An illustration and interrogation of the spectrum of Robert Burns's masculinity.

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MA (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

Scottish Literature

School of Critical Studies

College of Arts & Humanities

University of Glasgow

September 2025

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors Professor Pauline Mackay and Dr Ronnie Young. This project is indebted to their continuous support, kindness, and advice. I am proud to have worked with such inspirational individuals who have consistently motivated me to become a far more confident researcher and writer through their firm trust in my abilities.

This endeavour would not have been possible without the kindness of the Shaw family. Their generous financial support via the 'Shaw Scholarship' has provided me with the opportunity to carry out such an enjoyable project and has set in motion my academic career in Burns Studies.

The Centre for Robert Burns Studies has been a rich and stimulating research environment which I am very proud to be a part of. Special thanks to Professor Gerard Carruthers, Professor Kirsteen McCue, Professor Rhona Brown, and Dr Craig Lamont for their advice, support and input.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr Moira Hansen, Edward Hardiman, Patrick Jamieson, and John Watson who have all taken the time to support my work by sharing their own research and opinions with me.

I'd also like to recognise the staff of the University of Glasgow Library and the National Library of Scotland for their help and care.

Although this work was often carried out in isolation, the support and friendship of my fellow Scottish Literature PGRs meant that I have never felt lonely. My heartfelt thanks go to all the Scottish Literature PGRs, but especially Geraldine Coleman and Kate Kane whose friendship and unfailing support has been the brightest ray of sunshine on some darker days.

Lastly, I would be remiss in not mentioning my family and friends. My parents - Alison and John Grimshaw - and siblings - Katie and Jack Grimshaw - have been particularly supportive of my ambitions. And Milo who is the most comforting writing buddy.

And thank you to my partner Shane who now knows far more about Robert Burns than he ever intended to. This project would be nowhere without your steadfast belief in me and unwavering encouragement.

Abstract

This MPhil dissertation is an illustration and interrogation of the spectrum of Robert Burns's expressions of masculinity. Through a historicised approach, this study accounts for the eighteenth-century literary and social conditions which influenced Burns's understanding and subsequent enactment of masculinity. Surveying the influence of sentimentalism and Adam Smith's notion of 'sympathy' on Burns's life and work, the 'spectrum of masculinity' which is outlined begins with Burns's significantly portrayal of himself as a 'Man of Feeling'. Furthermore, an examination of the social, cultural, and intellectual spheres which Burns produced writing for provides fruitful insight into the varied self-fashioning of his masculinity, which he tailors to his diverse audiences. Ultimately, this demonstrates that his unique access to multiple spheres produced a uniquely nuanced spectrum of masculine expressions. Notably, these spheres spanned socio-economic boundaries as Burns formed friendships with both economically struggling working men and men of a higher socio-economic status. While this study has a central focus on homosocial spheres, it also addresses Burns's awareness of the discourse on women's rights which was contemporary to him with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's pioneering feminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). This is situated in a wider evaluation of Burns's interaction with the concept of masculine authority, which features his bawdy work which ostentatiously celebrates male sexuality – lying at the other end of the 'spectrum' which is laid out. Burns's attitude towards masculine authority was varied - he upheld that authority through his expression of dominance in his writing while he also critically engaged with the futility of male dominance in his narrative masterpiece 'Tam o' Shanter'. Overall, this study utilises Robert Burns's complex expressions of masculinity to address contemporary anxieties concerning its nature – demonstrating that, for the poet, masculinity encompasses a wide range of traits which result from a fusion of cultural, social and biographical factors.

Contents

Abbreviations

K Vol 1: The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns Volume: 1, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968)

K Vol 2: The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns Volume: 2, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968)

Letters 1: The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol 1: 1780-1789, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson and G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

Letters 2: The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol 2: 1780-1789, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson and G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

TMM: *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*

TMS: Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

Introduction

> Is he fundamentally a poet of the 'age of sentiment' subscribing primarily to polite social sensibility (which many of his utterances elsewhere most certainly indicate), or is he the licentious libertarian?[1]

In 2006, this question concluded Gerard Carruthers' book-chapter which explored Burns's relationships with women, and still today it remains unanswered. The core of the question is a confrontation of Robert Burns's masculinity: is it a softer masculinity which centralises sympathetic tendencies or a masculinity which is driven by rebellious and carnal desires? One issue arising from the question lies with the proposition of a 'fundamental' Burns. To suggest the poet who wrote over a thousand letters, poems, and songs over a period which saw him go from an impressionable adolescent to a national literary success, can be surmised by one underlying motivation, would fail to encompass the complexity of Burns's literary output, to say nothing of his personality in so far as we might, in some sense, recuperate such a thing. This output does encompass traits of sentimentalism and promiscuity, but it also presents Burns's interest in male friendships and homosocial culture, while further reflecting shifting social and economic status, various parental concerns, different models of masculinity, and gender roles. Furthermore, Burns's personal life is well documented and provides significant insight into his varied relationships with men and women, and his unique access to an assortment of homosocial and heterosocial spheres. This range of aspects from his life and creative output weave together to form a tapestry of Burns's masculinity which cannot be simply described using a singular label. This study illustrates the spectrum of Burns's expressions of masculinity, accounting for the nuances of his articulation of his maleness. Primarily considering the societal and biographical formation of these expressions, this study will also take some theoretical understandings of gender into account – drawing heavily on R.W. Connell's work on masculinity – with the intention to fully interrogate what differing shades of Burns's person and work entail for his masculinity.

Like most gender terms, the meaning of 'masculinity' is problematic. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines masculinity as: 'The state or fact of being masculine; the

[1] Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2006), p.75.

assemblage of qualities regarded as characteristic of men; maleness, manliness.'[2] The definition is itself simple, however determining the 'assemblage of qualities' which comprises masculinity complicates matters. Connell's *Masculinities,* a foundational text on the topic asserts that characterisations of masculinity are, 'deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures. Masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations.'[3] Essentialist definitions of masculinity dismiss the malleability of these social relations and wider structures. Connell conveys that there is no core, innate quality which defines masculinity; it is a concept which changes as 'a product of historical process.'[4] Seen in this light, the formation of Burns's masculinity can be viewed as a product of his specific historical moment. It follows that this moment must be closely considered to completely interrogate his gendered expressions.

Arguably the most significant societal development in Britain from the seventeenth century into the eighteenth was the emergence of polite society. This was, 'a consequence of significant, and welcome, late-seventeenth-century social and economic change, consolidated and further stimulated by the political settlement following the Glorious Revolution (1688-9). Through these events the nation was, it was argued, becoming more powerful, prosperous, tolerant and civilised.'[5] In turn, politeness became fashionable as its practice was contemplated as the means to, 'acquire a suitably refined, yet virtuous, personality that proved superior to many existing forms of manly virtue which, on account of their association with elitism, violence or boorishness, were judged detrimental to truly polite sociability.'[6] In *The Civilizing Process,* Norbert Elias determines that the development of the everyday enactment of politeness reflects broader societal transformation, ultimately linking the personal with wider societal structures.[7] This widespread improvement of manners resulted in an upheaval of masculinity, which saw the emphasis of the polite, refined gentleman, which was propelled by literature such as 'courtesy books, conduct guides, essay periodicals, magazines. sermons, academic papers and treaties – to which these men often turned for advice and insight.'[8]

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[2] 'Masculinity' in *Oxford English Dictionary,* <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/masculinity_n?tl=true>, [accessed 1st December 2024].
[3] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities,* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p.29.
[4] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteenth-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.21.
[5] Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.1.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).
[8] Ibid, p.9.

Taking R.W. Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', that 'one form of masculinity rather than others which is culturally exalted,'[9] we can see that the polite, refined gentleman defined the hegemonic masculine character in the eighteenth century. However, despite the character of the polite gentleman becoming the coveted form of masculinity in eighteenth-century Britain, it was constructed on 'an ideal that is ultimately never realised, a promise never fulfilled.'[10] This study will look beyond this singular idealised model of polite masculinity to the varied masculine characteristics which were enacted in private and public life. In fact, polite masculinity is given little space in this study relative to other forms, simply because Burns seldom embodies this rarified form of masculinity. Born in 1759, Burns's life spanned a time when, as Philip Carter notes, the concept of a manly gentleman slightly shifts from polite to sentimental.[11] It was sentimentalism, over politeness, that had a hugely significant influence on Burns's character and writing, and which therefore forms a significant focal point of Chapter One.

Of course, geographical location is also essential to consider as locale impacted the relevance of which social and economic structures directly impacted one's masculinity. For example, intellectual club culture was readily accessible to men who resided in Enlightened cities such as Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow, where 'an elite model of manhood,' could be established through the performance of 'refined masculinity.'[12] On the other hand, the distinct lack of these intellectual spheres outside of Scotland's main cities left significantly less opportunity for men in rural areas to practice refined masculinity. Burns generally provided an exception to this rule with founding the Tarbolton Bachelors Club in rural Ayrshire, which was tailored on social and intellectual improvement for those of a same social station as Burns. In general, the social and economic status of individual men played a critical role in the spheres they could access, so that 'multiple masculinities were available to landed, professional and middling men.'[13] Meanwhile, the same opportunity was not available to the relatively restricted residents of rural areas, with 'poorer classes occupy[ing]

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[9] Connell, *Masculinities,* p.77.
[10] Michael Rowland, "Plain, hamley, fife": James Boswell's shameful national masculinity', *European Journal of English Studies*, 23:3 (2019), pp.281-294, (p.284).
[11] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society,* p.8.
[12] Rosalind Carr, *Gender and the Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p.37.
[13] Rosalind Carr, 'The Importance and Impossibility of Manhood: Polite and Libertine Masculinities in the Urban Eighteenth Century', in *Nine Centuries of Man: Manhood and Masculinities in Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp.58-79, (p.58-59).

an ambiguous place in Scottish Enlightenment philosophy.'[14] Chapter Two will address Burns's masculinity with consideration of him falling into the latter category; interrogating the self-fashioning of his masculinity in relation to his position as a rustic farmer and a boisterous Ayrshire lad. However, Burns's unusual social mobility, afforded to him following the commercial and critical success of *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786, Kilmarnock edition) - and his involvement with Freemasonry[15] – resulted in the Scottish Bard having atypical access to a variety of spheres of men and women who were far higher on the social and economic ladder than Burns. Chapter Three will explore this varied experience of homosocial club culture, which seen Burns interacting with men from varying socio-economic backgrounds and writing for differing audiences. Of course, social and economic status divided these distinct audiences but so did the aims and activities of these clubs, which each propelled diverging expressions of masculinity, from refined gentlemanliness to convivially charged phallocentrism.

These three aspects of Burns's life and work (sentimentalism, self-fashioning, and club culture) have been individually interrogated at length. Carol McGurik's *Burns and the Sentimental Era*[16] provides an in-depth evaluation of the presence of sentimentalism in Burns's life and work. Furthermore, the construction of his image – specifically in the prefaces to *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*- has been suitably evaluated by Rhona Brown[17] and Nigel Leask[18] in recent years to demonstrate Burns's own hand in creating his public persona. Similarly, Gerard Lee McKeevar's recent chapter '"I, Rob, am here": Becoming and Belonging in the Verse Epistles'[19] like Liam McIlvanney's *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland,*[20] considers Burns's more private self-fashioning, presented to male cronies who belonged to the same social and economic class as him. Moreover, Corey E. Andrews has researched and published extensively on the

[14] Carr, *Gender and the Enlightenment*, p.24.
[15] While the notion of a completely classless brotherhood will be contested in Chapter 3, Freemasonry's widespread popularity across the socio-economic spectrum meant that Burns could acquaint himself with a more diverse group of men.
[16] Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985).
[17] See Rhona Brown, 'Self-Curation, Self-Editing and Audience Construction by Eighteenth-Century Scots Vernacular Poets', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 42:2, (2019), pp.157-174.
[18] See Nigel Leask, 'The Making of a Poet', in *Robert Burns and Pastoral: poetry and improvement in late eighteenth-century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.81-114.
[19] Gerard Lee McKeever, '"I, Rob, am here": Becoming and Belonging in the Verse Epistles', in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp.94-105.
[20] Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

topic of Burns and club culture,[21] as well as Pauline Mackay, who has brought Burns's illicit collection *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* written for the Crochallan Fencibles to the forefront of contemporary Burns studies.[22] Collectively these have done much to explore Burns's self- and social fashioning, however they do not focus on Burns's masculinity itself within these contexts even though the factors they explore are key components of his expressions and understanding of masculinity as well as his prominent involvement un masculinity culture.

