's recognises that his elevated moods, like his lowered moods, are not fashionable affectations but another aspect of his diseased mind (ll.116-117). The whirling and birling of the Scottish dances, lacking the stately control of a French cotillion, mirror the whirling and birling of thoughts in his head as his mood state elevates.

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<sup>496</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.224.

From among the unholy gathering, the first of only two figures who are differentiated from the mass is introduced - the devil himself, 'auld Nick' (l.120). Crawford argues that the Devil is as important to the poem as Tam, calling to mind Burns's references to and identification with Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>497</sup> Burns previously described the character as 'my favourite hero', quoting from *Paradise Lost* lines which evoke the independence of mind he admires (L113). He continues to elaborate, citing 'the dauntless magnanimity; the intrepid, unyielding independence [*sic*]; the desperate [*sic*] daring, and noble defiance of hardship' as qualities he aspired to (L114). He later describes his admiration in terms even more explicitly relevant to his mental health, writing to Agnes McLehose '[m]y favourite feature in Milton's Satan is, his manly fortitude in supporting what cannot be remedied - in short, the wild, broken fragments of a noble, exalted mind in ruins' (L171). As if this identification with Satan was not a grandiose enough notion in itself, Burns goes even further in his identification of himself as some sort of 'fallen angel', drawing on allusions to poetic talent and creativity being rooted in the Devil.<sup>498</sup> Thus, the Devil's presence at a witches' gathering, which would be expected, is not to serve the purpose as the focus of worship but '[t]o gie them music was his charge' (l.122). His bagpiping, his creativity, controls the dance. Thus, Satan becomes an embodiment of the creative aspect of Burns's character, the music controlling the dance an actualisation of Burns's use of his creativity to control his unstable moods.

While Burns's creative activity helps to keep his mood in check, just as Satan controls the witches' dancing, he also indicates that he is as aware of the signs of a threatening hypomania as he is of a threatening depression. Thus, the narrator moves into further description of the scene, detailing the gory offerings piled on the altar. The attention to detail and extensive listing again echoes the fluency of thought and ideas that come with elevated mood. That the narrator can describe the sights in such detail points to him having seen them with his own eyes, reinforcing the idea that he and Tam are the same person. Images of a hanged murderer, blood-encrusted blades and violent deaths create an excessively real tableau within a supernatural setting, giving the reader an

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<sup>497</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.217.

<sup>498</sup> Burns makes such an allusion himself in L84.

understanding that, while it may be suggested these sights are alcoholic hallucinations, they are very real to Tam (ll.131-142). As with the choice of Scottish over French dances, this underlines Burns's assertion that his experiences of disordered mood are real, irrespective of how they might be regarded by others. Such a gruesome embodiment within such an increasingly exhilarating scene again reminds the reader of the ever-present possibility of returning to depression. In Burns's original composition, however, this stanza closed with four lines which were expunged from the version published in Grose's *Antiquities*, following the advice of Alexander Tytler.<sup>499</sup> These lines focus not on artefacts representative of those considered criminals within the law but those Burns considered moral criminals - dishonest lawyers and hypocritical clergy

Three Lawyers' tongues, turn'd inside out,  
 Wi' lies seam'd like a beggar's clout;  
 Three And 91 Priests' hearts, rotten, black as muck,  
 Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk.—<sup>500</sup>

Though Tytler argued the lines should be removed because 'though good in themselves, yet, as they derive all their merit from the satire they contain, are here rather misplaced among the circumstances of pure horror', within the context of a reading of the poem through the lens of Burns's mental health, the satire becomes the irritated condemnation of an abnormally elevated mood. Both groups had caused Burns either personal pain and distress or public disapprobation at various points in his life. By placing them at the culmination of a catalogue of increasingly evil acts, these crimes become equable with, if not exceeding the awfulness of murder and infanticide. A somewhat grandiose and exaggerated notion, this arguably echoes the same sense of unjust persecution evident in the poetry of April 1786.

Channelling his grandiosity into presenting such a tableau of evil also opens up the suggestion that such episodes of elevated mood and hypomania are not as entirely positive as the opening pub scene may have suggested and this idea is picked up by Burns as the poem approaches its climax. The narrative turns to the

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<sup>499</sup> Currie, p.332.

<sup>500</sup> Kinsley, p.562. These lines originally followed ll.130-142.

dancers themselves, the rhythm and repetition of the lines capturing the increasingly chaotic frenzy of the dancing

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd, and curious,  
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:  
 The piper loud and louder blew;  
 The dancers quick and quicker flew;  
 They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,  
 Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,  
 And coost her duddies to the wark,  
 And linket at it in her sark!

(ll.143-150)

As the pace picks up, the narrator's language shifts from English to Scots, a reversing of the shift from Scots to English seen in the earlier extended simile of lines 59-66, signalling the beginning of the loss of the narrator's control as he lapses from the finely controlled standard English of the philosopher narrator into the broad and unchecked Scots that is associated with drunken Tam.

The Scots, and the marking of the narrator as Tam, continues; while control is momentarily regained when the narrator interrupts the pace of the preceding lines to bemoan the fact that the witches are not young and attractive, he cannot entirely regain himself such that he can return to the same measured Scots-English of earlier lines. He slows the frenzy as he considers details such as how fine a linen a young witch should wear, yet refers to them as 'queans' and his own trousers as 'breeks' (l.151, l.155). Thus, his control is only temporary and tenuous, a fact he makes clear by indicating that the presence of such a young and attractive witch could precipitate such risky and inappropriate behaviour as giving up his only pair of trousers to gain a look, exactly the action which he has just advised Tam against (ll.155-158).

This interjection by the narrator echoes Tam's earlier '[d]espising wind, and rain, and fire' to avoid being swallowed by the stormy darkness of depression (l.82). The narrator recognises the inevitability of the approaching hypomania and tries to ward it off, to maintain control of the narrative and, by extension maintain control of the increasing frenzy of his thoughts in the knowledge that it will lead to a loss of control in his actions. Yet, it is unavoidable. The narrative continues with the appearance of the only other figure individualised within the scene, the young and attractive witch, Nannie, exactly the circumstance he

described as being a trigger for his loss of control (ll.164-165). His description of her ‘cutty sark’, as with his description of the offerings on the altar, is detailed and realistic, emphasising the reality of these events within his mind as he becomes almost indistinguishable from Tam, such is his use of Scots, and the mounting sense of barely contained energy marked by the shift from the past to the present tense.

The narrative returns to Nannie and her participation in the increasingly uncontrolled dance. Burns and the narrator are near-indistinguishable, the whirling dance observed by one a perfect representation of the whirling thoughts of hypomania experienced by the other, both finding themselves unable to process their experience: ‘But here my Muse her wing maun cour;/ Sic flights are far beyond her pow’r’ (ll.179-180). Burns then completes the coalescence of the multiple representations of himself by turning to the image of Satan controlling the dance with his music, as entranced as Tam, creating a further sense of the increasing energy and increasing loss of control

Even Satan glowr’d, and fidg’d fu’ fain,  
And hotch’d and blew wi’ might and main:  
Till first ae caper, syne another,  
Tam tint his reason a’thegither,

(ll.185-188)<sup>501</sup>

The two halves of this second couplet run into one another, the narrator’s description shifting from Satan to Tam. There is ambiguity in whether ‘capering’ refers to the former or the latter, creating an impression of it referring to them both, uniting them as one in the mind of the reader. Thus, Satan’s creativity and Tam’s reason are both running beyond their powers of control, the whirling witches are the whirling thoughts and neither creativity nor reason can contain them.

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<sup>501</sup> The reference here to losing reason, as well as recalling the earlier advice of Kate, also echoes Burns’s words in writing to Richard Brown in March 1788 - “Reason almost always comes to me, like an unlucky wife to a poor devil of a husband - just in time enough to add her reproaches to his other grievances.” (L220). This can be seen to be an echo of Burns’s repetition of himself in letters written during periods of lowered mood, for example in letters to Frances Dunlop and William Greenfield in the winter of 1786 (L66, L78). Weston also offers further examples of this (Weston, p.542).

The 'cumulative' structure of the poem identified by Weston has built each layer of Burns's identity, converging at this single point such that Tam's loss of control as he 'roars out, 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!'' is a loss of control for all (l.189). Tam losing control of his behaviour has resulted in Satan losing control of the dance as the 'hellish legion' set out in pursuit of Tam, the narrator has lost control of the narrative and can only ride alongside Tam as he tries to escape - creativity is functionless as a control mechanism at the peak of such an episode. Yet, while the narrator has lost control of the immediate narrative, indicated by the shift in pacing, he has not lost control of the rhyme scheme, arguably indicative again of the narrator as Burns retelling the events with hindsight, at a point where he has regained control of himself and can again use his creativity as a means of controlling and understanding his disordered moods. Burns uses this crafted loss of control as a vehicle to convey the experience of losing control of one's thoughts and behaviour during an hypomanic episode.

He achieves this by mirroring his earlier structure. Just as Tam emerges from the warmth of the pub into the terror of the stormy night via an extended simile reflecting on the transience of pleasure, so this time he emerges from the warmth of the dance to the terror of the pursuit by Nannie and her coven via another extended simile

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,  
 When plundering herd assail their byke;  
 As open pussie's mortal foes,  
 When, pop! She starts before their nose;  
 As eager runs the market-crowd,  
 When 'Cath the thief!' resounds aloud;  
 So Maggie runs, the witches follow,  
 Wi' mony an eldritch screech and hollow.

(ll.193-200)

The meteorological storm Tam experienced is swapped for a supernatural one and thus, where the earlier storm can be understood to represent the onset of depression, so now can the pursuing witches, and particularly Nannie, be seen to represent the chaos and threat of hypomania. This creates a sense of Burns viewing his elevated moods as equally stormy but somewhat supernatural in origin, in the same way that he sees a divine or supernatural aspect to his creativity, calling to mind his reference to 'fairy pleasures' in his letter to Helen Craik during the summer of 1790 and his earlier contemplation of the origin of

his 'Passions wild and strong' within his Irvine poetry (*L413; K13*, ll.9-10 ). It also demonstrates his recognition of his elevated moods not necessarily being positive or constructive; that just as his lowered mood can reach severity which leaves him incapable of composing, so can the height of chaotic thinking and disinhibited behaviour lead to an inability to compose anything of substance. Conversely, the period immediately following the worst of his symptoms, as they begin to resolve and he recovers, are marked as being times of exceptional creative stimulation, *K321* itself an example of a piece originating in such a recovery phase.

It is also at this point that Burns makes that second reference to Kate which locates her alongside Nannie in the mind of the reader, highlighting the sense that he feels that the two opposing poles of his mood state are, nevertheless, connected and especially in the risk they both carry for harm to be caused (ll.203-204).

The terrifying pursuit finishes with the iconic scene of Tam barely escaping with his life, and only by virtue of the fleetness of his horse Maggie allowing her to get them across the bridge. Through lines 199-214, the focus shifts from Tam to randomly reintroduce Kate, then shifts back to Meg then back and forth between the characters involved in the chase, echoing the flight of thought and inability to focus during hypomania. This offers an insight into Burns's lived experience of his persistently elevated mood of the summer of 1790, where he was intermittently hampered by a lack of focus and distractibility as his symptoms worsened. Yet, Tam's escape is not cost-free - as they clear the keystone of the bridge, Maggie sacrifices her tail when Nannie makes one last grasping attempt to catch her prey. Previous interpretations of the poem have presented this scene as one of castration, of Tam being metaphorically emasculated by a threatening woman.<sup>502</sup> Yet, this is an interpretation which has risen from a gendered reading of the poem and falls down on the very simple fact that it is Maggie who is de-tailed and not Tam.<sup>503</sup> As an ending it does not make sense, it is comical in the face of the genuine threat faced by Tam.<sup>504</sup> Perhaps though, it

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<sup>502</sup> Carruthers (2009), p.153.