Of course, gender as a whole has not been ignored by Burns scholars. Sarah Dunnigan's chapter 'Burns and Women'[23] deals with the various relationships Burns had with the opposite sex and his complex presentations of them in his creative output. Moira Hansen's more recent work on 'Writing To and About Women'[24] focusses on the correspondence Burns had with women, primarily focusing on the platonic friendship he maintained with Francis Dunlop. The previously quoted chapter by Gerard Carruthers published in 2006, titled 'Women, Love and the Body,'[25] navigates the sexual politics of Burns's work. Furthermore, Carruthers' paper 'Fraternal Claims: The Brotherhoods of Robert Burns', 'briefly outlines different masculine characteristics which are associated with Burns, determining that 'manhood was for the poet a complex business that gave him much food for thought and sustenance for a successful creative career.'[26] These chapters have contributed significantly to the understanding of Burns and gender in the academic sphere and this study is indebted to the conversations that they have sparked amongst Burns scholars. Each study delves into a specific aspect of Burns's masculinity, and the range of these facets can lead to a question regarding authenticity and performativity. Which aspects of Burns's masculinity truly reflect him and his values and which are a performance of gender? This thesis rarely differentiates

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[21] See Corey E. Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Club Poetry* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).
And Corey E. Andrews, 'Robert Burns, Club Society, and Convivial Sociability', in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp.230-241.
[22] See Pauline Mackay, 'Burns and Bawdry' in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp.121-134.
And Pauline Mackay, '"Low, tame, and loathsome": Bawdry in Romantic Scotland', *European Romantic Review,* 27:4, (2016), pp.433-448, doi:10.1080/10509585.2016.1190086.
[23] Sarah Dunnigan, 'Burns and Women', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.20-33.
[24] Moira Hansen, 'Writing To and About Women', in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp.252-269.
[25] Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2006).
[26] Gerard Carruthers, 'Fraternal Claims: The Brotherhoods of Robert Burns', in *Inspiring Views from "a' the airts" on Scottish Literatures, Art and Cinema* (Glasgow: The First World Congress of Scottish Literatures, 2014), pp.139-152, (p.151).

between the performativity and authenticity, demonstrating that all Burns's 'masculinities' exist somewhere within his personal writings or creative output. While this question is a valid one, this study addressed the deficiency in scholarship which specifically pertains to Burns's expressions of masculinity: catering to a gap in Burns scholarship with the first fully-fledged illustration and interrogation of Burns's various masculinities.

Furthermore, this study answers concerns expressed outside of the academic sphere regarding Burns's masculinity – which has been framed as toxic in recent years. In January 2018, former Scottish Makar Liz Lochhead deemed Burns 'Weinsteinian' and a 'sex pest.'[27] This was followed by a poem entitled 'From Beyond the Grave', in which Lochhead took on the persona of maidservant Jenny Clow who was impregnated by Burns, mocking Burns's 'womanizing' image and criticising his treatment of women that he was romantically involved with.[28] Lochhead's comments stemmed from the MeToo movement and that particular historical moment which saw women addressing the sexual abuse they had previously endured. While highlighting a crucial contemporary issue, Lochhead's statement failed to acknowledge the social and cultural context which produced Burns's specific expressions of masculinity. This study addresses this past moment, examining the literary and social contexts which resulted in Burns's gendered expressions. In Chapter Four, I closely interrogate Burns's interaction with masculine authority, patriarchy, and his problematic writing about women - which speaks to this specific negative narrative propelled by the media in recent years - while resituating this controversial material within relevant cultural and social contexts. Additionally, this research addresses wider conversations regarding the state of masculinity. Terms such as 'crisis of masculinity' - originally a contentious theory which broadly implies that 'men today, more than ever, are confused about what it means to be a man'[29]- and 'toxic masculinity' - 'a way of describing certain cultural norms associated with masculinity which can be harmful to both men and society at large'[30]- have become commonplace in contemporary media. This issue has warranted political attention, with the UK's Prime Minister Keir Stamer and MPs voicing their concerns about the growth of

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[27] John Dugdale, 'Robert Burns: was the beloved poet a 'Weinsteinian sex pest', *The Guardian,* 24th January 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2018/jan/24/robert-burns-was-the-beloved-poet-a-weinsteinian-sex-pest> [accessed 25th October 2024].
[28] Liz Lochhead, 'From Beyond the Grave', in *A Handsel: New and Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2023), pp. 32-35.
[29] Jennifer Lemon, 'The Crisis of Masculinity and the Renegotiation of Power', *Communicatio,* 18:2 (1992), pp.16-30, (p.18), doi: 10.1080/02500169208537709.
[30] Benjamin A. Hine, *Current Issues Facing Men and Boys: A Case for Urgent Change* (Oxon: Routledge, 2025), p.19.

harmful behaviours amongst young men,[31] which has initiated further political discussions concerning the state of modern masculinity. Overall, there is a clear cultural and political concern regarding modern expressions of masculinity, which partially stems from the difficulty of defining masculinity in the twenty-first century. While this study does not set out to solve these complex critical cultural issues, and while it steers clear from modern perceptions of gender, it significantly provides an example of the fluidity of gendered expressions, demonstrating that masculinity is multifaceted, with one archetypical Scotsman exhibiting a range of nuanced masculine expressions. Thus, the spectrum of Robert Burns's masculinity – as outlined and evaluated in the chapters which follow- serves as an example of the complexity and multiplicity of gender and could act as a model for challenging reductive perceptions of masculinity today.

[31] Alexandra Topping, Sally Weale and Pippa Crerar, 'Group of Labour MPs seeking to steer young men away from "toxic influencers", *The Guardian,* 19th March 2025 < https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/19/group-of-labour-mps-seeking-to-steer-young-men-away-from-toxic-influencers> [accessed 1st September 2025].

Chapter 1: Men of Feeling: Enlightened Sentimentality

> My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his Elegies, Thomson, Man of feeling, a book I prize next to the Bible, Man of the World, Sterne, especially his Sentimental journey, McPherson's Ossian, &c. these are glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct.[32]

At the age of twenty-three Burns wrote to his former schoolmaster John Murdoch, briefly outlining the man he had become in their years apart. From a literary perspective, the letter offers valuable insight into the sentimental reading preferences of Burns in his early twenties – which is unsurprising considering, 'Burns lived from 1759-1796, a lifespan coinciding with the rise and fall of the cult of sensibility or sentimental movement.'[33] Yet, the letter offers far more valuable insight into the ways in which Burns would aim to act as a young man, possessed of the sentimental values contained in the pages he read. Earlier in the letter he writes that, 'as a man of the world I am most miserably deficient,'determined that his purpose in life was 'to see, and observe,' asserting that the true 'joy of my heart is to "Study men, their manners, and their ways."'[34] True men - such as his father William Burnes and 'Men of Feeling' presented to him in the works of Mackenzie and Sterne- acted with benevolent intent; meanwhile Burns found himself observing instead of acting. Yet, his close observations of others gave way to an intense sense of empathy, allowing Burns to become chameleon-like – inhabiting differing masculine identities including the 'Man of Feeling'.

Burns's connections with the sentimental movement go beyond this early letter – his *oeuvre* is rich with allusions to sentimental fiction while his correspondence casts light on the extent to which his self-fashioning is informed by characteristics displayed by the protagonists of sentimental novels. Sentimental fiction was a popular genre in eighteenth-century Scotland and like all literary movements it was the product of various literary and social circumstances. Deirdre Dawson situates the genre in the wider Enlightenment landscape, asserting that, 'the greatest influence was without a doubt the philosophy of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Thomas Reid and

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[32] Robert Burns, letter to John Murdoch, 15 January 1783, in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol 1: 1780-1789,* ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson and G. Ross Roy (Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 16-18, (p.17).
[33] Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p.xxv.
[34] Burns, letter to Murdoch, 15 January 1783, in *Letters 1,* pp.16-17.

Adam Smith, with their emphasis on human feelings and reflections, rather than transcendental truths, as the origin of moral sentiments.'[35] These 'literati' of the Scottish Enlightenment began to look further than an innate predetermined sense of morality which guides actions and intentions, instead encouraging people to interact with and express their emotions – especially 'sympathy', or what Adam Smith (1723-1790) defined as the kind of fellow-feeling which would equate with the modern word 'empathy':

> Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.[36]

Acting with sympathy was a key conclusion of Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS,* 1759)*,* with *morality* ultimately contingent on humanity's sociability as moral judgements respond to and are shaped by other people. What is commonly referred to as the 'age of reason' was in fact an age of sympathy for many across Scotland - dictated by the 'discourse of passions'[37] - with the philosophical focus on emotional reasoning seeping into Scotland's literary landscape. Janet Todd asserts:

> In all forms of sentimental literature, there is an assumption that life and literature are directly linked, not through any notion of a mimetic depiction of reality but through the belief that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one. So literary convictions become a way of life.[38]

Smith himself uses literature as an example for humanities capacity to feel sympathy: 'Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us, is as sincere as our grief for their distress, and our fellow-feeling with their misery is not more real than that

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[35] Dedrie Dawson, 'Literature and Sentimentalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment,* ed. by Alexander Brodie and Craig Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.289-312 (p.290).
[36] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.13.
[37] John Alfred Dwyer, *The Age of Passions: An Interpretation of Adam Smith and Scottish Cultural Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1998), p.11, <https://go.exlibris.link/Dzph9GDM>.
[38] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (Great Britain: Richard Clay, 1985), p.4.

with their happiness.'[39] Life and literature were parallel, with sentimental fiction staging Smith's sympathetic proposals which would in turn, inform the real-life conduct of its readers such as Burns. In his First Commonplace Book, Burns clearly supports Smith's stance on sympathy, asserting that 'I entirely agree with that judicious Philosopher Mr Smith in his excellent Theory of Moral Sentiments, that Remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom.'[40] Burns's familiarity with Smith's text is further evidenced in some of Burns's most famous poems such as 'To a Louse' (1785)[41] and 'To a Mouse' (1785),[42] in which he toys with Smith's notion of spectator and agent while maintaining a core sympathetic outlook. In the former, he proclaims that we should *'see ourselves as others see us!'* (l.44), endorsing Smith's concept of a sympathetic 'impartial spectator'. Clearly, Burns was directly influenced by Smith, who 'instilled in Burns a philosophical understanding of sympathy which would go on to become a hallmark of his poetry.'[43] While Burns was most evidently influenced by the Scottish Adam Smith, some of his sentimental inspirations came from further afield. For example, he engaged with the work and ideas put forward by Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). A significant intellectual figure in Britain from the 1760s onwards, he contributed to the discourse of sensibility by laying 'great emphasis on the heart as a means to reach a form of sincerity.'[44] Yann Tholoniat redresses the lack of credit Rousseau has received as an influence on Burns, determining that his notions of universal social contract and rustic simplicity – which are underpinned by pity and compassion – are reflected in a range of Burns's work.[45] While Burns was most evidently plugged into the bubbling Scottish discourse which promoted sympathy, he also notably engaged with wider European philosophy.