<sup>503</sup> Carruthers (2009), p.153.

<sup>504</sup> Whyte, p.14.

is Burns's representation of the idea that his instability of mood does not make sense, an echo of those early pleas for understanding found in the Irvine poems.

Altogether, the complete poem takes on the shape of a mock epic, 'honest' and 'heroic' Tam's quest to navigate a journey fraught with danger to safely reach home and his waiting wife and thus, it finishes as such epic poems do, with a moral

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,  
Ilk man and mother's son, take heed:  
Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,  
Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,  
Think, ye may buy the joys o'er dear,  
Remember Tam o Shanter's mare.

(ll.219-224)

Taken at face value, this suggests the poem is a warning against the dangers of drinking and dissolute behaviour. However, just as it is fallacious to consider Maggie's loss of her tail as a castration, so too is it fallacious to consider this moral as anything other than an oversimplification of the meaning of the tale.<sup>505</sup> Maggie's tail, and Tam's escape, can be argued to represent the idea that, to date, Burns has been as lucky as Tam in that no real harm has befallen him (although someone dear to him has been hurt) but that this misadventure should be taken as a salient warning that he may not always be so lucky.

Furthermore, in describing the poem as a 'tale o' truth', Burns again acknowledges that the reader may question the veracity of the events depicted but that should not detract from the fact that, for Tam, they have been very real. What others may have viewed as high-spiritedness or dissolution leading to alcohol-induced hallucinations or dreams is a simplified interpretation of the moral that reflects Burns's sense that those around him oversimplified the explanations of his behaviour, that they arose from his rustic and unrefined inability to control himself and his passions. In a way, Burns predicts his own posthumous reputation and the way in which his core character would be misunderstood.

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<sup>505</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.234.

Instead, Burns's dramatic re-telling of the tale of Tam o Shanter describes 'the conflict between Tam's euphoria and the ills of life which have assailed and will again assail him.'<sup>506</sup> Thus, alongside other readings of the poem, it can also be seen to be a dramatic representation of Burns's own journey with disordered mood, an acknowledgement that it is a complex condition which often exhibits aspects of both poles concurrently, a condition which can lead to consequences for himself and those around him but, implicitly, also impacts his creativity. More importantly though is that this novel reading of the poem expands the previous exploration of his melancholy and hypochondria in his correspondence and poetry to now include his episodes of elevated mood and hypomania. Read in this way, the poem is not satirical but a creative representation of the poet coming to a better understanding that, whatever their basis, his disordered moods are a part of him. As Crawford notes, the 'total meaning [of the poem] may reside not in the final lines but in the interplay of several points of view' which eventually coalesce in the single complex individual that is Burns.<sup>507</sup> It is also a recognition that having this understanding gives him insight into his condition, and an awareness of the warning signs of approaching episodes and how he might fend against them - keeping friends and family around him, using his creativity as an outlet, reminding himself of what he has done in the past to bolster his resolution to avoid repetition. This is an insight which has grown from his correspondence with Frances Dunlop over the previous years, and particularly in the preceding winter, in conjunction with the events of the summer of 1790. He understands the contradictions in his character.<sup>508</sup> And so, he writes the poem in the third person to demonstrate the distance he now has from his earlier self which allows him, as Simpson argued, 'to see the wider significance of his experiences and responses', including the contradictory-yet-related aspects of the polarity of his disordered moods and the transient nature of those episodes.<sup>509</sup> In creating 'an essay in a walk of the muses entirely new to him', Burns could be argued to be indicating that this is a poetic form he has never attempted before, yet it can also be argued to be indicative of having never before engaged so fully with his moods and thus has made significant progress in

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<sup>506</sup> MacLachlan, p.16.

<sup>507</sup> Thomas Crawford, p.235.

<sup>508</sup> Weston, p.539.

<sup>509</sup> Simpson (1988), p.203.

understanding the nature of his condition. It allows him to recognise the need for stability, security and the support of his family and friends to manage it, a recognition which arguably feeds into his decision in the autumn of 1790 to give up Ellisland and move to a more predictable life in Dumfries (L445).

## **November 1791-July 1796: Dumfries**

As noted in Section 1 and in Ch.4, Burns's Dumfries years are arguably the most settled of his life with regards to his mood, resulting from life itself being more settled - secure employment, steady income, prospects of promotion, manageable physical demands, settled family life. Thus, the years spent in Dumfries are marked by relatively short periods of disordered mood: a period of elevated mood, possibly hypomania, between June and July 1793; a mild to moderate depression in December 1793; a brief episode of hypomania between October and November 1794. The final months of Burns's life are also marked by a persistently lowered mood state but this is consistent with his worsening health and fears for his family's future care and wellbeing.

As a result of Burns's domestic and professional commitments, his time is more limited than the years prior to 1788. As well as original composition and continuing to edit works for Johnson, in September 1792 he agrees to take a similar role for George Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* (L507). Consequently, Burns's average output of new material across these 56 months is only slightly higher than that of his Ellisland years. Between Kinsley and Pittock, 160 new compositions can be dated to the Dumfries years, with another two dozen works which represent some degree of editing of existing material rather than predominantly new. As will come to be seen, Burns's editing activity in these years becomes increasingly important in relation to his mental health, particularly as an outlet for his energy and the need for the distraction of multiple tasks that comes with his elevated mood states.

For the first year of Burns's life in Dumfries a large part of his output related to *Scots Musical Museum*. Kinsley identifies K341 to K385 as all appearing in the fourth volume, published in August 1792. While it is difficult to accurately date

the points at which Burns was composing or editing these works (there is a near even split between the two activities), it is reasonably expected that Burns was working on some of them throughout the first half of 1792, perhaps as late as a week or two before the publication date, as was also seen in his work for the second volume. Burns's own account of these early months in Dumfries attests to this, writing to Alexander Cunningham in September

[...]all my hurry of business[...]the merciless wheels of the Excise;  
making ballads, & then drinking, & singing them; & over & above all,  
the correcting of Presswork of two different Publications;

(L506)

The fact that the bulk of the dateable material Burns does produce in 1792 starts appearing from October, the point at which editing for both *Scots Musical Museum* and *Poems* would have passed, similarly supports this, as does the end of a summer lull in the rate of Burns's correspondence. On the whole, there is little remark to be made about the pattern of production or content of the material generated during Burns's first year in Dumfries, attesting to the stability of his life and of his mood during this period.

This stability appears to continue into the first half of 1793. There is a small group of edited works sent to Thomson in January (K397-K400), then a larger group sent in May which consists of mainly original pieces (K401-407B).

Remarkably, none of these pieces would be published by Thomson until after Burns's death, pointing to the poet's ongoing editing of his own work as well as the time taken by Thomson to commission new arrangements for some pieces. Otherwise, Burns's output for the first half of 1793 is more notable for the volume of correspondence, writing almost as many letters in the first six months of 1793 (35) as he did for the whole of 1792 (48), several of them of considerable length and those to Thomson indicating further editing work he had undertaken.<sup>510</sup> This increased epistolary output alongside the editing work points to increasing energy and activity on Burns's part. He appears to be functioning efficiently but it could be suggested that the piecemeal work of editing multiple

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<sup>510</sup> See L554, L557 and L586 as examples.

songs masks what may have otherwise manifested as hypomanic symptoms of restlessness and non-completion of several tasks.

This argument is supported by the increasingly evident elevated mood through the course of the summer of 1793 and particularly during Burns's tour of Galloway with John Syme in late July/early August. This tour, as with his earlier Border and Highland tours in 1787 brought a flurry of new composition. It did not, however, bring the same level of literary merit to its output. As discussed in Section 1, while the epistolary evidence from Burns himself points to some degree of elevated mood (Ch.1), although of unclear severity or duration, the evidence from Syme's accounts in his letters to Alexander Cunningham (Ch. 2) point to the possibility of Burns experiencing an episode of hypomania during this trip. The new pieces, predominantly extempore epigrams, generated by these events add a new level of detail to Burns's mood state and, therefore, will form the focus of the case study for this period.

Burns's output continues steadily through to November, a combination of original work and editing material. Of particular note is *L586*, written in early September, where Burns makes comment on every single song to appear in Thomson's first volume. This suggests that the elevated levels of activity evident in the early summer still persist, and further point to the possibility of Burns using his editing activity as an outlet for such energy and thus a mechanism for channelling and managing symptoms of abnormally elevated mood. In contrast, November 1793 sees a near-complete drop off in output. Only four new pieces appear before the end of 1793 (*K438-K441*). This diminishing output coincides with the 'damn'd melange of Fretfulness & melancholy' that would slide into a moderate depression, likely precipitated by his daughter's life-threatening illness (*L600A*). Again, Burns's output is seen to be hampered by his lowered mood, both during and beyond the actual episode of depression, it being fully into the spring of 1794 before his output picks up in any significant manner again. He does, however, recognise this impact now, writing to Johnson in February 1794 with an apology that

You should have heard from me long ago[...]I have, all this winter, been plagued with low spirits & blue devils, so that I have almost hung my harp on the willow-trees.—

This echoes L125, where Burns describes the impact of his Irvine episode of depression, suggesting he may see some similarities between his experience and the effects of it then, and what he is has been experiencing during the winter of 1793/94.

By May 1794 however, Burns's own account and Kinsley's reckoning show his output to be recovering, with eight new works produced between March and May, and a letter to Thomson reporting '[n]ow, & for six or seven months, *I shall be quite in song*, as you shall see by & by' (L625). This certainly seems to be the case as Burns would then send a steady flow of new pieces to Thomson, Dunlop, Hill and various other friends, accompanied by lengthy letters, again validating Burns's claim the previous year to autumn being his most productive season (L577). His letters to Thomson particularly show a significant level of editing activity. Given that the correspondence indicates a brief episode of hypomania between October and November, it suggests that Burns is again using his editing activity as a means of channelling his increasing levels of activity, restlessness and inability to focus on a single task for lengthy periods. McCue shows that, for several of these new pieces, they would then undergo further editing or discussion of the accompanying air within weeks of their first submission, despite them not being published for several years.<sup>512</sup>

In retrospect, this marks the beginning of what could probably be considered the last true creative peak of Burns's life. The volume of output, whether original composition or edited work, would provide Thomson with material for his *Select Collection of Scottish Airs* for years after Burns's death. The poet's enjoyment of his work with Thomson is appreciable in the tone of his letters, the frequency and length at which he would write, and his willingness to challenge Thomson on what he saw as the correct presentation of each piece. The year was also to end on a professional high with Burns's being temporarily promoted to the role of

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<sup>511</sup> L619 similarly sees Burns complain to Alexander Cunningham that '[f]or these two months I have not been able to lift a pen.'

<sup>512</sup> K459 ('How long and dreary is the night'), K466 ('Lassie with the lint white locks') and K470 ('Behold my Love, how green the groves') are good examples of such songs (McCue (in press) ST12, ST87 and ST77 respectively).

supervisor for the Dumfries port Excise division, bringing the prospect of additional salary and an increasingly comfortable domestic situation.

Creatively, 1795 would continue as 1794 finished. Despite the increased responsibility and workload that his promotion brought, Burns maintained a steady output of material. Several of these pieces were strongly political in nature, not least *K484* ('The Dumfries Volunteers') and what are now known as the 'Heron ballads' (*K491-K494*), written in support of Patrick Heron's Whig candidacy for parliament in February 1795. Perhaps spurred by an ongoing elevation of mood, he walks the line between the reforming politics of the opposition Whig party and demonstrating loyalty to the Crown, particularly hazardous as an employee of the government at a time when continental revolution threatened the peace of mind of the British establishment. The summer would be marked by the ongoing production and subsequent editing of new pieces for Thomson, but also by a lack of correspondence with Frances Dunlop. As noted in Ch.4, possibly in response to *L649*, where Burns expressed support for the French revolutionaries and criticised Dr Moore, Dunlop no longer responded to the letters she had previously expressed the greatest pleasure in receiving.

This fracture in what had been such an important relationship for Burns was the first in several blows that 1795 would bring, not least what might be considered the end of his creative life. Only fifteen new poems can be definitely dated to the period between August 1795 and Burns's death in July 1796. At some point in October or November, Burns would write to Maria Riddell that '[a] severe domestic misfortune has put all literary business out of my head for some time past' (*L685*). That misfortune had been the death of 2-year-old Elizabeth, his only surviving daughter by his wife, in September. Barely beginning to recover emotionally, Burns himself would fall ill in the final months of 1795 with what he would describe as 'a rheumatic fever, which brought me to the borders of the grave' (*L687*). It is thus unsurprising that his emotional and physical health during these months had brought a halt to his creativity. In what is now a bittersweet twist, one of the last pieces he wrote before his daughter's illness was *K500* ('Address to the Toothache'). His only creative piece which explicitly addresses an aspect of his physical health, it is a humorous tribute to those 'fifty

troops of infernal Spirits [...]riding post from ear to ear along my jaw-bones' (L671). It is likely that this toothache was symptomatic of the dental abscess that would be the source of the bacterial infection that would attack Burns's heart, weakened by his rheumatic fever, and lead to his death in July 1796. Despite his increasingly weakened physical state, Burns retained a creative desire; his final letters to Thomson promised new work or review of existing pieces while his last pieces (K519-525) spoke to the inspiration of Jessy Lewars, sister of a fellow Excise officer, family friend and nurse to Burns in his final weeks. Several of the poetic tributes to Jessy Lewars take an epigrammatic form but they strike a very different tone to those epigrams written during the 1793 Galloway tour, to which attention is now turned.

### **'The picture of thy mind': hypomanic irritability in poetic form**

As previously discussed, while Burns's correspondence points to a period of elevated mood of unclear severity or duration in the summer of 1793, additional sources increasingly support the case for there being within this a period of sufficient duration and severity to be recognised as hypomania, specifically during late July/early August when Burns was on a tour of Galloway with his friend John Syme. Syme's near-contemporary reporting of the trip, in his correspondence with Alexander Cunningham, talks to increasing irritability, grandiosity and unusual behaviour on Burns's part.<sup>513</sup> Syme notes one such incident where Burns came into sight of the home of Lord Galloway, 'expectorated his spleen against the aristocratic elf' and then produced 'half a dozen of capital extempores'.<sup>514</sup> It is these works - *K411B* ('Extempore— On being shown a beautiful Country seat belonging to the same—', *K415A-D* (four epigrams on Lord Galloway) and *K417* ('On John Morine, laird of Laggan') - which will constitute the basis of this case study.

<sup>513</sup> See Chapter 2 for the fuller discussion of this evidence.

<sup>514</sup> Letter from John Syme to Alexander Cunningham, August 1793 (Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.6162a-c, <[http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object\\_detail/3.6162.a-c](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object_detail/3.6162.a-c)>). Wilson perpetuates the story originated by Allan Cunningham that Burns also produced *K425* ('Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn') during this fit of extemporising (Wilson, vol. 2, p.33). While Burns admits that Bruce's story 'roused my rhyming Mania' within weeks of this trip (L582) it seems unlikely that Syme would recollect the production of the short verses attacking Galloway yet make no mention of the production of a more substantial piece of work which clearly walks a fine line in terms of its sentiments towards the Hanoverian monarchy.

The poems are all four-line epigrams on particular individuals that Burns dislikes. The tone of the verses demonstrates the degree of dislike which, in some cases, verges on the vitriolic, and very much fits with Syme's account of the irritability evident in Burns's demeanour at this time, adding weight to the suggestion that this incident was part of a hypomanic episode.

The title given to *K411B* clearly indicates that it is a sequel to another piece which gives the identity of the owner of the country house. The original poem, *K411A* ('On Maxwell of Cardoness'), indicates the subject of Burns's outburst is David Maxwell, laird of Cardoness. This first piece was written in June 1793 and included in a letter to Frances Dunlop as 'an epigram which I made the other day on a stupid, money-loving, dunderpate of a Galloway laird' (*L563*). Its contents are as clear in their sentiments as the verse which would follow a few weeks later. Burns implores Maxwell to thank Christ for the promise of resurrection of both body and soul, for had only the immortal soul to be raised up Maxwell would have 'lain forever' (*K411A*, l.8) Having accused him of soullessness once, Burns continues this in his lines on seeing Maxwell's country home

We grant they're thine, those beauties all,  
So lovely in our eye:  
Keep them, thou eunuch C——ss,  
For others to enjoy!

(*K411B*)

Maxwell is now soulless and emasculated, so much so he is incapable of enjoying beauty, with an added implication of covetous greed which leads him to hoard that which should be for all. While a verse that pulls no punches, neither is it one which will garner critical praise. This, however, is not Burns's point; it was not written with the intention of publication, only for himself and his close friends who might share his views of Maxwell, and as an outlet for the frustration and irritation that accompanies his abnormally elevated mood state.

Nor is he any less scathing when it comes to Lord Galloway. Such was the spleen vented on viewing Galloway House, Burns extemporised three separate epigrams, each as scornful as the last. *K415A* opens the sequence, taking the view of the mansion itself as its starting point

What dost thou in that mansion fair,  
 Flit, G——! and find  
 Some narrow, dirty, dungeon cave,  
 The picture of thy mind.—

(K415A)

It finishes in a very different place, the dark, dank prison that clearly conveys the disgust Burns has for Galloway. Although short and, again, not a piece that would be considered one of Burns's best, it is nevertheless a multi-layered condemnation of both Galloway the man and what he can be seen to represent - the upper-class landowner imprisoned by political beliefs which best satisfy his greed by preserving his status and wealth at the expense of perpetuating social inequalities. Burns is unrelenting in his criticism, such that while he can envisage a better architectural representation of his own mind and his ability to perceive the mindset of Galloway, this narrow cave of a verse creates a picture of the mind of its subject. It is predominated by a vitriolic irritation directed at a single individual, just as Burns's mood at the time of writing seems to have dominated by that hypomanic irritation. Similarly, it is rough and unpolished, almost flying in tone, surely echoing the 'expectorated spleen' that Burns's discharge upon viewing Galloway House, untempered and unrestrained. Underneath that however, there is the seed of a bigger idea which would grow to be a feature of the more overtly political poetry Burns would produce in the following 18 months, particularly K451 ('Ode for General Washington's Birthday'), K482 ('Song - - For all that and all that'), K491-K494 (collectively known as 'The Heron ballads') and K484 ('The Dumfries Volunteers'), the idea of equality and reform of the current system which favoured the Tory establishment.

The idea of Galloway as a long-term member of that establishment elite, forms the basis of the second epigram

No St-w-rt art thou, G——,  
 The St——ts all were brave:  
 Besides, the St——ts were but *fools*,  
 Not one of them a *knave*.—

(K415B)<sup>515</sup>

<sup>515</sup> This verse also points again to Burn's knowledge of *King Lear*, specifically Act 1, Scene 4. In contrast, he had previously described himself as "more fool than knave" in correspondence with Frances Dunlop (L198).

Playing on Galloway's family name of Stewart, a branch distantly related to the Scottish royal line, Burns highlights what he sees as Galloway's deliberate collusion in the corruption that pervades the current system of government, implying Galloway has no claim to the prestige of the name of Stewart, a line which may have made poor choices but always with the best of intentions. Contrasting the Stewart 'fools' with Galloway as 'a knave' calls to mind the previously discussed epigraph of *K130*, where Lear comes to the realisation that he has neglected his duty in caring for those of less fortunate circumstances, again subtly invoking the sense of social injustice evident in the preceding epigram. The emphasis placed on 'knave' however, keeps it a very personal attack on Galloway's character, again giving the picture of Burns's own mind, of the specifically targeted criticism which is a manifestation of Burns's hypomanic irritation.

The idea of belonging to an enduring and illustrious line continues into the third epigram

BRIGHT ran thy LINE, O G——,  
Thro' many a far-fam'd sire:  
So ran the far-fam'd ROMAN WAY,  
So ended in a MIRE.—

(K415C)

While Galloway's line may refer to the aforementioned Scottish royal blood, it may also refer to Galloway's own direct lineage; Galloway's father, the 6<sup>th</sup> earl, was Grand Master of the Freemasons, a position Burns would certainly venerate as a freemason himself, while the 5<sup>th</sup> earl had opposed the 1707 Act of Union, an event Burns had already addressed poetically.<sup>516</sup> Burns's sentiment here is not masked in any way; the actions and attitudes of the current Earl of Galloway have shamed the family name, an argument which is further supported by Gillray's later satirisation of the peer.<sup>517</sup> It is unclear to which specific 'ROMAN

<sup>516</sup> Heraldic Media Limited, 'Galloway, Earl Of', *Cracroft's Peerage*, 2017 <<http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/galloway1623.htm>> [accessed 14 November 2018]; Burns addresses the Act of Union in his poem *K375* ('Such a parcel of rogues in a nation').

<sup>517</sup> National Portrait Gallery, 'John Stewart, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Galloway', *People and Portraits* n.d. <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp61920/john-stewart-7th-earl-of-galloway>> [accessed 14 November 2018].

WAY' Burns refers, if any, but an argument can be made that it is the branch of Deere Street named Watling Street (not to be confused with the Roman road of the same name that ran between Canterbury and St Albans) that ended at 'Maul's Mire' (Maulsmyre) near Castlemilk - Burns is suggesting that Galloway has turned his family name to mud.<sup>518</sup> This poetical outburst is as vicious as its companion epigrams which, combined, make absolutely clear both Burns's animosity for Galloway and his mood state at the time of writing these pieces.

Burns closes this series of epigrams with a piece which may have been composed separately, although whether any time elapsed between it and the previous pieces is unclear as the manuscript source for these verses is a letter, possibly to Peter Hill, sent in 1795. If Burns's own title is to be believed, Galloway has come to hear and resent the scathing attack on his person and character.<sup>519</sup> Burns retorts with a final poetic swipe

SPARE me thy vengeance, G——,  
 In quiet let me live:  
 I ask no kindness at thy hand,  
 —For thou hast none to give.—

(K415D)

Assuming there was a lapse in time between the writing of this verse and the previous ones, it is a somewhat grandiose notion in itself that Lord Galloway would not only have taken note but responded to Burns's lines in a manner that would ensure Burns heard about it, and even more so that Burns should think it appropriate that he enter into a war of words with such a significant figure. Regardless of whether there was any time lapse, the opening line with a cry against any potential reprisals might be read as a plea to a God-like figure, predisposed to mercy and forgiveness. This is very quickly dispelled however, as Burns makes it clear that no mercy will be forthcoming as such benevolence is beyond Galloway's capacity. Burns's disdain for Galloway is obvious. These lines talk back to the idea of greed and self-interest of the first epigram, as well the soullessness of Maxwell in *K411B*, perhaps suggesting very little, if any time elapsed between the writing of this and the other verses and that the title

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<sup>518</sup> George Chalmers, *Caledonia: Or, a Historical and Topographical Account of North Britain from the Most Ancient to the Present Times* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1887), p.139.

<sup>519</sup> Lindsay, p.303.

attributed by Burns is a later addition. It fits with the mood state Burns is reported to have exhibited at the time and that expressed in the other verses.