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[39] Smith, *TMS,* p.13.
[40] Robert Burns, 'First Commonplace Book' in *The Oxford Edition of The Works of Robert Burns, Vol 1: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.42.
[41] Robert Burns, 'To a Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church', in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns Volume:1*, ed.by James Kinsley (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.193-194. Further references to Burns's verse will be to this edition or the accompanying second volume where indicated.
[42] Robert Burns, 'To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough, November, 1786', in *K Vol 1,* pp.127-128.
[43] Ralph Richard McLean, 'Robert Burns and the Enlightenment', in *Fickle Man: Robert Burns and the 21st Century,* ed. by Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers (Ross-shire: Sandstone Press, 2009), pp.104-117, (p.105).
[44] Yann Tholoniat, 'Robert Burns and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Sensitive Hearts, Big Mouths', in *Romanticism and the Philosophical Tradition*, ed. by Thomas Constantinesco and Sophie Laniel-Musitelli (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 2015), pp.167-183, (p.169).
[45] Ibid.

The Enlightenment ushered in a renewed model of masculinity which encouraged a generation of 'Men of Feeling' who should ultimately be led by their hearts. The Scottish Enlightenment consisted of masculine spheres, with debating clubs and intellectual societies, coffee-shops, and university lecture halls almost exclusively male,[46] resulting in ideas of improvement originating from male lives and experiences. Although the philosophical guidance produced by those such as Smith was to be understood as universal, it was specifically aimed at men. When discussing human nature 'man' was the normative term to describe all of humanity, as exhibited in texts such as David Hume's (1711-1776) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) in which he presented the concept of the 'science of man' - the notion that knowledge of human nature could be the basis for all other sciences.[47] However, Smith's argument excludes women as evidenced in Smith's specific reference to gender throughout the text, explicitly differentiating women when offering his core moral advice which he directs at men. The experience of men was understood as normative so that Scottish philosophers of the Enlightenment age were not only exploring morality and emotions but also asking: 'If the modes of epic and the heroic were no longer tenable, how was masculinity to be represented?'[48] in their masculine spheres, with their specific guidance for men.

While it is evident that the Enlightenment was a male-dominated sphere which aimed to improve the lives and conduct of men, sentimental fiction was more complex in terms of gender. Firstly, sentiment was understood as a universal instinct but one which women more readily express: 'Men are associated with conceptual mastery, a language of ideas, and with the mind, where women are associated with practical expression and may speak an affective language, a language of the heart.'[49] Reading sentimental fiction with these stereotypical associations of men with reason and women with feeling, would suggest the genre is inherently feminine with its excessive emotion, which is further supported by the movement's largely female audience.

However, the mid-eighteenth century heralded in new fashionable male literary archetype: 'a man of feeling who also suffers because he is either too good or too foolish for

[46] Rosalind Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.36-72.
[47] David Hume, 'The Science of Man', in *The Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology,* ed. by Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), pp. 35-41.
[48] Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, 'Introduction', in *The Man of Feeling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. vii-xxiv, (p.xiii).
[49] Ibid., p.xiii.

the world.'[50] This 'Man of Feeling' archetype was popularised by Henry Mackenzie's 1771 novel *The Man of Feeling*; a fragmentary tale following protagonist Harley as he navigates moral dilemmas with his heart. Harley is characteristically sentimental, with his overt emotion expressed through his consistently tearful demeanour. His expressive emotions do not feminise him; rather they soften his masculinity as he becomes an extreme example of the empathetic man delineated by philosophers of sentiment.[51] His tears embody the physicality of the genre, with a key motif of sentimentalism being bodily expressions of emotions. The word 'sentimental' can be broken down into its etymological elements and defined as 'thinking through feeling,'[52] which implies a blend of rationality, emotionality, and physicality. Smith addresses tears in *TMS*, questioning:

> Why should we be more ashamed to weep than to laugh before company? We may often have as real occasion to do the one as to do the other: But we may always feel that the spectators are more likely to go along with us in the agreeable, than in the painful emotions.[53]

Smith addresses wider societal expectations regarding men's expressions of emotions, conveying that acceptance lies within the comfortable; alternatively, it takes bravery to cry and embrace the uncomfortable. These notions of tears and bravery are further emphasised by the eighteenth-century's preoccupation with moral weeping. In a 1755 periodical *Man: A Paper on Enobling the Species,* the author 'A.B.' differentiates between physically crying and moral weeping:

> We may properly distinguish weeping into two general kinds, genuine and counterfeit; or into physical crying, and moral weeping. Physical crying, while there are no real corresponding ideas in the mind, nor any genuine sentimental feeling of the heart to produce it, depends upon the mechanism of the body : but moral weeping proceeds from, and is always attended with, such real sentiments of the mind and

[50] Ibid., p.ix.
[51] Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1771]).
[52] Ibid., p.xii.
[53] Smith, *TMS*, p.57.

> feeling of the heart, as do honour to human nature; which false crying always debases.[54]

Essentially, 'moral weeping' marries sympathy with the body which consequently results in tears being symbolic of an impressive emotional capacity which in turn conveys the humanity of those who weep. Jean-Jacques Rousseau connected the physicality of tears with social and moral factors, theorising that the human connection which is a product of crying gives space to a development of sympathetic morality and that being outwardly emotional can authentic moral relationships between people.[55] In *Masculinities,* R.W. Connell argues that, 'True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body.'[56] Although sentimentalism centred on emotional feeling, this was often so intense that it translated beyond the innate – with characters empathy manifesting in uncontrollable bodily expressions. Thomas Dixon reflects on the masculine dimension of tears in the eighteenth-century, assessing that the age of sentimentalism resulted in, 'a more intense effort [...], in both theory and practice, than had ever been exerted before, to produce and to praise the 'manly tear.'[57] As the eighteenth-century progressed so did the admiration of men who were capable of sentimental expression which manifested through bodily expressions of 'moral weeping'. A.B. further champions 'moral weeping' as a masculine act, stating:

> Moral weeping is the sign of so noble a passion, that it may be questioned whether those are properly men, who never weep upon any occasion. They may pretend to be as heroical as they please, and pride themselves in a stoical insensibility; but this will never pass for virtue with the true judges of human nature. What can be more nobly human than to have a tender sentimental feeling of our own and other's misfortunes? This degree of sensibility every man ought to wish to have for his own sake, as it

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[54]A.B., 'Moral Weeping' in *Man: A Paper for Ennobling the Species,* 43 (1755), <pp.wileydigitalarchives>, p.2.

[55] Marci Menin, *Thinking About tears: Crying and Weeping in Long Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2022), < https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192864277.003.0007>, pp.150-173, [accessed 15th December 2025].

[56] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities,* 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 45.

[57] Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannica: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.98.

> disposes him to, and renders him more capable of practising, all the virtues that promote his own welfare and happiness. [58]

By particularly referring to men and utilising language such as ‘noble’ and 'heroic', A.B. appeals to normative standards of masculinity, conveying that ‘moral weeping’ is in fact an impressive skill for men which requires a new form of bravery. The physical aspect of nobility and heroism remains however, is subverted from traditionally violent associations to softer bodily expressions. Furthermore, the importance of the sympathetic heart further contributes to the physical dimension of 'moral weeping': 'What proceeds from the heart, readily finds its way to the heart again. The weeping of a sorrowful or joyus heart has a powerful effect upon every human creature who is not lost to all sensibility.'[59] Similarly, the heart is key to Smith’s argument with his theory hinging on the notion that, 'The sentiment or affection of the heart from which any action proceeds.'[60] Smith’s continuous reference to the heart is presented in a symbolic sense – the heart being the focal point of feeling - yet, the repetitive use of the human organ in his argument brings attention to the physicality of his argument, placing the body as a starting point in all decision making. Therefore, despite the long-standing association of sentimentalism and the feminine reader, sentimental fiction offered a renewed prototype of masculinity which was informed by Enlightened philosophy.

But what bearing did the Enlightenment and sentimental fiction have on an Ayrshire farmer? Burns's relative isolation in a small rural community contributed to his status as a 'Heaven-taught Ploughman,'[61] with his access to the Scottish Enlightened centres (Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen) non-existent until he became an established poet. Two men played an essential role in Burns’s emotional and literary education – his father William Burnes and his schoolteacher John Murdoch. John Murdoch was eighteen when he began to tutor Burns and his brother Gilbert and was critical to the social and education development of the Scottish Bard. Corey E. Andrew observes:

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[58] A.B., *Man: A Paper for Ennobling the Species,* p.4.
[59] Ibid, p.5.
[60] Smith, *TMS*, p.22.

[61] Henry Mackenzie, ‘Review of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*’ in *The Lounger*, 97 (Edinburgh: December 1786) pp.385-388.

> Burns's early life was marked by long periods of relative isolation, during which he was engaged in conversation with only his family and tutor. The nature of this conversation proved to be a formative influence for Burns, affecting not only his development as a writer but also his social character. The role in this process played by his tutor, John Murdoch (1747–c.1824), was pivotal.[62]

As previously alluded to, the Enlightenment was built on intellectual masculine sociability, which Burns lacked in his early years, with the exception of the company of Murdoch, who exposed him to new ideas and literature. However, Murdoch's influence was secondary to that of William Burnes. The patriarch of the Burnes family had no formal education himself but insisted that his sons received a sufficient education which included having a strong grasp of the English language. Murdoch recounts William's approach to the education of his eldest two sons by recalling an evening spent with William and Robert: 'The father and the son sat down with us, when we enjoyed a conversation, wherein solid reasoning, sensible remark, and a moderate seasoning of jocularity, were so nicely blended as to render it palatable to all parties.'[63] Murdoch's account illuminates the miniature Enlightenment William was orchestrating on his Ayrshire farm, where discussion and reasoning emerged in an air of masculine conviviality; the Burnes home becoming a microcosm of the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly in its relatively modern outlook. Burns praised and credited his father in his autobiographical letter to Dr. John Moore, declaring that:

> after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he pickt up a pretty large quantity of Observation and Experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom .- I have met with few who understand "Men, their manners and their ways" equal to him.[64]

William's direction was not grounded in any experience of formal academic schooling but in his extensive experience as a working man in both rural and urban Scotland – having worked in Edinburgh as a gardener during a time of environmental improvement.[65] Witnessing an age

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[62] Corey E. Andrews, 'Robert Burns, Club Society, and Convivial Sociability', in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2024), pp.230-241, (p.231).
[63] John Murdoch, letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, 22 February 1799, in *Burns Chronicle* (1929), pp.79-86.
[64] Robert Burns, letter to Dr John Moore, 2 August 1787, in *Letters 1,* pp. 133-147, (p.134).
[65] Catherine Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998), pp.18-25.

which promoted reason and sympathy, he aspired for Robert and Gilbert to partake in this new age, using academic and moral teachings to direct his children towards it.