Finishing this set of ‘half a dozen capital extempores’, Burns turns to one final target - John Morine of Laggan. Laggan adjoined Ellisland, and Morine bought the farm when Burns moved to Dumfries.<sup>520</sup> There had been some tension between Burns and Morine at the time, relating to Burns’s sense that Morine did not appreciate the work he had put into bringing Ellisland from a wasteland to functioning farmland.<sup>521</sup> Clearly, although now 18 months in the past, something about this still niggled Burns as he toured Galloway, Syme reporting that ‘Burns was in a most epigrammatic humour indeed’.<sup>522</sup> This suggests that, in his irritated hypomanic state, Burns made more of this annoyance than was warranted

WHEN M-r-ne, deceased, to the devil went down,  
 ‘Twas nothing would serve him but Satan’s own crown:  
 Thy fool’s head, quoth Satan, that crown shall never wear;  
 I grant thou’rt as wicked—but not quite so clever.—

(K417)

Burns expresses glee, arguably in a somewhat childish manner, in having outsmarted Morine, allegedly by smashing any Ellisland windows which carried verses he had engraved, thus depriving Morine of the benefit of any value they might carry, while scornfully comparing him to Satan. This contrasts with the Burns’s depictions of Satan as ‘Auld Nick’ discussed earlier, suggesting that Burns is insinuating something more malign in the character of Morine. Furthermore, that he should choose to attack Morine after the passage of so much time suggests some impulsiveness in this writing, pointing to this particular group of verses as a creative outlet for that building irritation evident in his other actions during this period.

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<sup>520</sup> Kinsley, p.1434.

<sup>521</sup> Lindsay, pp.231–32.

<sup>522</sup> Letter from John Syme to Alexander Cunningham, August 1793 (Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, MS 3.6162a-c; <[http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object\\_detail/3.6162.a-c](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object_detail/3.6162.a-c)>).

None of these pieces are examples of Burns at his creative best; they are petty, bitter, childish, rude and short. They are as much venting of spleen as his shouting at Galloway House, a manifestation of his abnormally elevated mood, the short attention span and particularly the irritation to which he was prone during such episodes. What is clear, and becomes clearer, however is that Burns is aware that they are a therapeutic outlet for him, a means of channelling some of the negative energy of dysphoric hypomania to which he alludes in *K321*, the energy which can lead to damaging actions and regrettable consequences. Burns signals this recognition when he sends the epigrams, probably to Peter Hill, in May 1795. In the accompanying letter he notes 'I do not pretend that there is much merit in these Morceaux[...]they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings' (*L671*). These, however, were not the only pieces emerging from a period of elevated mood included in the bundle; they were also accompanied by *K410* ('On being asked why God had made Miss D---- so little and Mrs A---- so big') and *K463* ('On seeing Mrs. Kemble in Yarico'), pieces which are notable for their stark difference in tone from the Galloway tour epigrams. These pieces were composed for individuals to whom Burns was positively inclined and at points where he was in a sub-clinically elevated mood state. This adds weight to the evident bitterness of the Galloway epigrams arising, at least in part, from Burns's clinically significant mood state at the time of writing. That Burns notes that the tone of these pieces matches his mood of the time (his irritability at this point being caused by his toothache of *K500*) points to his awareness of his mood state at the time of writing and the therapeutic role the pieces play, it being likely that he had to copy these pieces out at this time and previous acknowledgement that such transcriptions were a preferable activity when he was feeling out of sorts (*L267A*). These pieces are as helpful for him now as they were at the time of writing. Although extemporised during a period of abnormal mood, rather than originating in the post-episode recovery phase, what should not be ignored is that these pieces contain glimpses of ideas and themes which would become more evident in the work Burns would later produce, work which was for public consumption - ideas of reform and equality, of status on the basis of merit and not birth. Likewise, Maxwell and Galloway would again find themselves victims of Burns's observations when he penned a series of ballads in support of Patrick Heron's election campaign in February 1795 (*K492* ('The Election: A New Song'), *K493* ('Johnnie B----'s lament')). Just as

the elevated mood and hypomania of the summer of 1790 gave rise to Burns better understanding and versifying his experience of his disordered mood in 'Tam o Shanter', so too does the elevated mood and hypomania of the summer of 1793 appear to have given rise to Burns beginning to better understand and articulate his political attitudes. These works plant seeds which would become more fully developed works as time and recovery allowed Burns to reflect on his experiences and his thoughts, leading to pieces as insightful as *K321*, although with an altogether different purpose.

## Conclusion

Although sent almost two years after their composition, the Galloway epigrams are written in a firm and clear hand. This is a stark contrast to the tremulous script of Burns's last letters. What is clear however, is that to the last Burns was committed to creating, still finding inspiration around him. It was his body that hindered these last weeks, rather than his spirits. That his spirits, his mood, did have an impact on his creativity is evident. Abnormal mood, whether lowered or elevated, led to a diminished creative output. Depression made his thinking sluggish, preoccupying his mind with a limited range of ideas, causing him to turn to the works of others, either finding words which bore some semblance to his own mood and emotions or undertaking editing activity to reshape something already in existence. At his lowest points though, even this would prove too much, and his creative activity would all but cease until he recovered. Conversely, hypomania meant he was unable to focus or sufficiently organise his thoughts for a long enough period to produce work of quantity and quality. Where he did produce, the pieces read as a sudden outpouring of his predominant emotion at the time. The similarity of effect of the two mood states does not end here; whether abnormally lowered or abnormally elevated, Burns appears to experience a flurry of creativity during the recovery phase, shaping seeds into more cohesive concepts and articulating complex expressions of ideas, as was seen in the poetry emerging from the Irvine depression and *K321* emerging from the elevated mood of summer 1790.

These periods of creativity, while influenced by his mood, also clearly have a role in influencing those moods. While caution should always be sounded in reading an individual's works in an autobiographical manner, it is clear that aspects of Burns's creative output also become a vehicle for his exploration of his disordered mood, allowing him to come to terms with the nature and impact of the extremes. Even in considering only the handful of poems addressed here, a variety of readings by previous critics can be identified, themselves offering varying degrees of biographical insight. In exploring these works in the novel manner offered here, through the lens of Burns's mental health, it can be appreciated that alongside these readings, there exist additional interpretations which offer insight into his lived experience of disordered mood. He is seen to employ images of the seasons, the weather, nature and religion to depict his experience in powerful and moving ways, echoing the language he was seen to use when discussing his disordered moods within his correspondence. Increasingly, it becomes evident that Burns consciously recognises and utilises his creativity as a strategy for managing those moods over which he previously felt he had no control. Thus, as his life regularised, and with it the moods, he became adept at using both original composition and editing activity as a means of maintaining control where circumstance might otherwise provoke a slide into clinical abnormality. For Burns, his creativity and his mood are inextricably linked in a bi-directional manner.

### **Section 3 conclusion**

This section opened with an overview of the historical connections made between creativity and mental illness, a connection more clearly elucidated in the recent clinical literature which indicates a correlation in the increased likelihood of creative individuals also being affected by a mood disorder, particularly bipolar disorder. Furthermore, there is an indication that mood swings are productive, but the nature of this relationship is, as yet, unclear. It is apparent from his correspondence that Robert Burns came to appreciate his disordered moods as an inherent component of his creative temperament. Having shown an influence on aspects of his life, it is only logical to explore their potential influence on the creative output for which he became world-

renowned. In doing so, this section sought to answer the third and final research question of the thesis:

What evidence exists to demonstrate an impact of affective state on the quantity, quality and content of Burns's creative output, and how does this reflect or add to what is known about the links between affective disorders and creativity?

At the most superficial level, Burns acknowledges himself that his mood state affected the volume of his creative output, making several references to his inability to produce any new material whilst in the throes of lowered mood or depression. Burns's observation is held up by the overview of his output based on a calculation of his average monthly output of new poems during various phases of his life. He doesn't, however, discuss in any great detail how this might shape the content of his work. Neither, consequently, do later biographers and critics, tending to prefer factual biographical material and momentary emotional state over the wider climate of Burns's mood during a particular period of production. Exploring a selection of works produced during episodes of abnormal moods within those key periods - Winter 1781/82 (Irvine), April 1786 (Mossgiel), November 1786-May 1788 (Edinburgh and Mossgiel), May 1788-November 1791 (Ellisland), and November 1791-July 1796 (Dumfries) - revealed some clear patterns in the timing of production, content of the material and wider influence on Burns's creativity which can, at least to some degree, be attributed to the influence of his disordered moods.

Building on findings from the preceding chapters of the thesis, in writing in response to episodes of lowered mood and depression, Burns is seen to make repeated use of key images relating to storms, tempests and sleepless nights watched by the moon. He draws on the works of others to shape the presentation of his ideas, initially as a framework as he seeks to understand his moods then, later, as a means of avoiding the painful experience of close engagement with his mood state. As he matures and comes to better understand his moods and their place in his life, he is seen to grow in confidence in writing some aspects of his experience, settling into the use of Scots which can be argued to represent Burns writing at his most honestly personal. It is notable, however, that he continues to use standard English and English poetic tradition to write what can be seen to be the most difficult or severe aspects of his

depression. This runs counter to Daiches's argument that Burns needs high spirits to write Scots, although it is qualified with Burns clearly having a preference for returning to standard English for writing his melancholy.

This split is perhaps seen at its most mature and most accomplished in *K321*, where Burns writes both aspects of his bipolarity in a single work. Coming out of a period where he had experiences both depressive and hypomanic episodes, it shows a coalescing of his ideas around the nature and experiences of living with bipolar moods, scaffolded by the counsel of Frances Dunlop. His understanding of his condition has matured, the cohesive integration of Scots and English within the poem indicative of Burns better reconciling his moods as an aspect of his character and creative temperament. Nevertheless, features such as storm-related imagery and the connection of standard English with the lowered mood state which were appreciable in his early works persist, showing these to be deep-rooted strategies for Burns to effectively convey the more psychologically painful aspects of his condition. As with the previous works examined, *K321*'s emergence during a recovery phase points to these times being particularly productive for Burns, but develops that understanding to highlight that this applies both elevated and lowered mood states.

Although he comments several times on being unable to lift his pen during depression, he does appear capable of writing during periods of hypomania. There is a bleeding of his symptoms of elevated mood state into his writing, mirroring the lowered levels of control and inhibition during such episodes. The work produced has an urgency representative of the pressured thinking, resulting in no great literary quality. It does, however, show that this mood state for Burns can be the origin of themes which can be nurtured and developed in later works produced during more normal phases. Thus, the pressured thinking that gives such short pieces their urgency also demonstrates a fluency and creativity that generates core ideas which can become key features of some of his most significant later work. On the whole, however, what emerges are new ways of engaging with and appreciating Burns's poetry, adding further depth and complexity to the already existing range of interpretations available for some of the works examined. These add to the overall sense of the influences on Burns's creative output being multi-factorial, with his mental health becoming an

additional contributor that sits alongside aspects such as his religious upbringing, his political beliefs, his poetic inspirations and the various relationships in his life.

Although focusing on the influence of Burns's mental health on his creative output is a novel approach to reading his poetry, it is not without limitations. The crude measure of the rate of output masks the finer detail of shorter periods of time, incomplete dates of composition hamper the accuracy of these calculations, and neither do they account in a quantitative manner for the contribution of Burns's editing work to his overall creative activity within a given period. This examination of his work has taken only a very small sample of his entire body of output and only draws on those known to have originated around periods of abnormal mood, thus introducing the possibility of a distortion in the degree of influence attributed to Burns's mood state on his composition. The repeated appearance of particular features in such works, corresponding to those found in his correspondence that similarly deals with his mental health provides justification for a degree of autobiographical reading of these works, as well as supporting the hypothesis of influence but a wider study which included a greater selection of his material would work to confirm or refute this. Thus, for the moment, all conclusions of influence have to be conditional and suggestive, not definitive. Similarly, the role of his poetic influences, his preferences for particular sources over others, and the waxing and waning of his use of these in parallel with the onset and resolution of episodes of abnormal mood have also been broadly indicated in this work but would merit further detailed examinations.

Nevertheless, this new reading of his work gives new insight into Burns's output and builds on the study of his correspondence already undertaken to further show that his disordered moods had a role in shaping his creative life, thus satisfying part of Muramoto's first purpose of retrospective diagnosis. The study shows how Burns's mental health, as neglected in any previous study of his poetry as it has been in study of his life, plays into the success of his creativity as much as more well-documented aspects such as his religious and political beliefs or personal relationships. Contrary to the arguments of Daiches and Costa, the complex range of poetry produced by Burns is neither the voice of

affected performativity nor fragmentation but a reflection of the complex individual who produced the works and evidence of the complex interplay of his disordered moods with his creative inspiration. Such a reading of his work sits alongside, without negating, previous interpretations, and thus offers a new perspective which might attract a new audience who now find something relevant to their own lives with which they can connect. It also adds to potential knowledge of the wider understanding of the connections between mood disorder and creativity. Burns's output concurs with the observations that mood swings are creatively productive, further suggesting that it is both directions of mood abnormality which can be stimulating. The peak creative influence appears to occur in the recovery phase, rather than at the height of episodes, mirroring the returning of functionality that accompanies the resolution of a period of clinically significant disordered mood. Further research involving a larger cohort of individuals would be required to more fully study these patterns but they are, nevertheless, intriguing suggestions of the manner in which mood disorder influences creativity.

## General conclusion

In his *Letter to a friend of Robert Burns*, William Wordsworth responds to Gilbert Burns's request, via James Gray, for advice on rehabilitating his brother's reputation in the upcoming re-issue of Currie's biography by Alexander Peterkin. Wordsworth criticises Currie's representation of Burns, assigning blame to the biographer's 'superficial knowledge' of his subject for the resultant 'revolting account of a man of exquisite genius'.<sup>523</sup> As paraphrased by Higgins, it is Wordsworth's opinion that '[b]ecause Currie's biography does not aid the reader to understand what lay behind Burns's behaviour, it has harmed his reputation by giving a catalogue of debauchery'.<sup>524</sup> As outlined in the General Introduction, this representation of Burns has doggedly persisted to the current day.

Wordsworth goes on to rail against the growing fashion for authors to be the subject of biography, arguing that '[o]ur business is with their books, - to understand and to enjoy them.'<sup>525</sup> He goes on to emphasise that this is particularly true of poets, as their works 'contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished.'<sup>526</sup> Such examination of any individual's life must move beyond a simple accumulation of biographical fact; it must seek to engage with their inner life to offer a perspective on the causes of the behaviour evident within those biographical facts. For Wordsworth, the scientific imperative of presenting the life of an individual as a means to better understand human nature generally and as a lesson for readers, and then to also use that as a framework against which to judge the individual, is outweighed by the damage which might be done to the reader's ability to appreciate the creative work - science and art are simply not compatible in this area.<sup>527</sup>

Arguably, it is the 'superficial understanding' of Burns, of the privileging of the biographical facts of his life, which have led to the reductive readings of his

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<sup>523</sup> Low, pp.280–81.

<sup>524</sup> David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.47.

<sup>525</sup> Low, p.284.

<sup>526</sup> Low, p.284.

<sup>527</sup> Higgins, p.49.

works, such as those which have arisen around 'Tam o Shanter'. By exploring his inner life, giving consideration to his opinions and beliefs, subsequent critics have offered more considered and nuanced interpretations of both the motivating factors in his life and the ways in which his poems and songs can be read. In that vein, this thesis has also sought to do that through the novel lens of his mental health.

To achieve this, the thesis has undertaken three tasks. It assessed the ability of available evidence relating to the mental health of Robert Burns to support or refute the hypothesis that he was affected by what would now be recognised as a mood disorder such as depression or bipolar disorder; it assessed the impact of Burns's mood state on key aspects of his life; and finally, it assessed the impact of his mood state on his creative activity and output.

Prompted by Jamison's suggestion that Burns was affected by recurrent depression or bipolar disorder, the first section assessed the evidence present within Burns's own correspondence and personal writing (Ch.1) and the evidence available through the accounts of those who knew the poet in life (Ch.2). This body of evidence suggests with a good degree of confidence that Burns was affected by what would now be recognised as Type II bipolar disorder - periods of depression accompanied by periods of hypomania. It also shows that he was prone to somatic manifestation of his condition during more severe episodes, and that episodes of lowered mood and depression were particularly likely to be triggered by stressful life events. He would, however, have spent the majority of his time in a euthymic (clinically normal) mood state.

Muramoto argues that retrospective diagnosis of a historic individual can be an ethical practice if it moves beyond simply applying a label. This is achieved by using the process to construct a more detailed medical biography of the individual to learn more about the life-long course of a condition, to build a better understanding of the impact of the diagnosis on the individual's personal life and professional output, or to develop an understanding through the individual's life and works of the experience of living with a particular condition within that historical period. Thus, Sections 2 and 3 sought to explore Burns's understanding of his disordered moods (Ch.3), the impact of his moods on particular aspects of his life (Ch.4), and the impact of his moods on his creative

output (Ch.5). This showed a development in his thinking about and understanding of the nature of his moods, both as he matured and through his friendship with Frances Dunlop, shifting from an initial fear and uncertainty of their origin to an acceptance of them as unwanted and unpleasant but a necessary component of his creative temperament. It also showed how episodes of disordered mood stimulated Burns's creativity, generating poems which explored the nature and experience of his moods using recurrent images and language to capture his thoughts, as well as strategies he employed to avoid close engagement with the more painful aspects of his most severe depressions. While his creativity was shown to offer some therapeutic benefit in recovering from and understanding his moods, Burns's behaviours were also seen to influence and be influenced by his moods. While depression saw him withdraw from social contact and suffer from poor self-esteem and pessimism, a greater degree of influence appears to have been exerted by his episodes of elevated mood and hypomania. Occurrences of such episodes can be connected to evidence of impulsive decision making, excessive alcohol consumption and, possibly, improper sexual relationships. Notably, while Burns can be seen to indulge in binges of excessive drinking, there is no evidence that he was addicted to alcohol or that his drinking was related to periods of melancholy, contrary to the arguments originated by James Currie and propagated by subsequent biographers.

The work has limitations. The most significant of these are gaps in the evidence base. Little reliable contemporaneous evidence exists relating to Burns's life prior to summer 1786, and several points through the final decade of his life are marked by gaps arising from correspondence being lost or destroyed over the past two centuries, or simply from a reduced rate of production by Burns as a result of the combined pressures of domestic life, professional responsibilities, creative activity and, of course, periods of disordered mood. Thus, any conclusions drawn throughout the thesis are subject to the caution this must naturally advise. Previously unknown Burns-related material still periodically surfaces, some of which may work towards closing some of these gaps and allowing a more accurate reassessment of aspects of this study. Issues also arise in the evidence which is available, where the study is so dependent on the complete and accurate dating of letters and the composition of poems and

songs. This is further compounded by the dependence on text of some letters being known only through published volumes which have been subject to questionable editorial practices. Some periods of Burns's life, even where there is substantial evidence, rely on sequences being constructed from the internal evidence within these sources, some of which can never be guaranteed to be fully accurate or to be more specific than a month within a given year. These have been treated with due care and attention, with associated conclusions again carrying the necessary caveat of possible error. The ongoing scholarship for the new *Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns*, as well as turning up new primary sources, also seeks to clarify dating and the correct sequences of production for various letters which, in turn, will allow future reassessment of their interpretation within this thesis.

Nevertheless, this thesis has sought to maintain an objective approach to the evidence by constructing a novel methodology for the exploration of Burns's medical biography. Where there has been uncertainty in the degree to which evidence talks to a possible diagnosis, a deliberately conservative approach has been taken and this has been highlighted throughout the thesis. Using clinical diagnostic criteria which clearly define a condition by its symptoms, their severity and their duration, the methodology reframes a neglected aspect of Burns's life. It has also created a methodology which could be deployed in relation to other historic individuals where a sufficient body of appropriate evidence exists. The approach has provided a scaffold for mapping the pattern of Burns's moods throughout his life. While this allows identification of a likely clinical label for Burns's condition, far more importantly, it is a powerful tool which has allowed examination of the interplay of his physical and mental health, and his mental health and key aspects of his life, such as countering the historic arguments that Burns was a man of dissipation, incapable of controlling his passions and excesses. Furthermore, by building on these findings, it adds to the appreciation of how his moods are as important in understanding the man behind the poetry as other, better studied aspects such as his rural roots, his education or his political and religious beliefs. It provides a lens for novel readings of his creative work which adds further insight into his lived experience of disordered moods, allowing these to sit alongside existing interpretations and

thus opening up his works in way which has a resonance for modern readers, whether they are unfamiliar with or reconnecting to his work

This approach has also generated areas of interest which would warrant further investigation:

- the thesis has shown Frances Dunlop to have a far greater role in Burns's life than has been previously appreciated. This pivotal friendship deserves further study to better understand the dynamic of the dialogue between the two, how Burns might have reciprocated the role of confidant and counsellor for her. Dunlop herself would also warrant a focused examination, her connections with many notable figures of the time pointing to her being a significant node within the nexus of Scottish Enlightenment society.
- examination of the function of Dunlop in relation to Burns's understanding of his mental health also highlighted Burns's recurrent use of particular images and themed language, such as that related to storms or water, when writing about his mental health. This points to an area rich for further exploration, possibly through the use of the *Historical Thesaurus of English* in combination with approaches from the field of corpus linguistics to explore when and how he used language from particular semantic fields in relation to his mental health, and how this might compare with its usage in a similar fashion by his peers. Plans to develop a complimentary thesaurus for historic Scots would also open up the opportunity to examine such language across the entirety of Burns's works, regardless of their predominant language of composition.
- as well as recurrent reuse of particular language, Burns's was also shown to appropriate the words and styles of others, particularly from Thomson's *Seasons* and Young's *Night Thoughts*. As a notable strategy he uses to avoid fully engaging with his most painful thoughts, further examination of his use of quotation and allusion during these periods could better tease out when and how he uses such material to develop current understanding of the importance of Burns's early reading material in shaping his self-perception and creativity.

Burns has always been seen as a man of complexity and contradiction, all things to all people, a poet who could give voice to male and female, rich and poor, bawdy and sentimental. As he approached his end, he observed that 'melancholy and low spirits are half my disease', hinting towards his inexorable physical decline. This thesis has shown, however, that the melancholy and low spirits were also likely only half his disease in that energy, exuberance and high spirits were the other half. Both these aspects shaped Burns as a man and as a poet and understanding them better, it is intended, will reshape understanding of his life. The public perception of Burns's mental health has been skewed by myth and social attitudes over the 230 years since his death. This work has sought to take a new approach to examining those aspects - his life choices, his relationships with women, his relationship with alcohol, his creative output - in a novel way which gives precedent to the evidence to be found in Burns's own ideas and thinking. It offers new interpretations of some aspects of the personal and creative which challenge these misconceptions by offering alternative explanations within the framework of modern understanding of mental health and disordered mood. In doing so, the work gives a new dimension for the appreciation of Burns's life and work and, coming full circle to an idea that opened this thesis, adds yet another way in which he represents the complexity and contradiction of his native country.