Burns's championing of his father's ability to understand 'Men, their manners and their ways' is parallel to his earlier letter to Murdoch in which he deems this his purpose in life, further demonstrating the formative influence both men had on Burns. The pairs attempt to influence Robert (and Gilbert) is crystalised in *A Manual of Religious Belief* - a series of written moral pointers, stemming from Presbyterian beliefs.[66] Traces of Enlightenment culture exist within the format of the text with the conversation between father and son framing producing an illusion of a bilateral discussion while maintaining a didactic nature. Moreover, the intention of it (if not the form) resembles that of popular 'conduct literature,' which was more commonly aimed at young women. Burns celebrates Presbyterian worship and rural family life in his early poem 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' (1785).[67] The patriarch Cotter character is widely accepted to be inspired by William with the poem appearing to pay homage to him following his death. The existence of *A Manual of Religious Belief* provides evidence for this association with the poem largely focussing on the 'priest-like Father,' (l.118) who leads his family in prayer. Transformed from a simple Cotter to, 'The *Saint,* the *Father,* and the *Husband'* (l.137), as he conducts his family's worship, the patriarch's identity transcends his economic and social status, becoming a symbol of masculine spiritual authority. This dismissal of materialistic worth is further exemplified later, when the speaker determines that the Cotter exemplifies the value of the mundane: 'Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,| 'An honest man's the noble work of GOD' (ll.165-166). Burns's presentation of his father as an honest, sentimental man is key to the character he illustrates. This is reflected in the song 'My Father was a Farmer' (1784)[68] where Burns considers himself and his father while the family go through financial strain. Despite thematic and form differences to 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', both texts champion males working in agriculture by unmasking their value as men. William Burnes lived in poverty throughout his life, yet this song gives insight into the resilience of a man's heart throughout times of financial strain. In the first verse the speaker asserts: 'He bade me act a manly part though I never a farthing O| For without an honest manly heart, no man is worth regarding' (ll.3-4).

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[66] William Burnes and John Murdoch, 'A Manual of Religious Belief in a Dialogue Between Father and Son' in *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns, Vol 1: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.12-16.
[67] Robert Burns, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' in *K Vol 1*, pp.145-152.
[68] Robert Burns, 'Song [My Father was a Farmer]', in *K Vol 1,* pp.27-28.

These two lines clearly illustrate the fathers' priorities as he steers his son in the direction of becoming a man, ultimately ranking sentiment above capital – shifting a man's worth from his tangible economic success to his intangible capacity to feel. By switching the order or wealth, he offers a lesson in 'manliness' in a time of financial difficulty demonstrating that masculinity is not dependent on wealth and status; this theme remains central to Burns's *oeuvre* as evidenced previously with 'The Cotters Saturday Night' and with Burns's later depiction of manly virtue explored in 'A Man's a Man' (1795).[69] As previously mentioned, sentimentalism has complex gender dynamics with the genre shifting throughout the eighteenth century to result in the 'Men of Feeling' model becoming popular. In this song, Burns asserts that feeling is in fact masculine, with 'an honest manly heart' being the true indication of a man. Reflecting Smith's focus on the heart, Burns points to sympathetic conventions while maintaining that his father's influence is paramount in the emotional development of his 'Man of Feeling' character.

Following William's death in February 1784 Burns wrote an epitaph dedicated to him which further conveys his admiration for his father and the emotional example he provided. Despite honouring his father in his writing, the pairs relationship was not perfect, notably strained by Burns's engagement with social dancing against paternal advice.[70] Nevertheless, the epitaph concisely celebrates the upstanding morality of William and his capacity to feel: 'The pitying Heart that felt for human Woe;| The dauntless heart that fear'd no human Pride.'[71] Reflecting 'My Father was a Farmer', Burns utilises the heart motif here to emphasise William Burnes' capacity for human emotion – specifically sympathy and courage, ultimately linking his father to the wider Enlightenment discourse which proposed that male emotionality could inform reasoning. Therefore, Burns's 'Man of Feeling' persona was the product of literary, social and biographical influences, which converged through the teachings of is schoolteacher John Murdoch and his father William Burnes.

Burns's farming background became central to his image – as alluded to with the previous reference to Mackenzie's famous 'Heaven-taught Ploughman' epithet – with his position as a labouring man in provincial Scotland providing a refreshing angle when writing in the Enlightenment period. His ploughman occupation sets up 'To a Mouse' - a sympathetic

[69] Robert Burns, 'Song—For a' that and a' that--', in *K Vol 2,* pp.762-763.
[70] Robert Crawford, *The Bard* (London: Pimlico, 2010), pp.78-79.
[71] Robert Burns, 'Epitaph on the Author's Father', in *K Vol 1,* p.49, ll.5-6.

poem rumoured to be inspired by Burns 'turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough.'[72] What may be observed as an unfortunate yet, insignificant symptom of farming life is transformed into a sentimental contemplation of human nature. The first stanza centralises the 'Wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous *beastie'* (l.1), whose home has been destroyed at the hands of farming ambitions. Nigel Leask positions the mouse in relation to Burns and the era's agricultural improvement, determining that, 'the creature is victim of "improvement": it's often forgotten that despite Burns's sympathy for the mouse, his plough is the agent of its ruination'[73] However, this initial concern with the creature acts as a red herring, as Burns quickly centralises the poet-persona as the subject of the poem with his capacity to sympathise becoming the key to defining his humanity. Despite this centralising of the human, Burns's ability to sympathise is contingent on the existence of the mouse and the interaction with it. The crucial lines, 'I'm truly sorry Man's dominion | Has broken Nature's social union' (ll.7-8), rely on both his ability to sympathise and the mouses presence as an object of such sympathy. Thomas Crawford stresses the importance of these lines in establishing the sympathetic outlook of the speaker, 'uses the concept of "social union" as a tool, in order to convey his sense of the pathos involved in man's relationship to the animal he destroys.'[74] This focus on affinity is further emphasised when Burns's deems the mouse a 'poor, earth-born companion, | An fellow mortal!' (ll.11-12) Robert Crawford asserts that, 'The mouse is no isolated thing-in-itself- divorced from its surroundings; on the contrary it exists only in relation to a total situation of which the weather, the coulter, the poet's own emotions, and society itself are all integral parts.'[75] The mouse is constantly estimated in relation to the humanity of the speaker – she is not an individual being but rather exists in the wider web of society, defined by the ability of others to identify with her. As Burns's rural life isolates him, he presents affinity with the smallest of creatures in the absence of human sociability. Here, Burns is the ultimate 'Man of Feeling' as he extends his sympathy beyond mankind, his identification with the creature, 'a triumph of compassion.'[76]

This interaction with the mouse provides a prominent example of Smith's *TMS* as Burns expresses sympathy and fellowship to the smallest of creatures. Despite this excessive

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[72] Robert Burns, 'To a Mouse', in *K Vol 1,* pp. 127-128.
[73] Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: poetry and improvement in late eighteenth-century Scotland* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p.161.
[74] Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, Canongate Academic, 1960), p.166.
[75] Crawford, *The Bard*, p.165.
[76] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral,* p.166.

sympathy, the final stanza segregates the parties, so that the male speaker becomes a greater sufferer:

> Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' *me*!
> The *present* only toucheth thee:
> But Och! I *backward* cast my e'e,
> On prospects drear!
> An *forward,* thou I canna see,
> I *guess an' fear!* (ll.43-48)

Burns segregates the poet-persona from the mouse, asserting that humanity is haunted by the past and anxious of the future, while the suffering of animals is presentist. Ultimately, the speaker's human consciousness makes his suffering greater than that of the mouse. Smith touches on the position of animals in *TMS*, stating that:

> though animals are not only the cause of pleasure and pain, but are also capable of feeling those sensations, they are still far from being complete and perfect objects, either of gratitude or resentment; and those passions still feel, that there is something wanting to their entire gratification.[77]

Burns presents his own theory of the ways in which animals are 'far from complete', dividing himself and the mouse on the grounds of consciousness. Specifically focusing on the emotions of regret and anxiety, Burns gives an example of what human consciousness can truly entails while conveying financial anxieties. Ultimately, the concluding stanza alters the tone of the poem by recasting the poet-personae from sympathiser to object of sympathy with the sudden exposure of, 'the poet in the nakedness of his self-pity, like the homeless mouse shivering in the cleared stubble.'[78] With his own suffering brought to the forefront of the poem, the final stanza provides the reader with an opportunity to sympathise with Burns. Murray Pittock observes that, 'In 'To a Mouse' as in 'Tam o' Shanter', both agent and spectator are conflated.'[79] By toying with these sympathetic positions, Burns opens himself to

[77] Smith, *TMS,* p.112.
[78] Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral,* p.166.
[79] Murray Pittock, 'Nibbling at Adam Smith' in *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century,* ed. by Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers (Ross-shire: Sandstone Press, 2009), p.127.

both sides of a Smithian social interaction so that he can be both a 'Man of Feeling' and the object of sympathy - this duality ultimately emphasising his humanity.

In his correspondence with Agnes McLehose, Burns further exemplifies this balance of being a 'Man of Feeling' and a man worthy of sympathy – extending his poetic persona into a prosaic character. McLehose became one of Burns's most famous correspondents, with the pair trading over seventy letters throughout their passionate friendship. Born in Glasgow in the same year as Burns, Agnes Craig became Agnes McLehose in 1776 when she married lawyer James McLehose.[80] The unhappy couple separated in 1780[81] with evidence suggesting that James was abusive (the antithesis of Burns's 'Man of Feeling' persona) which ultimately resulted in Agnes moving to Edinburgh in 1782 where she soon moved up the social circle.[82] With friends such as Robert Ainslie and Miss Erskine Nimmo in common, she first met Burns at a tea-party hosted by the latter in December 1787 when Burns was residing in Edinburgh.[83] Following this initial meeting the couple quickly began a correspondence, with Burns soon asserting that: 'I never met with a person in my life whom I more anxiously wished to meet again than yourself.'[84] Despite this eagerness to see McLehose, the pairs differing social status and McLehose's position as a married (yet separated) woman deemed the pairs romantic feelings for one another were socially unacceptable. McLehose appears particularly cautious about her reputation, writing that, 'many a glorious woman have been undone by having her head turned.'[85] After a few letters to one another they assumed the pseudonyms 'Sylvander' and 'Clarinda', most likely propelled by the possibility that their 'frequent letters miscarried,'[86] which would result in the shattering of McLehose's societal status. The frequency of the correspondence conveys a sense of urgency, with the couple often sending one another letters multiple times a day while Burns remained in the capital longer than intended due to a knee injury.[87] R.W. Connell further comments on the

[80] W.C McLehose, *The Correspondence between Burns & Clarinda with a memoir of Mrs.McLehose (Clarinda)* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), pp.16-17.
[81] Pam Perkins, 'Maclehose [*n*ée Craig], Agnes, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23rd September 2004 <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-17662> [accessed 24th February 2025].
[82] McLehose, *The Correspondence between Burns & Clarinda with a memoir of Mrs. McLehose (Clarinda)*, pp.19-24.
[83] Crawford, *The Bard,* p.279.
[84] Robert Burns, letter to Agnes M'Lehose, 8th December 1787, in *Letters 1*, p.182.
[85] Agnes McLehose, letter to Robert Burns, 21st December 1787, in *Ae Fond Kiss: The Love Letters of Robert Burns and Clarinda,* ed. Donny O' Rouke (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 2000), p.9.
[86] Crawford, *The Bard*, p.282.
[87] Donny O'Rouke, 'Introduction', to *Ae Fond Kiss: The Love Letters of Robert Burns and Clarinda,* p.xvii.

importance of the body in masculine identities, asserting that: 'the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when performance cannot be sustained – for instance, as a result of physical disability.'[88] While Burns's physical body was compromised due to his injury, he retreated into his performance of 'Sylvander' - a man of feeling whose body essentially housed a heart, produced tears, and wrote letters. The *noms d'amours* the couple used quickly became more than a practical hiding of identity; they became epistolary personae both could inhabit when writing to one another. An example of Burns embracing this new identity can be found in his promotion of himself as a victim. Janet Todd asserts that the sentimental genre, 'delivered the great archetypal victims including, the sensitive, benevolent man, whose feelings are too exquisite for the acquisitiveness, vulgarity and selfishness of his world.'[89] Sylvander fits this character type perfectly, presenting in an early letter that he is, 'the victim, too frequently, of much imprudence, and many follies.[90] His victim status is initially the result of his own mistakes and the wider world, but as the letters progress the blame begins to lie with the objects of his affection:

> O, what a fool I am in love! - what an extravagant prodigal of affection! Why are your sex called the tender sex, when I never have met with one who can repay me in passion! They are either not so rich in love as I am, or they are niggards where I am lavish. [91]

By becoming the model 'Man of Feeling' - who loves too deeply and too foolishly for this world – Sylvander quickly turns to blaming his romantic failures on a woman who will not readily return his feelings. Burns's biographical details presents an alternative story to this letter, with his life coloured with multiple sexual and romantic partners – resulting in multiple children from different partners. Andrew Monnickendam emphasises the contrast between Burns the person and Sylvander the persona, arguing that 'The whole [Clarinda] episode is out of character, unless this movement out of character is playful and willing.'[92] Sylvander reflects Burns's to an extent however, there is a clear disconnect between the person and

[88] Connell, *Masculinities,* p.54.
[89] Todd, *Sensibility,* p.4.
[90] Burns, letter to Agnes M'Lehose, 28th December 1787, in *Letters 1,* p.189.
[91] Burns, letter to Agnes M'Lehose, 21st January 1788, in *Letters 1*, pp. 214-215.
[92] Andrew Monnickendam, "if ever there was a man who felt, it was Burns": Burns and Desire', in *Robert Burns in Global Culture,* ed. by Murray Pittock (Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2019), pp. 116-129, (p.121).

persona. For example, Burns frequently revelled in the success of his romantic conquests, while Sylvander is a victim of a sole unsuccessful attempt of seducing Clarinda - further demonstrating that Sylvander is an extreme sentimental character whom Burns inhabited to enact sentimental masculinity through. Sylvander is the exemplary 'Man of Feeling'.

Sylvander's suffering as a man who lives by the example of the sentimental writing of the period is intensified by allusions to physicality. Sylvander writes to Clarinda claiming that, ‘Her name is indelibly written in my heart’s core; but I dare not look in on it, - a degree of agony would be the consequence.’[93] Burns evokes the sentimental motif of the body as he presents Clarinda as painfully etched into the physical essence of Sylvander; dictating his thoughts and actions through feeling. The latter part of the quote emphasises the emotional torment through the physical, as Sylvander has no choice but to turn a blind eye to the control which Clarinda has over him. Clarinda too alludes to hearts writing that ‘Never were there two hearts formed so exactly alike, as ours!'[94] Clarinda echoes Sylvander’s use of the heart motif, asserting that their very essence is identical - an assertion which is strengthened by the mimicking of his literary devices. In fact, Clarinda's echoing of Sylvander exceeds the use of common motifs, with the imitation of Sylvander also lying within her overall use of language:

> McLehose expresses intimacy with Burns through sustained use of “points of admiration” and similarly expressive dashes. The two shared a love of sentimental literature, adopting for the sake of privacy the *noms d’amour “*Sylvander” and “Clarinda”, trading in allusions to Sterne and other sentimental writers, and sharing to some degree a “Sternean” style of sentimental exclamation.[95]

Presenting herself as a mirror image of Sylvander, Clarinda states, 'for had I been a man, I should have been you. I am not vain enough to think myself equal in abilities; but formed with liveliness of fancy, and a strength of passion little inferior.'[96] Inspired by her

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[93] Burns, letter to Agnes M’Lehose, 8th January 1788, in *Letters 1*, p. 202.
[94] Agnes McLehose, letter to Robert Burns, 30th January 1787, in *Ae Fond Kiss: The Love Letters of Robert Burns and Clarinda,* p.51.

[95] Rhona Brown, Pauline Mackay and Ronnie Young, ‘Formalising Feeling: Robert Burns’s Punctuation', in *A History of Punctuation in English Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Bonapfell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), pp. 387-409, (p.392).
[96] Agnes McLehose, letter to Robert Burns, 1st January 1788, in *Ae Fond Kiss: The Love Letters of Robert Burns and Clarinda,* p.11.

correspondence with a man who appreciates sentimental to the degree she does, Clarinda utilises the opportunity to fashion herself as a sentimental woman, who feels and lives passionately like Sylvander. Despite this endeavour to position herself as Sylvander's gender alternative doppelganger, the couple are inevitably separated by their gendered experiences - suggesting an inescapable disconnect in their experiences and personas. As Burns was partaking in the intellectual and convivial homosocial culture of the Enlightened Edinburgh, McLehose was partaking in a very different Enlightenment. Rosalind Carr asserts, 'Scottish intellectual culture was manifestly male. Women were involved in informal, tea-party intellectual conversation, but they were excluded from intellectual clubs and their contribution to print culture was negligible.'[97] Despite living wildly contrasting lives due to gender difference, Sylvander repetitively promotes Clarinda to the most superior of women, narrowing the space between them:

> For my own part, I can say to myself in both requisitions, "Thou art the man!" I dare, in cool resolve I dare, declare myself that Friend, and that Lover.—If Womankind is capable of such things, Clarinda is.—I trust that she is; and feel I shall be miserable, if she is not.—There is not one Virtue which gives worth, or one Sentiment which does honor to the Sex, that she does not possess superiour to any woman I ever saw: her exalted mind, aided a little perhaps by her situation, is, I think, capable of that nobly-romantic Love-enthusiasm.[98]

Sylvander asserts his position as a successfully honest, sentimental companion – in both a platonic and romantic sense – while also implying that Clarinda is too 'capable' of such passions as she is 'superior'. In Sylvander's eyes, Clarinda's emotional superiority allows her to transcend gendered boundaries of Enlightened discourse, allowing her to become a 'Woman of Feeling'. Of course, eighteenth-century discourse created 'the assumption that women were possessed of a greater sensibility,' which 'led male literati to desire female opinion on their texts, with women deemed able to assess a text's impact on a reader's sympathetic response.'[99] However, Sylvander allows Clarinda to become more than a sympathetic spectator - encouraging her to become an active 'Woman of Feeling' who too is

[97] Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment,* p.75.
[98] Burns, letter to Agnes M'Lehose, 20th January 1788, in *Letters 1,* p. 213.
[99] Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment,* p.93.

as capable as a 'Man of Feeling' of being both the object of sympathy as well as an agent of sympathy. Therefore, the couple connect emotionally through their 'Man/Woman of Feeling' personas – refracting off one another's excessive emotionality.

Off the page, Burns and McLehose's romantic feelings remained forbidden. There is no evidence that the affair had a physical nature; however, Burns expresses his longing for a romantic relationship through bodily imagery. At the pinnacle of the epistolary affair Sylvander writes: 'To kiss your hand, to live on your smile, is to me far more exquisite bliss, than any thy dearest favours that the fairest of the sex, yourself expected, can bestow.'[100] As previously mentioned, a significant aspect of sentimentalism is expressing feelings through physicality, which Burns and McLehose could not partake in due to the taboo nature of their relationship. Sylvander's words provide some small escape from these constraints, as he imagines undertaking small acts of physical affection to convey his romantic feelings. 'Ae Fond Kiss'[101] is the most famous piece of literature associated with the relationship and is a prime example of Burns using bodily imagery to convey emotions. Written in 1791, the song was a parting gift to McLehose who was sailing to Jamica to be reconciled with her estranged husband, marking the finality of what had once been a passionate relationship between Burns and McLehose. Following years of leaving Sylvander uninhabited, Burns takes on the persona one last time to deliver a heartfelt goodbye to Clarinda. As the title suggests, the song has a clear physical throughline, with the central motif of a parting kiss being repeated throughout the song to represent the finality and limitations of their relationship. Sylvander expresses his love for Clarinda through his immediate physical attraction, declaring, 'But to see her, was to love her' (l.11), which underscores the physical limits of the attraction which he cannot act on. As the poet comes to terms with the finality of their farewell kiss, he describes the 'Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee | Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee' (ll.23-24), further utilising emotive bodily imagery to convey his overwhelmed emotional state. The song is not the first instance of Sylvander weeping for Clarinda. During their epistolary affair, Sylvander wrote to Clarinda:

> You talk of weeping, Clarinda: some involuntary drops wet your lines as I read them. Offend me, my dearest angel! You cannot offend me, - you never offended me. If you

[100] Burns, letter to Agnes M'Lehose, 3rd February 1788, in *Letters 1*, p. 225.
[101] Robert Burns, 'Song [Ae Fond Kiss]' in *K Vol 2*, pp. 591-592.

> had ever given me the least shadow of offence, so pardon me my God as I forgive Clarinda. I have read yours again; it has blotted my paper.[102]

Sylvander aligns his behaviour with characters found in sentimental literature such as Harley through his outward physical expressions of inner sentiments via tears. This act of moral weeping ultimately strengthening Sylvander's 'Man of Feeling' identity while further demonstrating that the character is a prime example of eighteenth-century sentimental masculinity. Significantly, the document itself has been blotted which corroborates Burns's claim to being brought to tears – whether this is from an act of moral weeping or not remains in question. Therefore, despite the couple's lack of physical contact throughout their relationship, Burns resumes playing Sylvander – the ultimate 'Man of Feeling' - by leaning into sentimental conventions of physicality in 'Ae Fond Kiss'. A relationship which was marked by forbidden physical longing ends with one final physical manifestation of romance – a kiss. The song further paints Burns as a 'Man of Feeling', authenticating the extreme sentimentalism of his correspondence with MacLehose years later:

> Burns's parting gift to McLehose of such a love-song, some three years after his departure from Edinburgh, complicates any straightforward reading of this correspondence as purely an epistolary exercise. Though the letters are deemed in places overblown and contrived, Burns's application of similar rhetoric and punctuation in a love-song for his correspondent results in what Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) describes as "the essence of a thousand love tales".'[103]

Overall, Sylvander lies at one end of the spectrum of Burns's expressive masculinity with the character's expressions of sentimental masculinity being extreme. By utilising bodily imagery Sylvander conveys masculinity while maintaining his overtly emotional outlook – an outlook which was initially associated with women yet, through Smiths *TMS* and the rise of sentimental literature became a staple of eighteenth-century masculinity. Although Sylvander was a heighted version of Burns's 'Man of Feeling' persona, he characterised the period's promotion of sentimental masculinity. Burns played with the ideas presented in the Smith's

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[102] Burns, letter to Agnes M'Lehose, 12th January 1788, in *Letters 1*, p.205. For the 'tear-stained' manuscript see University of South Carolina Digital Archive via < https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/rbc/id/1034/rec/1>.
[103] Brown, Mackay and Young, 'Formalising Feeling: Robert Burns's Punctuation', p.402.

text while maintaining an image of himself as a ‘Man of Feeling’, ultimately associating his image with the Scottish Enlightenment.