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# Appendix 1: Annotated letters<sup>528</sup>

## Letter 63. JOHN BALLANTINE Esq. Banker Ayr

My honored Friend,

I would not write you till I could have it **in my power** to give you some account of myself & my matters, which by the bye is **often no easy task**. — I arrived here on tuesday was se'ennight, and have suffered ever since I came to town with a **miserable head-ach & stomach complaint**; but am **now a good deal better**. — I have found a worthy, warm friend in Mr Dalrymple of Orangefield who introduced me to lord Glencairn, a man whose **worth and brotherly kindness** to me I shall remember when time will be no more. By his interest it is passed in the Caledonian Hunt, & entered in their books, that they are all to take each a Copy of the second Edition, for which they are to pay one guinea. — **I have been introduced to a good many of the noblesse**, but my avowed Patrons & Patronesses are, the Duchess of Gordon — the Countess of Glencairn, with my lord & lady Betty — the Dean of Faculty — Sir John Whiteford. — I have likewise warm friends among the Literati, Professors Stewart, Blair, Greenfield, and Mr Mckenzie the Man of feeling. — An unknown hand left ten guineas for the Ayrshire Bard in Mr Sibbald's hand, which I got. I since have discovered my generous unknown friend to be Patrick Miller Esq. brother to the Justice Clerk; and drank a glass of claret with him by invitation at his own house yesternight. — I am nearly agreed with Creech to print my book; and, **I suppose**, I will begin on monday. — I will send a subscription bill or two next post; when I intend writing my first, kind Patron M<sup>r</sup> Aiken. I saw his Son today, and he is very well. —

Dugald Stewart and some of my learned friends put me in the periodical paper called The Lounger, a copy of which I here inclose you. — I was, Sir, when I was first honored with your notice, too obscure, **how I tremble lest I should be ruined** by being dragged to [sic] suddenly into the glare of polite & learned observation. — I shall certainly, my ever-honored Patron, write you an account of my every step; & **better health and more spirits** may enable me to make it something better than this stupid, **matter-of-fact epistle**.

I have the honor to be, good Sir,

Your ever grateful humble servt  
ROBERT BURNS

Edinr 13th Dec: 1786}

If any of my friends write me, my direction is  
Care of M<sup>r</sup> Creech Bookseller

Commented [MH1]: Key to annotations:

Red text – relating to mood  
Blue text – relating to cognition and perception  
Green text – relating to activity and behaviour

Commented [MH2]: Indicates lowered energy levels and possibly sluggish thought processes

Commented [MH3]: Self-critical indicative of low self-esteem

Commented [MH4]: Possibly physical manifestation of mental disorder arising from increased stress of relocation to an unfamiliar geographical and social setting

Commented [MH5]: Indicative of reducing severity of symptoms, connecting to reduced severity of lowered mood

Commented [MH6]: Sense of status and self-esteem in relation to social superior

Commented [MH7]: A matter-of-fact listing of individuals, fitting with the tone of the 'matter-of-fact' epistle Burns knows he is writing

Commented [MH8]: Tone of resignation indicating lowered mood and lack of enjoyment in the prospect of further publication, unusual given this was his purpose in coming to Edinburgh.

Commented [MH9]: Indicative of anxiety and feelings of stress of the attention that fame is bringing; also indicative of a sense of pessimistic inevitability at being found wanting in ability, manners or character

Commented [MH10]: Indicates Burns' own sense of physical and mental impairment, and the impact this is having on his ability to write and to write well. Adds to the overall tone of a letter being written out of a sense of duty rather than genuine desire.

<sup>528</sup> To assist with legibility, the Word documents from which these images were constructed are included on the CD enclosure as "Appendix 1 – Annotated letters"

**Letter 411B. ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM**

Ellisland 8th August 1790

Forgive me, my once dear & ever dear Friend, my seeming negligence. — You cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead. — I laid down my Goose-feather to beat my brains for a pat Simile, & had some thoughts of a country Grannum at a family-christening; a Bride on the market-day before her marriage; an Orthodox Clergyman at a Paisley Sacrament; an Edin' Bawd on a Sunday evening; a tavern-keeper at an Election-dinner; &c. &c. &c. — but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is, that poor, blackguard Miscreant, Satan, who, as Holy Writ tells us, roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, searching, whom he may devour. — However, tossed about as I am, if I chuse (& who would not chuse) to bind down with the crampets of Attention the brazen foundation of Integrity, I may rear up the Superstructure of Independance, & from its daring turrets bid defiance to the storms of Fate. — And is not this a "consummation devoutly to be wished?"

"Thy spirit, Independance, let me share;  
"Lord of the lion-heart, & eagle-eye!  
"Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,  
"And brave each blast that sails along the sky!["]

Are not these glorious verses? They are the introduction of Smollet's Ode to Independance: if you have not seen the Poem I will send it you. — How wretched is the man that hangs on & by the favors of the Great! To shrink from every dignity of Man at the approach of a lordly piece of Self-consequence, wh[o,] amid all his tinsel glitter & stately hauteur, is but a creatu[re] formed as thou art — & perhaps [as a creature (deleted)] not so well formed as thou art — came into the world a puling infant as thou di[dst,] & must go out of it as all men must, a stinking corp[se] — & should the important piece of clay-dough deign to cast his supercilious eye over you, & make a motion as if to signify his tremendous fiat — then — in all the quaking pangs & staring terrors of self-annihilation, to stutter in crouching syllables — "Speak! Lord!! for thy servant heareth!!!" — if such is the damned state of the poor devil, from my soul I pity him!...

Commented [MH1]: Indicative of energy level, perhaps with a touch of hyperbole

Commented [MH2]: Illustrates efficiency and fluidity of thinking, coupled with energy and rapidity. Triplicate 'Ic' points to ongoing state of this as well as an elevated mood state.

Commented [MH3]: Comparison of self with Satan indicating grandiosity and hinting at inappropriate behaviour open to criticism.

Commented [MH4]: Simile pointing to high levels of energy

Commented [MH5]: Grandiose language and inflated sense of self-esteem in the face of unpredictable, uncontrollable Fate.

Commented [MH6]: This, and in fact the whole of this second half of the letter, is a grandiose railing against class order and status conferred by virtue of title or birth. It demonstrates a clarity of thinking, but also relies in committing such egalitarian ideas to paper.

The overall tone creates a sense of Burns being clearly aware of and enjoying taking such a controversial stance, particularly in light of ongoing events in Europe.

## Appendix 2: Tables of results

### Pilot test of methodology (Tables 17-20)

Table 17: Mood states for pilot block 1

Letter Number	Date of letter <sup>529</sup>	Recipient	Number of symptoms <sup>530</sup>	Mood state
593	29 Oct 1793	George Thomson	0	Euthymia
593A	November 1793	Alexander Cunningham	0	Euthymia
594	November 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
595	November 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
595A	November 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
598	November 1793	Edward Whigham	0	Euthymia
599	01 Dec 1793	Louisa Fontenelle	2 ↑	Euthymia
599A	Late Nov/early Dec 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
600	03 Dec 1793	William Robertson	2 ↑	Euthymia
600A	December 1793	Maria Riddell	5 ↓	Mild depression
601	December 1793	Alexander Findlater	0	Euthymia
602	December 1793	George Thomson	3 ↓	Euthymia
603	December 1793	Frances Dunlop	3 ↓	Euthymia
603A	December 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
605	15 Dec 1793	Frances Dunlop	5 ↓	Mild depression
606	December 1793	William Stewart	0	Euthymia
607	December 1793	John McMurdo	0	Euthymia
608	January 1794	Elizabeth Riddell	2 ↑	Euthymia
609	January 1794	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
610	07 Jan 1794	Robert Graham	0	Euthymia
610A	January 1794	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
611	12 Jan 1794	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
612	12 Jan 1794	Earl of Buchan	0	Euthymia
613	January 1794	Patrick Miller	0	Euthymia

<sup>529</sup> Italicised dates indicate those letters where dating is incomplete.

<sup>530</sup> Direction of arrow following number of symptoms indicates whether symptoms were consistent with depressed mood (↓) or with elevated mood (↑).

Table 18: Mood states for pilot block 2

Letter Number	Date of letter	Recipient	Number of symptoms	Mood state
60	29 Nov 1786	George Reid	0	Euthymia
61	01 Dec 1786	John Whitefoord	5 ↑	Hypomania
61A	06 Dec 1786	John Mackenzie	0	Euthymia
62	07 Dec 1786	Gavin Hamilton	3 ↑	Hypomania
63	13 Dec 1786	John Ballantine	3 ↓	Euthymia
64	15 Dec 1786	Robert Muir	3 ↓	Euthymia
65	16 Dec 1786	Robert Aiken	3 ↓	Euthymia
66	16 Dec 1786	William Greenfield	6 ↓	Mild depression
67	20 Dec 1786	Robert Muir	0	Euthymia
67A	20 Dec 1786	John Tennant	0	Euthymia
68	27 Dec 1786	William Chalmers	6 ↑	Hypomania
69	30 Dec 1786	Lord Monboddo	0	Euthymia
70	December 1786	Henry Erskine	0	Euthymia
71	January 1787	James Sibbald	1 ↓	Euthymia
72	07 Jan 1787	Gavin Hamilton	4 ↑	Hypomania
73	11 Jan 1787	John Mackenzie	0	Euthymia
75	13 Jan 1787	Earl of Glencairn	0	Euthymia
76	January 1787	Margaret Chalmers	3 ↓	Euthymia
77	14 Jan 1787	John Ballantine	3 ↓	Euthymia
78	15 Jan 1787	Frances Dunlop	5 ↓	Mild depression
78A	15 Jan 1787	Patrick Miller	4 ↓	Mild depression
79	January 1787	Dr Moore	1 ↓	Euthymia
80	05 Feb 1787	George Lowrie	3 ↓	Euthymia

Table 19: Mood states for pilot block 3

Letter Number	Date of letter	Recipient	Number of symptoms	Mood state
398A	28 May 1790	William Nicol	0	Euthymia
399	06 Jun 1790	Frances Dunlop	3 ↑	Hypomania
400	07 Jun 1790	William Burns	0	Euthymia
401	June 1790	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
402	10 Jun 1790	Elizabeth Graham	0	Euthymia
402A	10 Jun 1790	Robert Graham	0	Euthymia
403	09 Jul 1790	Frances Dunlop	2 ↑	Euthymia
404	14 Jul 1790	John Moore	3 ↑	Hypomania
405	16 Jul 1790	John Murdoch	0	Euthymia
406	16 Jul 1790	William Burns	0	Euthymia
407	23 Jul 1790	Robert Cleghorn	1 ↑	Euthymia
408	July 1790	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
409	July 1790	Dugald Stewart	0	Euthymia
410	30 Jul 1790	Dugald Stewart	1 ↑	Euthymia
411	30 Jul 1790	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia
411A	02 Aug 1790	John McMurdo	2 ↑	Euthymia
411B	08 Aug 1790	Alexander Cunningham	5 ↑	Hypomania
412	08 Aug 1790	Frances Dunlop	3 ↑	Hypomania
413	09 Aug 1790	Helen Craik	0	Euthymia
414	August 1790	Alexander Findlater	0	Euthymia
416	29 Aug 1790	Robert Cleghorn	0	Euthymia
417	August 1790	John Mitchel	6 ↑	Hypomania
418	September 1790	Excise	1 ↑	Euthymia
419	04 Sep 1790	Robert Graham	5 ↑	Hypomania
420	11 Sep 1790	John Wilson	0	Euthymia
421	11 Sep 1790	John Sommerville	0	Euthymia
422	05 Oct 1790	Alexander Dalziel	1 ↓	Euthymia
423	06 Oct 1790	Frances Dunlop	1 ↑	Euthymia
424	08 Oct 1790	Crombie & Co	0	Euthymia
425	15 Oct 1790	Crauford Tait	4 ↑	Hypomania
426	01 Nov 1790	James Anderson	0	Euthymia
427	November 1790	Frances Dunlop	5 ↑	Hypomania
427A	01 Dec 1790	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
428	06 Dec 1790	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia
429	31 Dec 1790	Thomas Sloan?	0	Euthymia
430	17 Jan 1791	Peter Hill	5 ↑	Hypomania

Table 20: Mood states for pilot block 4

Letter Number	Date of letter	Recipient	Number of symptoms	Mood state
640	22 Sep 1794	Robert Riddell	0	Euthymia
643	October 1794	Peter Hill	4 ↑	Hypomania
644	19 Oct 1794	George Thomson	4 ↑	Hypomania
645	29 Oct 1794	Frances Dunlop	1 ↓	Euthymia
646	November 1794	George Thomson	6 ↑	Hypomania
647	19 Nov 1794	George Thomson	8 ↑	Hypomania
648	09 Dec 1794	George Thomson	3 ↑	Hypomania
649	20 Dec 1794	Frances Dunlop	6 ↑	Hypomania
650	January 1795	Maria Riddell	3 ↑	Hypomania
651	January 1795	George Thomson	5 ↑	Hypomania
652	15 Jan 1795	William Stewart	1 ↑	Euthymia
652A	15 Jan 1795	Unidentified	0	Euthymia
653	29 Jan 1795	John Hamilton	3 ↓	Euthymia
654	29 Jan 1795	Morning Chronicle	5 ↑	Hypomania
655	31 Jan 1795	John Hamilton	2 ↓	Euthymia
656	06 Feb 1795	George Thomson	0	Euthymia
657	07 Feb 1795	George Thomson	2 ↓ / 1 ↑	Euthymia
658	March 1795	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
659	08 Mar 1795	Patrick Miller	3 ↑	Hypomania
660	March 1795	Patrick Heron	2 ↑	Euthymia

## Range of correspondents (Table 21)

Table 21: Range of correspondents for letters of interest

Recipient	Number of letters received by mood state				
	Hypomania	Sub-threshold elevated	Sub-threshold lowered	Mild depression	Moderate depression
Agnes Dunlop	-	-	1	-	-
Agnes McLehose	5	5	4	2	-
Alexander Cunningham	2	3	1	-	-
David Sillar	-	1	-	-	-
Elizabeth Riddell	-	1	-	-	-
Frances Dunlop	7	8	6	3	1
Gavin Hamilton	2	2	-	-	-
George Lowrie	-	-	1	-	-
George Reid	-	1	-	-	-
George Thomson	7	7	2	-	-
Gilbert Burns	-	-	1	1	-
Hugh Parker	-	-	1	-	-
James Armour	-	-	1	-	-
James Burness	-	-	1	-	-
James Candlish	-	1	-	-	-
James Clarke	-	-	1	-	-
James Johnson	1	-	1	-	-
James Smith	4	-	-	-	-
John Arnot	1	-	-	-	-
John Ballantine	-	-	1	1	-
John Logan	-	-	1	-	-
John McMurdo	1	2	-	-	-
John Mitchel	1	-	-	-	-
John Moore	-	2	1	-	-
John Rankine	1	-	-	-	-
John Tennant	1	-	-	-	-
John Whitefoord	-	1	-	-	-
Josiah Walker	1	-	-	-	-
Literary Scolding	-	1	-	-	-
Margaret Chalmers	-	1	1	-	-
Maria Riddell	1	2	2	1	-
Peter Hill	1	1	-	-	-
Rev. John Geddes	-	1	-	-	-
Richard Brown	-	2	-	-	-
Robert Aiken	-	-	1	1	-
Robert Ainslie	3	2	2	-	1

Robert Cleghorn	-	-	-	1	-
Robert Graham	1	-	-	-	-
Robert Maxwell	-	-	1	-	-
Robert McIndoe	-	1	-	-	-
Robert Muir	-	-	1	-	-
Samuel Clark	1	-	-	-	-
Stephen Clarke	-	1	-	-	-
Thomas Walker	-	1	-	-	-
Unidentified	-	1	-	-	-
William Burnes	-	-	-	1	-
William Burns	-	1	-	-	-
William Chalmers	-	1	-	-	-
William Cruikshank	1	-	-	-	-
William Dunbar	-	1	-	-	-
William Greenfield	-	-	-	1	-
William Logan	-	1	-	-	-
William Nicol	1	-	2	-	-
William Pitt	-	1	-	-	-

## Phase 3 analysis (Tables 22-32)

**Table 22: Results of analysis of Group 2**

Letter	Date <sup>531</sup>	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood score
62	7 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Burns	Gavin Hamilton	3↑	Hypomania
63	13 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Burns	John Ballantine	6↓	Mild to moderate depression
64	15 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Burns	Robert Muir	3↓	Sub-clinical lowering
65	16 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Burns	Robert Aiken	3↓	Sub-clinical lowering
	17 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Muir	Robert Burns		
66	Dec 1786	Robert Burns	William Greenfield	4↓	Mild depression
67	20 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Burns	Robert Muir	0	Euthymia
67A	20 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	Robert Burns	John Tennant	0	Euthymia
	22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec 1786	Alexander Dalziel	Robert Burns		
	22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec 1786	George Lawrie	Robert Burns		
	30 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1786	John Ballantine	Robert Burns		

<sup>531</sup> Italicised dates indicate those letters where dating is incomplete.

Table 23: Results of analysis of Group 5

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
	1787-1788	William Creech	Robert Burns		
159	8 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
	8 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
159A	12 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	William Hamilton	0	Euthymia
160	12 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Margaret Chalmers	2↓	Euthymia
161	12 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↓	Euthymia
	16 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
	17 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Margaret Chalmers	Robert Burns		
162	19 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Margaret Chalmers	0	Euthymia
163	20 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
	20 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
	21 <sup>st</sup> Dec 1787	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
164	24 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Charles Hay	1↑	Euthymia
	25 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Frances Dunlop	Robert Burns		
164A	10 <sup>th</sup> -24 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Mr Thomson	0	Euthymia
165	26 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	James Stewart	0	Euthymia
	27 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Mrs Scott	Robert Burns		
166	28 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	4↑	Hypomania
167	28 <sup>th</sup> or 29 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Francis Howden	0	Euthymia
168	30 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1787	Robert Burns	Richard Brown	2↑	Sub-clinical elevation
	1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
168A	1787-1788	Robert Burns	Jane Ferrier	0	Euthymia
169	3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		

	3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan 1788	William Niven	Robert Burns		
170	4 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia
171	5 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
	7 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
172	(?)7 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Robert Graham	1↑	Euthymia
173	Undated	Robert Burns	John Ballantine	0	Euthymia
174	8 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia
	9 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
175	10 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↓	Euthymia
	10 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
176	12 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia
177	12 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	3↓	Sub- threshold lowering
	13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
178	14 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↓	Euthymia
	14 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	William Creech	Robert Burns		
179	15 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↓	Euthymia
	16 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
180	16 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia
180A	16 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Unidentified	0	Euthymia
181	19 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	3↓	Sub- threshold lowering
	19 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
	19 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Unidentified	Robert Burns		
182 Part 1	20 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	4↓	Mild depression
182 Part 2	21 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	4↓/1↑	Mild depression

183	21 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	3↓/1↑	Sub- threshold lowering
184	21 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	5↓	Mild depression
	23 <sup>rd</sup> Jan 1788	William Creech	Robert Burns		
	23 <sup>rd</sup> Jan 1788	Mrs Scott	Robert Burns		
185	22 <sup>nd</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Margaret Chalmers	3↓/1↑	Sub- threshold lowering
185A	24 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	William Creech	1↑	Euthymia
186	24 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↓	Euthymia
	24 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
187	25 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	3↓	Sub- threshold lowering
188	26 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
189	27 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia
	27 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
190	29 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↓	Euthymia
	30 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
	31 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
	(?)31 <sup>st</sup> Jan 1788	Frances Dunlop	Robert Burns		
191	1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
192	1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Earl of Glencairn	0	Euthymia
194	3 <sup>rd</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↑	Sub- threshold elevation
	5 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
195	7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↓	Euthymia
196	7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	John Richmond	0	Euthymia
197	7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	John Tennant	2↓	Euthymia

Table 24: Results of analysis of Group 6

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
198	12 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia
199	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	4↑	Hypomania
199A	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	William Dunbar	2↑	Sub-threshold elevation
200	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	3↑	Hypomania
	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Henry Mackenzie	Robert Burns		
	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Unidentified	Robert Burns		
	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Mrs Fall	Robert Burns		
	13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Richard Brown	Robert Burns		
201	14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↑	Sub-threshold elevation
202	14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	4↑	Hypomania
203	14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	John Skinner	0	Euthymia
204	15 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	4↑	Hypomania
205	15 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Richard Brown	2↑	Sub-threshold elevation
206	17 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Elizabeth Rose	1↑	Euthymia
207	17 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Margaret Chalmers	0	Euthymia
207A	Dec 1786 - Mar 1788	Robert Burns	Unidentified	0	Euthymia
207B	Oct 1787 - Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Anthony Dunlop	0	Euthymia
208	18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	0	Euthymia
	19 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
	22 <sup>nd</sup> Feb 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
209	22 <sup>nd</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia

**Table 25: Results of analysis of Group 7**

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
212	29 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1788	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	2↑	Sub-threshold elevated
213	2 <sup>nd</sup> Mar 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	2↑	Sub-threshold elevated
214	3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar 1788	Robert Burns	William Cruikshank	3↑	Hypomania
214A	3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar 1788	Robert Burns	Patrick Miller	1↑	Euthymia
215	3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar 1788	Robert Burns	Robert Ainslie	5↑	Hypomania
	5 <sup>th</sup> Mar 1788	Agnes McLehose	Robert Burns		
217	6 <sup>th</sup> Mar 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↑	Euthymia
218	7 <sup>th</sup> Mar 1788	Robert Burns	Agnes McLehose	1↓	Euthymia

Table 26: Results of analysis of Group 10

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood score
373	09 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	Robert Graham	0	Euthymia
	09 Dec 1789	Elizabeth Cunningham	Robert Burns		
	09 Dec 1789	Alexander Cunningham	Robert Burns		
	11 Dec 1789	Frances Dunlop	Robert Burns		
374	13 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	7↓	Moderate depression
375	13 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	William Nicol	3↓	Sub-clinical lowering
	13 Dec 1789	Gilbert Burns	Robert Burns		
	13 Dec 1789	W. Cunningham	Robert Burns		
376	Dec 1789	Robert Burns	David Blair	0	Euthymia
377	16 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	Winifred Maxwell Constable	2↓	Euthymia
	17 Dec 1789	Alexander Cunningham	Robert Burns		
	17 Dec 1789	Robert Graham of Fintry	Robert Burns		
378	20 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	Robert Maxwell	3↓	Sub-clinical lowering
	22 Dec 1789	James Johnson	Robert Burns		
379	23 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	Elizabeth Cunningham	1↓	Euthymia
380	31 Dec 1789	Robert Burns	George Sutherland	0	Euthymia
392 <sup>532</sup>	Dec 1789	Robert Burns	Alexander Cunningham	1↑	Euthymia
380A	1789?	Robert Burns	Alexander Findlater	1↑	Euthymia
	02 Jan 1790	William Nicol	Robert Burns		
381	11 Jan 1790	Robert Burns	Gilbert Burns	4↓	Mild depression
	13 Jan 1790	Peter Hill	Robert Burns		

<sup>532</sup> Refers to the second section of this letter, dated Dec 1789.