Burns's sentimental persona was complex, with various literary and biographical influences. William Burnes was essential to the formation of Burns's understanding of how a man should conduct himself – with honesty and feeling. Burns demonstrates that he valued these intangible characteristics more than he valued materialistic status. With the aid of John Murdoch, William conducted his own miniature Enlightenment with his sons which resulted in Burns engaging with complex ideas and developing his own sense of morality at a young age. This education encouraged Burns to read and engage with fictional and philosophical texts which further nourished his sentimental principles; these texts shine and principles shine through Burns's own literary output. 'To a Mouse' illustrates the complexities of his engagement with Smith's *TMS;* highlighting that he could embody the ultimate Smithian 'Man of Feeling' who was both a worthy receiver and agent of sympathy. This sentimentalism also manifested itself in his love affair with Agnes McLehose as he found a 'Woman of Feeling' who mirrored his attempt at an extreme 'Man of Feeling' persona. All the sentimental literature and philosophy Burns had absorbed contributed to the persona of Sylvander where Burns became an extreme example of the period’s sentimental masculinity. Overall, Burns's sentimental persona lies at one end of the spectrum of his masculinity - a spectrum which will be mapped further in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Self-Fashioning Masculinity Privately and Publicly: Commonplace Books, Prefaces, and Epistles

From 'Heaven-Taught Ploughman'[104] to 'Priapic Drunk',[105] Burns's masculinity has been mythologised since the late eighteenth century. The lore began with Burns himself whose 'self-consciousness is undeniable',[106] which is evidenced by his multiple attempts at self-fashioning his identity. This self-fashioning can be found in various forms of writing – from the private Commonplace Books to the public facing prefaces of the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect.* Additionally, it can be found in the verse epistles which lie in between the public and the private; their epistolary nature appearing private on the surface yet, their status as published pieces which are disseminated to public audiences corrupts this private nature. As Burns makes a conscious effort to construct a 'Bardic' image, he simultaneously constructs an image of his masculinity – an image which is full of contradictions and further demonstrates how he projects multiple masculinities.

Perhaps the most significant evaluation of Burns's private and public self lies within Gerard Carruthers' recent distinction between Burns's 'official' and 'reserved' canon. The former refers to the poetry published in the Kilmarnock and subsequent Edinburgh editions of *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* as well as the songs Burns collected, edited, and wrote for James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803) and George Thomson's *Select Collection of Scottish Airs* (1793). The latter, by contrast, refers to Burns's more sexually and politically provocative material, which was privately circulated among Burns's trusted male cronies. These works include 'Holy Willie's Prayer'[107] (a scathing criticism of religious hypocrisy which is imbued with double-entendre) and the bawdy collection *The Merry Muses of Caledonia.*[108] These distinct canons of literary output simplify the separation of Burns's public facing literary persona (which had a broader appeal in eighteenth-century 'polite' society) from the veiled private persona (which catered to a specific, predominantly male

[104] Henry Mackenzie, 'Review of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*' in *The Lounger*, 97 (Edinburgh: December 1786) pp.385-388.
[105] AL Kennedy, 'Love Composition: The Solitary Vice' in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp.23-39, (p.39).
[106] Rhona Brown, 'Self-Curation, Self-Editing and Audience Construction by Eighteenth-Century Scots Vernacular Poets', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 42.2 (2019), pp.157-174 (p.167).
[107] Robert Burns, 'Holy Willie's Prayer', in *K Vol 1,* pp. 74-78.
[108] Gerard Carruthers*, Robert Burns* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2006), p.3.

audience). For example, 'Holy Willie's Prayer' (1785) was never traditionally published in any of Burns's official works during his lifetime, however, it can be found disseminated anonymously via a 1789 chapbook.[109] Avoiding traditional publication, the poem was passed around acquaintances at the time of composition and was subsequently reserved for a 'select, even upper-class, private audience' which included James Cunningham, fourteenth Early of Glencairn (1749-91) and Captain Robert Riddell (1755-94).[110] Although predominantly male, the poem reached Glencairn's sister Lady Don (1752-1801) in a manuscript collection prepared for her which also included 'The Jolly Beggars.'[111]

The distinction between 'official' and 'reserved' provides a valuable starting point and creates some relevant boundaries in terms of gender (although these are not strictly adhered to as demonstrated above), however, there remains miscellaneous texts which lie outside the bounds of these distinctive 'canons' such as Burns's Commonplace Books. These private collections contain a range of prosaic musing and poetic exercises which demonstrate the scope of Burns's thematic concerns. Burns claims that in the first of these Commonplace Books he was 'determined to write myself out,'[112] a clear indication of a private rehearsal of the personas he would eventually project to the public. Rehearsing his personas (and in turn exhibiting different models of masculinity), the Commonplace Books contain a range of material which could slot into both the 'official' and 'reserved' canons, ultimately existing in a space between the private and public.

Commonplace Books were a useful literary and personal tool in the Enlightenment period, providing a space for perfecting a polite persona while keeping track of intellectual musings. Lucia Dacome notes their multifaceted functions, stating that:

> The practice of commonplacing similarly came to be regarded as capable of bringing together the order of learning and the methodizing of one's thoughts, the pursuit of self-improvement, and the fashioning of the polite individual. While collecting and

[109] Patrick Scott, 'The First Publication of 'Holy Willie's Prayer'', *Scottish Literary Review,* 7:1 (2015), pp.1-18.
[110] Gerard Carruthers, 'Burns and Publishing', in The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns, ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.6-19, (p.11).
[111] Ibid.
[112] Robert Burns, 'Glenriddell Manuscripts: Volume II', in *The Oxford Edition of The Works of Robert Burns, Vol. I: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p.257.

> ordering notes and thoughts, compilers also worked on their own intellectual, moral, and social edification.[113]

Both an act of Enlightenment culture and an act of self-construction, the first Commonplace Book is, 'an invaluable record of [Burns's] dawning creativity and poetic self-fashioning, prior to the celebrity that followed the publication of the Kilmarnock volume.'[114] Meanwhile the second Commonplace Book coincides with later ventures such as the production of the Edinburgh edition. Compared to one another, they demonstrate the elasticity of Burns's masculinity over time with the first being written between 1783 and 1785 and the second composed over a three year period between 1787 and 1790.

With composition beginning in April 1783, the first Commonplace Book provides early insight into the formative years of Burns's literary career and the beginning of his attempts at self-fashioning his identity. Burns immediately outlines the purpose of the small volume and sketches his own character:

> Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry &c. by Robt Burness,[115] a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it; but was, however, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature rational or irrational. — As he was but little indebted to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinctured with his unpolished, rustic way of life; but as I believe, they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human-nature to see how a plough-man thinks, and feels, under the pressure of Love, Ambition, Anxiety, Grief with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the Modes, and Manners of life, operate pretty much alike I believe, in all the species.[116]

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[113] Lucia Dacome, 'Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65.4 (2004), pp.603-625 (p.615).

[114] Nigel Leask, 'Introduction to First Commonplace Book, 1783-1785 ', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, p.34.

[115] As evidenced, Burns was still using his father's spelling of his surname 'Burness' in 1783 when he was beginning to self-consciously construct his poetic identity. Three years later he adopted the alternative spelling 'Burns', signing his letters with the new spelling and publishing the Kilmarnock edition under this name.

[116] Robert Burns, 'First Commonplace Book, 1783-1785 ', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, p.39.

Prefacing his private book in the third person, Burns presents his character to an imaginary spectator - emphasising his agricultural occupation, lack of university education, and commitment to sympathy. By using this public mode of preface in a private journal, Burns's opening plants the seeds of the character he will go on to construct and play for a significant portion of his poetic career – a sentimental rustic genius. Burns's repetitive reference to his farming occupation has often been analysed in the context of his construction of the 'natural genius' persona with which he became associated. However, the focus on his ploughman duties also highlights Burns's masculinity in his particular economic context. R.W. Connell comments on the relationship between masculinity and labour-intensive work, asserting that:

> Heavy manual work calls for strength, endurance, a degree of insensitivity and toughness, and group solidarity. Emphasizing the masculinity of industrial labour has been both a means of survival, in exploitative class relations, and a means of asserting superiority over women.[117]

Burns's constructed 'ploughman poet' identity represents both his body and mind, with his physically intensive work highlighting his masculinity. Similar to his use of his body in sentimental expressions to emphasise his 'Man of Feeling' role, here physicality plays an important role in Burns's implicit expressions of masculinity with his strength-based work implying a physical superiority to any female counterparts. In her eighteenth-century seminal feminist text *A Vindication of the Right of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) maintains that the only valid claim men have of superiority over women lies within their physical strength: 'I will allow that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman; and this is the only solid basis on which the superiority of sex can be built.'[118] The emphasis on this specific facet of his masculinity is more implicit by the time Burns writes his public-facing preface to the Kilmarnock edition, humbly asserting that his literary creations were written to, 'amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a laborious life.'[119] Although the reference to his laborious occupation does not occupy a large portion of the preface, his agricultural occupation clearly inspires the character of the speakers of notable works (for example, 'In the character of a ruined Farmer'

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[117] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities,* 2nd edn. (New York, Routledge, 2020), p.55.
[118] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. by Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2009), p.42.
[119] Robert Burns, 'Preface to *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786) ', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, p.72.

(1784), 'The Vision' (c.1785), ‘Scotch Drink’ (1785), and 'To a Mouse'). This farmer image is only strengthened by his evident awareness of the natural environment, which underpins a significant portion of the 'official canon.' Consequently, the public perception of his masculinity is informed by the central characteristic of his laborious agricultural role.

Many early verses which belong to the 'official' canon publicly cement Burns’s farmer identity, yet, 'The Vision' (c.1785)[120] stands out as a strikingly deliberate act of self-fashioning which draws from Burns's ecological awareness while he pursues his desired bardic status. Separated into two 'Duans' (inspired by the structure of James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems) the piece is set in rural Ayrshire where the narrator is drawn away from his farm when visited by Colia - an 'outlandish Hizzie' (l.41), and 'SCOTTISH MUSE' (l.51). Coila is depicted as wearing: 'Green, slender, leaf-clad *Holly-boughs*| Were twisted, gracefu’, round her brows' (ll.49-50) and dressed in a robe with 'a *tartan* sheen' (l.61). Blending natural and national imagery, Coila represents the dual inspiration of the natural environment and Scottish culture; the Holly crown highlighting a Celtic tradition, differing from the more common Greco-Roman laurel wrath. Burns's references to local cultural and wider literary figures demonstrates his education; while he simultaneously maintains that the poet-persona is a humble 'rustic bard' who has been divinely inspired by Coila – the natural muse. The poem is rich with contrast as the speaker’s plain lifestyle in provincial Scotland implies that his poetic ability must derive from a divine and organic source, on the other hand, the rich cultural and historical knowledge the speaker demonstrates signifies a rich knowledge. Contrast also lies within the two characters of 'The Vision'. Despite the speaker and Coila reflecting one another at first with their, 'wildly-witty, rustic grace' (l.57), they ultimately contrast one another, as clearly encoded in Coila’s English diverging from the speaker's Scots. Furthermore, the poet persona positions himself against a female muse, their gendered expressions significantly contrasting. Of course, the 'Muse' character type immediately implies a feminine quality, with the original Grecco-Roman mythology referring to a group of female goddesses who inspired art and education,[121] while a ploughman's identity was, as Corey E. Andrews reminds, 'decidedly gendered as male.'[122] Connell asserts the importance of contrast in gender theory, determining that, '"Masculinity" does not exist except in contrast

[120] Robert Burns, 'The Vision', in *K Vol 1*, pp.103-113
[121] 'Muse', in *Oxford English Dictionary,* <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/muse_n1?tl=true> [accessed 29th April 2025].
[122] Corey E. Andrews, *The Genius of Scotland: The Cultural Production of Robert Burns, 1785-1834* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p.35.

with "femininity.”"[123] Contrast results in Coila’s extreme femininity heightening the speaker’s masculinity; this femininity is quickly marked within her physical presentation as well as her Muse identity. The speaker exclaims at the sight of Coila's leg:

> And such a *leg*! my bonie JEAN
> Could only peer it;
> Sae straught, sae taper, tight and clean,
> Nane else came near it. (ll.63-66)

Burns's reference to 'Jean' hints to Burns's blending aspects of his own person into the speaker who has been constructed (with Burns's own wife's name being Jean). Whilst this detail is a private one – it's meaning most likely not resonating with the vast majority of Burns's contemporary readership - it strengthens Burns's personal connection with the speaker. Additionally, this stanza underscores the allure of the Muse's femininity. The speaker's focus on her flawless, attractive leg sexualises the muse, adding a striking dimension to her character for an eighteenth-century audience who would have rarely seen undressed legs due to the modest fashion. Burns's sexualisation of legs is present in the far bawdier poem 'The Fornicator' (c.1785)[124] which was most likely written close to the composition of 'The Vision', although it did not appear in print until the printing of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* – a collection of bawdy verse gathered for the Crochallan Fencibles. Although no formal record of Burns being publicly reprimanded for premarital sex, 'The Fornicator' offers a poetic record of the pair's public punishment by the Kirk. Showing no remorse for his actions, Burns sexualises his partner while they are being publicly rebuked:

> But my downcast eye by chance did spy
> What made my lips to water,
> Those limbs so clean where I, between,
> Commenc'd a Fornicator. (ll.13-16)

A glimpse of leg sparks the speaker's sexual fantasy - replaying his enjoyment of the sexual misdemeanour. Explicitly bawdy, Paton's character is defined by her body and her

[123] Connell, *Masculinities,* p.68.
[124] Robert Burns, ‘The Fornicator’, in *K Vol 1,* pp.101-102.

participation in the act which made Burns 'a Fornicator' (the ultimate badge of manly honour in the eyes of Burns). Similarly, Coila is objectified through the speaker's depiction of her legs – her femininity heightened by her sexual appeal; overall embodying the poetic inspiration Burns garners from his physical attraction to women. Her objectification is coded in both his description of her body and in her role as Burns's poetic Muse, where she primarily serves as an object of inspiration for the male poet. Although her character is more complex than the blank canvas of Paton in 'The Fornicator', Coila's relevance stems from her interaction with Burns. Just as Burns acquires his, 'Fornicator' label through Paton, Coila provides him with his poetic authority as she crowns him with her Holly crown in the final stanza.

While Coila's body is explicitly feminine through its sexualisation, the speaker's body is defined by his social-economic status as he describes himself as 'half-mad, half-fed, half-sarket' (l.29). Highlighting the unkempt nature of the speaker, Burns also draws attention to his own impoverished state as a failing farmer. Corey E. Andrews underlines the importance of Burns's class status in his genius persona, writing that:

> A key feature of this persona was its class dimension, whereby the ploughman (decidedly gendered as male) existed as a labourer within a rural landscape in much the same fashion as a pastoral shepherd. However, its principal difference from pastoral tropes resided in the ploughman's genius, coded as 'heaven-taught.'[125]

Andrews' allusion to the gendered dynamic of 'ploughman' and Connell's commentary on the link between masculinity and manual labour converge to exhibit that Burns's countryman overall promotes a masculine image. Presented as a rugged ploughman with a divine muse, the poem evidently contributes to the 'Heaven-Taught Ploughman' label which author Henry Mackenzie famously bestowed upon Burns in his 1786 *Lounger* review of *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect,* the collection in which 'The Vision' was published. 'The Vision' is a clear act of self-fashioning by Burns which presents him as the masculine 'rustic bard.' This masculinity is highlighted by the contrast with the feminine and objectified Coila.

Despite Connell's useful assertion that masculinity only exists in contrast with femininity, Burns's verse epistles provide significant insight into Burns's understanding and

[125] Andrews, *The Genuis of Scotland,* p.35.

expressions of masculinity in the context of other males in his rural community. More than a quarter of the Kilmarnock edition consists of the verse epistles, firmly cementing them in the 'official' canon. However, their semi-private nature creates tension between the audience and the text as the epistles are specifically, 'bantering salutations to Ayrshire friends and cronies.'[126] In *Burns the Radical,* Liam McIlvanney comments on the complex status of the epistles:

> Despite being published in *Poems,* the epistles retain the status of private letters. As such, they are resistant to the process of literary criticism: they are inadmissible as evidence, they do not offer themselves for our appraisal. For Burns and his correspondents, the business of criticism is an inside job, one which they perform *within* the epistles, in their 'roosing' of one another's work and their comparative references to Ramsay and Fergusson. The result is a kind of self-regulating community that requires no corroboration, no endorsement from the outside world. To a degree perhaps never again achieved in his oeuvre, Burns creates a space in which the terms of debate, the rules of engagement, are of his own making. In the epistles, Burns is on home ground.[127]

McIlvanney underscores the unique insight the epistles provide into Burns's creative engagement with labouring men who lived outside the hub of Enlightenment activity which was taking place in cities such as Edinburgh. His emphasis of their private nature implies that the epistles exist in a self-contained bubble, impenetrable by those outside of this community of similar men. However, like the Commonplace Books, the status of the epistles is not straightforward – ultimately complicated by Burns's publication of them. Instead, they exist in a space between the 'private' and 'public.' In *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* Clare Brant rejects these two distinct categories when determining the status of the epistolary tradition in the eighteenth century: '"personal" is useful in that it recognises the significance of letters to individuals and relationships. It is preferable to "private", a term that is simply inaccurate for many eighteenth-century familiar letters, which were composed in company, voluntarily circulated beyond the addressee and frequently found their way into print.'[128] Burns's epistles were the poetic form of these personal letters which found their way

[126] Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p.97.
[127] Ibid, p.103.
[128] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006), p.5.

into wider circulation thorough print. Painting a picture of men united by their suffering at the hands of the economic crisis which faced them in provincial Scotland, Burns brings his community of men to the forefront – those who were bound by their lower social status; fondness of rhyme, women and drink; their capacity to sympathise; and their rustic way. John C. Weston claims that, 'The central purpose of the epistles is to display friendship,'[129] and by nature the 'Scots epistle from the first is homely, old-fashioned, and rustic in its images and diction.'[130] In this light, Burns projects himself as a valuable participant in homosocial spheres while he explores his masculinity and plays with varying personas.

Primarily, the epistles demonstrate a dialogue between those in the same geographical and socio-economic position as Burns. The recipients of the epistles are glaringly similar to Burns in terms of occupational identity, with David Sillar and John Lapraik being fellow rural poets and John Rankine's occupation also lying within the agricultural industry. Burns wrote three epistles to John Lapraik (1727-1807) the 'Old Scotch Bard', with the first demonstrating Burns's interaction with the Scottish literary tradition while simultaneously criticising university education. Burns harshly criticises those formally educated:

> A set o'dull, conceited Hashes,
> Confuse their brains in *Colledge-classes!*
> They *gang in* Stirks, and *come out* Asses,
> Plain truth to speak[131]

While championing the organic inspiration of nature:

> Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
> That's a' the learning I desire;
> Then tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire
> Ae pleugh or cart,
> My Muse, tho' hamely in attire,
> May touch the heart (ll.73-78)

[129] John C. Weston, 'Robert Burns' Use of the Scots Verse-Epistle Form', *Philological Quarterly,* 49.2 (1970), pp.188-210 (p.190).
[130] Ibid, p.191.
[131] Robert Burns, 'Epistle to J. Lapraik, An Old Scotch Bard' (1785), in *K Vol 1,* pp.85-89, ll.67-70.

Here, Burns juxtaposes the differing lifestyles of those formally educated (which exclusively manifested in intellectual centres such as Glasgow and Edinburgh) with the plainer, rustic lifestyle (which manifested in provincial areas) which he experienced with his peers. Burns utilises a humorous tone to minimise the merit of institutional learning which if quickly followed by the celebration of rustic life offering its own poetic inspiration (which is personified through Coila in 'The Vision') despite the toils of agricultural labour. Kenneth Simpson asserts that, 'Burns's roots were in a specific rural community. He was both very much a part of that community and increasingly set apart within it.'[132] The epistles demonstrate his initial engagement with others within this community, before he found national fame as a published poet and experienced the different social setting of high-society Edinburgh - which arguably sets him apart from his peers who were more restricted to the opportunities afforded to them by their rural upbringing. In these epistles, Burns points to his common ground with his rustic male peers - these epistles being an early reflection of his appreciation of homosocial bonding. Whilst Gerard Carruthers has argued that the productivity of Burns's contemporary Ayrshire poets has been augmented to paint a scene of vibrant literary culture which did not truly exist, the epistles do give valid insight into a specific homosocial space (expressed through literature) which consisted of similar men who reinforced the validity of Burns's dual identity of a ploughman and a poet.[133]

Despite his apparent disdain for formal education, Burns demonstrates an appreciation of the Scottish literary tradition he had inherited in the first epistle to Lapraik. Following his celebration of nature's inspiration Burns advocates for the poets who came before him:

> O for a spunk o' ALLAN's glee,
> Or FERGUSSON'S, the bauld an' slee,
> Or bright Lapraik's, my friend to be (ll.79-81)

Firstly, Burns celebrates Allan Ramsay (1684-1758) – the most influential of the three in terms of Scottish culture – who is known for his catalytic role in the revival of the Scots

[132] Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p.186.
[133] Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Burns's Scots Poetry Contemporaries', in *Burns and Other Poets,* ed. by David Sergent and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

language poetry in eighteenth-century literature.[134] Although Ramsay's influence on Scottish culture cannot be underestimated, it is clearly Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) who has the most significant impact on Burns, with his reference to Fergusson in his autobiographical letter underscoring the poet's importance: 'Rhyme, except some religious pieces which are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scotch Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour.'[135] Fergusson reinvigorates the Scottish literary tradition by addressing eighteenth-century Scottish life in his native tongue; this modern work clearly animated Burns's appreciation for poetry in the Scots language. In the absence of literature written in Scots and models of modern masculinity,[136] Burns looked to his metaphorical 'brother' for guidance on both fronts. Before Burns encountered Fergusson's poetry he was exposed to the use of Scots language in literary culture through song, which was initially passed down to him by his mother Agnes Broun:

> Though Burns's mother was not taught to write, she learned to spin and keep house; she had a good memory for Scots ballads (which she sang to her grandmother), [and] Scots songs [...] He remembered his red-haired mother singing in his childhood. She was his first source and teacher of song: he was her greatest pupil.[137]

Burns's first encounter with the Scots language – in an imaginative sense – was through song and folk culture which was primarily passed to him through women such as Agnes (while his semi-formal education was delivered to him in English by a man John Murdoch). Growing up around a subtle feminisation of Scots song culture, Burns would go on to subvert this association, with the collection, adaptation, and writing of Scots song would form a substantial area of his literary output. The formative literary influence of women on Burns's is further underscored in his autobiographical letter to Dr. John Moore when he reminisces on the influence of another female relative:

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[134] Brown, 'Self-Curation, Self-Editing and Audience Construction', p.157.
[135] Robert Burns, letter to Dr. John Moore, 2 August 1787, in *Letters 1*, p.143.
[136] Models of masculinity existed as evidenced in Chapter One's exploration of the 'Man of Feeling' archetype. However, these models existed in fictional depictions. Meanwhile, women were provided with more instructive manuals which informed conduct and set a standard for femininity, such as Dr John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*.
[137] Robert Crawford, *The Bard* (London: Pimlico, 2010), p.17.

> In my infant and boyish days too, I owed much to an old Maid of my Mother's, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition.— She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the county of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, inchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery.—This cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy.[138]

Betty Davidson's influence is essential, with her supernatural folkloric stories influencing echoed in of Burns's most successful poems – Tam o' Shanter. Therefore, Burns's early introduction to Scottish cultural traditions was significantly a feminine introduction with women in his household transmitting songs and narratives orally.