382	14 Jan 1790	Robert Burns	William Dunbar	2↓	Euthymia
383	Undated	Robert Burns	James Mundell	0	Euthymia

Table 27: Results of analysis of Group 11

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
403	09 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	2↑	Sub-clinical elevation
	13 Jul 1790	Dr Touch	Robert Burns		
404	14 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	John Moore	2↑	Sub-clinical elevation
405	16 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	John Murdoch	0	Euthymia
406	16 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	William Burns	0	Euthymia
	21 Jul 1790	Alex. Dalziel	Robert Burns		
	22 Jul 1790	Alex. Cunningham	Robert Burns		
	22 Jul 1790	Frances Dunlop	Robert Burns		
407	23 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	Robert Cleghorn	0	Euthymia
408	Jul 1790	Robert Burns	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
409	Jul 1790	Robert Burns	Dugald Stewart	0	Euthymia
410	30 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	Dugald Stewart	1↑	Euthymia
411	30 Jul 1790	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	2↑	Sub-clinical elevation
411A	02 Aug 1790	Robert Burns	John McMurdo	3↑	Hypomania
	02 Aug 1790	William Dunbar	Robert Burns		
	05 Aug 1790	Frances Dunlop	Robert Burns		
411B	08 Aug 1790	Robert Burns	Alexander Cunningham	4↑	Hypomania
412	08 Aug 1790	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	4↑	Hypomania
413	09 Aug 1790	Robert Burns	Helen Craik	0	Euthymia
414	Undated	Robert Burns	Alexander Findlater	0	Euthymia
	14 Aug 1790	Helen Craik	Robert Burns		
	17 Aug 1790	Graham of Fintry	Robert Burns		
	18 Aug 1790	Frances Dunlop	Robert Burns		
416	29 Aug 1790	Robert Burns	Robert Cleghorn	2↑	Sub-clinical elevation
417	1790	Robert Burns	John Mitchel	3↑	Hypomania

	30 Aug 1790	Robert Graham of Fintry	Robert Burns		
418	Sep 1790	Robert Burns	Excise	1↑	Euthymia
	01 Sep 1790	Dr Blacklock	Robert Burns		
	02 Sep 1790	Dr Anderson	Robert Burns		
419	04 Sep 1790	Robert Burns	Robert Graham	3↑	Hypomania
	04 Sep 1790	Gilbert Burns	Robert Burns		
	05 Sep 1790	Robert Cleghorn	Robert Burns		
	06 Sep 1790	George Sutherland	Robert Burns		
420	11 Sep 1790	Robert Burns	John Wilson	0	Euthymia
421	11 Sep 1790	Robert Burns	John Sommerville	0	Euthymia

Table 28: Results of analysis of Group 15

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
599	1 <sup>st</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Louisa Fontenelle	1↑	Euthymia
	1 <sup>st</sup> Dec 1793	Gilbert Burns	Robert Burns		
599A	Early Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
600	3 <sup>rd</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Burns	William Robertson	1↑	Euthymia
600A	?Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Maria Riddell	5↓	Mild depression
601	Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Alexander Findlater	0	Euthymia
602	Dec 1793	Robert Burns	George Thomson	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
603	Dec 1793	Robert Burns	France Dunlop	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
603A	Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
	12 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Graham	Robert Burns		
605 Part 1	15 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	5↓	Mild depression
606	Dec 1793	Robert Burns	William Stewart	0	Euthymia
607	Dec 1793?	Robert Burns	John McMurdo	0	Euthymia
605 Part 2	20 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia
605 Part 3	24 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	1↑	Euthymia
605 Part 4	24 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1793	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia

**Table 29: Results of analysis of Group 18**

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
644	19 Oct 1794	Robert Burns	George Thomson	3↑	Hypomania
	27 Oct 1794	George Thomson	Robert Burns		
	Oct 1794	George Thomson	Robert Burns		
645	29 Oct 1794	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	2↓	Euthymia
646	Nov 1794	Robert Burns	George Thomson	3↑	Hypomania
	15 Nov 1794	George Thomson	Robert Burns		
647	19 Nov 1794	Robert Burns	George Thomson	4↑	Hypomania

**Table 30: Results of analysis of Group 3**

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
73	11 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1787	Robert Burns	John Mackenzie	0	Euthymia
75	13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1787	Robert Burns	Earl of Glencairn	0	Euthymia
76	?Jan 1787	Robert Burns	Margaret Chalmers	2↓	Euthymia
77	14 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1787	Robert Burns	John Ballantine	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
78	15 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1787	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	4↓	Mild depression
78A	15 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1787	Robert Burns	Patrick Miller	1↓	Euthymia
	22 <sup>nd</sup> Jan 1787	Mr Ferguson	Robert Burns	0	
79	Jan 1787	Robert Burns	John Moore	0	Euthymia
80	5 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1787	Robert Burns	George Lowrie	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
81	6 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1787	Robert Burns	Bailies of the Canongate	0	Euthymia
82	7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1787	Robert Burns	Earl of Buchan	0	Euthymia
83	7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1787	Robert Burns	Archibald Lawrie	1↑	Euthymia
84	7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1787	Robert Burns	James Dalrymple	1↑	Euthymia

**Table 31: Results of analysis of Group 17**

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
635	30 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1794	Robert Burns	George Thomson	1↑	Euthymia
635A	Early Sept 1794	Robert Burns	William Maxwell	0	Euthymia
636	Sept 1794	Robert Burns	George Thomson	2↑	Sub-threshold elevation
637	Sept 1794	Robert Burns	George Thomson	4↑	Hypomania
638	Sept 1794	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
639	Sept 1794	Robert Burns	Alexander Findlater	1↑	Euthymia

Table 32: Results of analysis of Group 19

Letter	Date	Sender	Recipient	No. of symptoms	Mood state
695	18 <sup>th</sup> May 1796	Robert Burns	George Thomson	0	Euthymia
696	1 <sup>st</sup> Jun 1796	Robert Burns	James Johnson	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
697	1 <sup>st</sup> Jun 1796	Robert Burns	Maria Riddell	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
698	26 <sup>th</sup> Jun 1796	Robert Burns	James Clarke	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
698A	26 <sup>th</sup> Jun 1796	Robert Burns	Jessie Lewars	0	Euthymia
699	4 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	George Thomson	1↓	Euthymia
	4 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Alexander Cunningham	Robert Burns		
700	7 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	Alexander Cunningham	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
701	10 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	James Armour	2↓	Euthymia
702	10 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	Frances Dunlop	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
703	10 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	Gilbert Burns	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
	11 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Graham	Robert Burns		
704	12 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	Alexander Cunningham	1↓	Euthymia
705	12 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	James Burness	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering
706	12 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	George Thomson	2↓	Euthymia
707	13 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	James Gracie	1↓	Euthymia
708	14 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	Jean Armour Burns	1↓	Euthymia
	14 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	George Thomson	Robert Burns		
709	16 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	John Clarke	1↓	Euthymia
710	18 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1796	Robert Burns	James Armour	3↓	Sub-threshold lowering

## Appendix 3: Charles Fleeming's daybook<sup>533</sup>

Figure 3: Entry from Charles Fleeming's day-book pertaining to 'Robert Burns Lint Dresser'

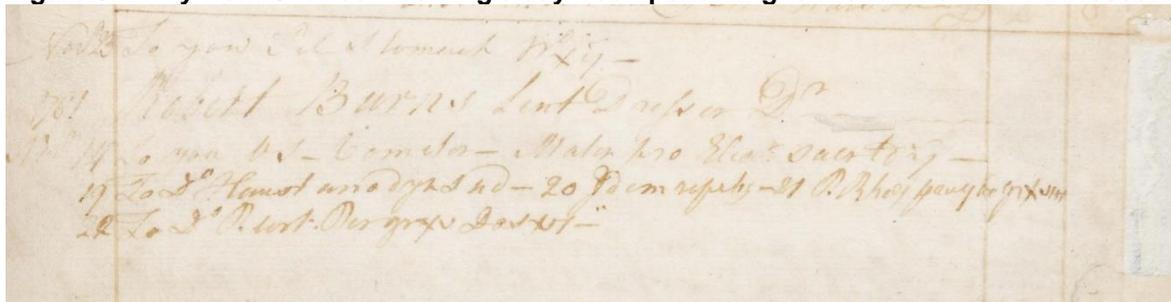
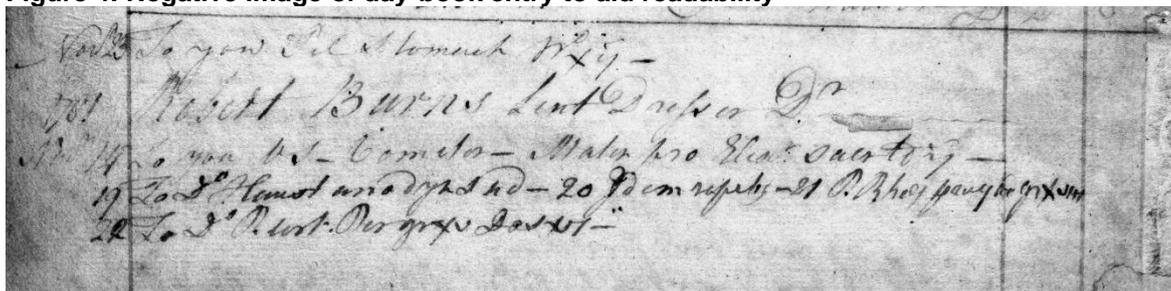


Figure 4: Negative image of day-book entry to aid readability



### Transcription of entry for Robert Burns Lint Dresser

Nov 23	To you Pil Stomach iiP x ii
1781	Robert Burns Lint Dresser D <sup>o</sup>
Nov 14	To you VS - Vomitor - Mater pro Elixir sacr td ii
19	To D <sup>o</sup> Haust anodyne ud - 20 idem repting - 21 P. Rhei [? vii ?] gr xviii
22	To D <sup>o</sup> P cort Per gr xv Dos xii

### Translation of entry for Robert Burns Lint Dresser

Nov 23	To you, Stomachic pills, 2 pills for 2 days
1781	Robert Burns Lint Dresser Ditto
Nov 14	To you, against vomiting, materials for sacred elixir, three times day (?2 days or 2 spoonfuls)
19	To Ditto, anodyne draught as per directed; 20 <sup>th</sup> repeated as before; 21 <sup>st</sup> Powdered rhubarb [? 7 ?] 18 grains
22	To Ditto, powdered Peruvian bark, 15 grains divided into 12 doses

### Ingredients within preparations and indications

**Sacred Elixir:** rhubarb and aloe

**Anodyne draught:** likely laudanum

<sup>533</sup> The full-size high-resolution image files from which these are taken are included on the CD enclosure within the folder "Appendix 3 – Fleeming Day Book"

**Powdered rhubarb:** bowel regularity, settling stomach, promoting appetite

**Powdered Peruvian bark:** quinine; intermittent fever, settling appetite

**Stomachic pills:** rhubarb, mint, gentian

Figure 5: 1960s summary of entry for Robert Burns, bound into day-book

This book was presented to Irvine Burns Club by Mr. Charles Balcombe, who found it amongst other old papers in the attic of his property at 49 Kirkgate, Irvine, in 1955.

Mr. Balcombe being not only a member of Irvine Burns Club but also, by profession, a pharmaceutical chemist, the significance of his find was immediately known to him. The property at 49 Kirkgate dates back to the 18th. century and the inference is that 'Dr.' Fleming had resided there.

The dates of the entry relating to Burns coincides with the period of Burns illness when in Irvine and, for the first time, gives documentation of the event.

Mr. C. G. Drummond, a historical authority of the Pharmaceutical Society, being asked to comment on the entry, states as follows:-

" 1781

Nov. 14 To you V.S. - Vomitor (i.e. an emetic, probably Ipecacuahna) - Mater(lal) pro Elixir Sacr. ad ii (Elixir Sacr. or Sacred Elixir was Tincture of Rhubarb and Aloes, aloes itself being known as the 'Sacred' drug. Why only 'materials' for that preparation I can't explain. Those would be aloes itself and powdered rhubarb and the doctor may have instructed Robert to steep them in wine or spirit or even in hot water, rather than supply the more expensive Elixir itself.

2nd. line :- ? anodyne (probably opium in some form as a pain killer or as an astringent) - 20 th. - the same repeated - 21 st. P. Rhei  $\frac{7}{8}$  aa gr. xviii (i.e. powdered rhubarb and some other substance, of each 18 grains). That part is not distinct and may read Pulv Rhei Ang (ie English rhubarb) but I think the first more likely.

3rd. line : Nov. 22. P. cort Per gr xv Dos xii - i.e Pulv. Cort. Peruvian, powdered Peruvian or Cinchona bark, 12 x 15 grain doses.

That is as far as I have got for the moment. As to your question as to the nature of the illness, I'm afraid that is a matter for conjecture, for many illnesses (if not most) were at that time treated with vomiting,