While the women of the Burness household were singing and storytelling in Scots, William Burness was providing a different type of education for his sons which focused on religion[139] and perfecting their English – the language of the Scottish Enlightenment. Of course, Burns would go on to use a blend of both languages in his literary output. Robert Crawford observes that, 'This bi-cultural upbringing gave him access to the vernacular heritage of song and folk-tale strong in his mother's family, and to that world of "improvement" of which his father was part and whose language was formal English.'[140] When Burns eventually encountered the poetry of Ramsay and Fergusson he too encountered a masculine Scottish literary tradition – one which the pair renewed and refined for the eighteenth century, which would preserve their contemporary culture while addressing relevant local and national concerns. In the Preface to the Kilmarnock edition, Burns refers to his use of Scots, indicating the importance of writing in the language he shares with his peers, as he narrates their shared circumstances in rural Ayrshire: 'Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language.'[141] This intention is clear in the verse epistles yet, his particular affinity with Fergusson is immortalised in the English short poem 'On Fergusson' (1787) in which he asserts the poet is:

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[138] Robert Burns, letter to Dr. John Moore, 2 August 1787, in *Letters 1*, p.135.
[139] Most clearly demonstrated in William Burness' *A Manual of Religious Belief* written for Robert and Gilbert.
[140] Crawford, *The Bard,* p.39.
[141] Burns, 'Preface to the Kilmarnock Edition' in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose* , p.71.

'O thou, my elder brother in Misfortune, | By far my elder Brother in the muse.'[142] Burns's kinship with Fergusson is highlighted by his repetition of 'brother' - a term commonly associated with Freemasonry in the period- overall reinforcing the centrality of gender in Fergusson's inspiration. Despite this clear affinity with Fergusson, the poet led a life which contrasted with Burns and his Ayrshire cronies in many ways. This difference reinforced by Burns's use of neoclassical English in his verse concerning Fergusson which diverges from the Scots used in the epistles addressed to his rustic companions. Moreover, Fergusson is often characterised as an urban poet, with his verse primarily focussing on city life in Edinburgh and he had resided in St Andrews while attending university.[143] The country and the city are often contrasted, especially in this time period with the rapid growth in urbanisation, with the rural country associated with 'peace, innocence, and simple virtue,' while the city is aligned with 'learning, communication, light.'[144] However, the real history is far more complex and varied. Burns and Fergusson did lead different lives which were influenced by their environments, yet Burns's clear affinity with the city poet demonstrates that the borders of these categories are not as definitive as assumed. Considering these social differences, Rhona Brown draws attention to the attractiveness of Fergusson to an impoverished Ayrshire Farmer: 'While Fergusson is no archetype of "rural self-sufficiency", his poverty and diligence are heavy reminders of the destructive cycle of consumption.'[145] Additionally, Fergusson's celebrated verse 'The Father's Ingle' romanticises the rustic male labourer, positioning masculine virtue in the country rather than in the city – a notion which appeals to Burns's geographical, occupational, and social circumstances. Despite the assumed difference between their country and city lifestyles, Fergusson evidently recognised value in the rustic way of life and Burns found common ground with Fergusson. Overall, Fergusson is permitted to Burns's brotherhood because of his own economic and personal suffering - which is a common feature of Ayrshire life for Burns and the subjects of his epistles.

Poverty is a central theme across the epistles with Burns demonstrating his tendency to discard wealth and status when assessing the value of his acquaintances. In the second epistle to Lapraik (1785), Burns ridicules rich male city residents, criticising their greed with

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[142] Robert Burns, 'On Fergusson', in *K Vol 1*, p.323, ll.3-6.
[143] James Robertson, 'Introduction' in *Robert Fergusson: Selected Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007), pp.1-38, (p.4).
[144] Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p.1.
[145] Rhona Brown, 'Burns and Robert Fergusson', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.86-97, (p.87).

the description of their 'muckle wame.'[146] By attributing the feminine characteristic of a pregnant woman to these males, Burns ultimately emasculates rich and powerful men. Meanwhile Burns's body is characterised by his exhaustion induced by his laborious occupation: 'Forjesket sair, with weary legs | Rattlin the corn out-owre the rig' (ll.7-8). Burns presents the rich men as unnatural beings who have overindulged in luxury while he and his peers meet normative standards of masculinity due to their plain lifestyle:

> When first the human race began,
> 'The social, friendly, honest man,
> 'Whate'er he be,'
> 'Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan,
> 'And none but he. (ll.86-90)

Returning to notions which stem from the sentimentalism and Enlightenment philosophy, Burns subtly asserts his and Lapraik's superiority over wealthy men, with their close knit friendship and honest manner. In the epistles, Burns praises his peers for their poetic talents, humour, and wit without valuing them in terms of wealth or status, asserting that worth is, 'no in titles nor in rank.'[147] The epistles echo the importance of the honest man whose masculinity is not corrupted by materialism. Therefore, Burns's early brotherhood is bound together by their experience of poverty and hardship. This homosocial bonding was formed between Ayrshire men such as Lapraik and David Sillar who - like Burns – were maintaining a local literary tradition in provincial Scotland. However, Burns opened this brotherhood to the deceased Fergusson, with Burns finding affinity in their shared misfortune. By contextualising himself alongside these men, Burns is not a lone rustic bard but part of a wider male literary tradition in Scotland which thrived on homosocial bonds.

In 2006, Gerard Carruthers asserted, 'The most certain area of Robert Burns's personal notoriety concerns sex,'[148] and the comment remains true almost twenty years later. A result of fathering at least thirteen children to five women on top of his string of affairs;[149] his commemoration of multiple sexual liaisons in his writing; and more recently the reprinting of

[146] Robert Burns, 'To the Same [Second Epistle to John Lapraik]', in *K Vol 1*, pp.89-93, l.64.
[147] Robert Burns, 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet', in *K Vol 1*, pp.65-69, l.57.
[148] Carruthers, *Robert Burns,* p.62.
[149] Ibid, p.62.

the bawdy collection *TMM,*[150] Burns's has the reputation of a womanizer. Burns's writing to women such as Agnes MacLehose contrasts with the boastful voice found in some epistles, where Burns's gloats to his Ayrshire friends about his sexual ventures. A prime example of this gloating can be found in 'Epistle to John Rankine'[151] - one of the earliest epistles which is addressed to another Tarbolton tenant farmer with whom Burns formed a friendship with while he resided in Lochlie.[152] While the pair have an identical vocation, the epistle more proudly marks the conception of Burns's first daughter, as Burns utilises extended metaphor to depict the sexual intercourse he had with Elizabeth Paton which resulted in his illegitimate child. Opening with the suggestion that 'ROUGH, rude, ready-witted Rankine' (l.1) is going 'Straight to auld Nick's' (l.6), Burns sketches the addressee as a 'wicked sinner (l.19). These claims are not particularly critical in Burns's voice as he maintains a hearty tone, finding joy in Rankine's 'cursed wit' (l.17). This vivid illustration of Rankine as a convivial and profane man is followed by Burns preaching his ethos, further demonstrating that:

> Burns, like Fergusson departing from the early models, used the Scots epistle to express a personal view of the world. [...] He found in the Scots epistle a perfect medium for the expression of an important part of his personality with its corresponding vision.[153]

The fourth stanza reinforces Burns's core belief in the futility of the materialistic - echoing his second epistle to Lapraik – while simultaneously hinting at a rebellious facet of his personality:

> It's just the *Blue-gown* badge an' claithing,
> O' Saunts: tak that, ye lea'e them naething,
> To ken them by,
> Frae ony unregenerate Heathen,
> Like you or I. (ll.20-24)

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[150] Burns sends this collection accompanied by a letter which declares 'I think I once mentioned something to you of a Collection of Scots Songs I have for some years been making: I send you a perusal of what I have gathered' (*Letters 2*: p.137). Due to the bowdlerisation of this letter and the small number of eighteenth-century copies, attribution of the entire collection remains unresolved however, manuscripts in his holograph of some songs provides evidence of his significant contribution to the collection.
[151] Robert Burns, 'Epistle to J. R******, Enclosing some Poems', in *K Vol 1,* pp.61-63.
[152] James Kinsley, 'Notes' for 'Epistle to J. Rankine, Enclosing some Poems', in *K Vol 1,* p.61.
[153] Weston, 'Robert Burns' Use of the Scots Verse-Epistle Form', p.197.

By conveying to Rankine that common humanity outranks wealth and social status, he validates both beyond economic status. The final line of the stanza aligns Rankine – the brazen and hearty 'sinner' - with Burns himself, while signalling a transition of the poem's subject from Rankine to Burns (who similarly finds himself as an immoral citizen in the eyes of the Kirk). In this case, the Kirk's disapproval is owed to Burns's sexual misconduct as he had impregnated Elizabeth Paton without any form of marriage contract in 1784.[154] Although there is no formal record of Burns being rebuked for the affair, his poem 'The Fornicator' suggests the pair were publicly reprimanded by Tarbolton Kirk. In his epistle to Rankine, Burns likens Paton to a '*bonie* hen' (l.40) who he '*straiket* it a wee for sport' (l.44) in the cover of 'twilight' (l.41). This sexual imagery of the hunter draws from medieval poetry[155] and exemplifies Burns's association of the feminine with nature. Burns's presents himself as the dominant party in the interaction – his strength represented by the manmade gun – while Paton is helpless prey. Moreover, Burns's humanity is emphasised in contrast with Paton's animalisation; his actions are not the result of primal instinct but based in his possession of the unique human consciousness (this centrality of human consciousness echoes 'To a Mouse'). Overall, the contrast presented in the sexual symbolism suggests Burns is a powerful male while Paton is a bestial woman who does not have the capacity to reason; his masculinity is the dominant force in the interaction both physically and mentally. Although Burns cultivates a persona 'of the roistering ram-stam boy, determined to seize each chance of pleasure,'[156] his epistles criticise the larger social structures which influence him demonstrating a rebellious spirit which runs deeper than lively entertainment for his peers. Here he notes that:

> Ne'er thinkan they wad fash me for't:.
> But, Deil-ma-care!
> Somebody tells the *Poacher-Court,*
> The hale affair. (ll.45-48)

Burns underscores the policing of sexuality by the Kirk and in turn, the wider community. Despite his punishment for his misdemeanour the epistle exhibits no hint of remorse, instead

[154] Crawford, *The Bard,* p.156.
[155] James Kinsley, 'Notes' to 'Epistle to J. Rankine, Enclosing some Poems', in *K Vol1,* pp.61-63.
[156] McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical,* p.107.

he fumes at the Kirk's intense punishment for sexual intercourse. Burns appeared to be pleased with the poem, circulating the piece further than his addressee Rankine – sending a copy to John Kennedy in May 1786 prior its publication in the Kilmarnock edition. Kinsley assesses that the poem 'had an enthusiastic response from the company of his 'ramstam' friends,'[157] conveying its success in the specific sphere of Burns's Ayrshire cronies who experienced the harsh reality of Scottish rural life. Throughout their examination of case studies, R.W. Connell hints to widespread misogyny as a byproduct of economic hardship amongst men, which is driven by the 'loss of the economic basis of masculine authority.'[158] This epistle's appeal to Burns's working class friends resonates with Connell's implication that masculinity is often formed at the expense of women. Outside of this specific Ayrshire sphere, the reception of the poem was not as positive. Dr Hugh Blair (1718-1800), a leading moderate minister and Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Letters in Edinburgh University[159] is renowned for his significant contributions to the Scottish Enlightenment. It has been well documented that he became acquainted with Burns while Burns was travelling in Edinburgh between 1786 and 1787, however, the bard candidly demonstrates a conflicting opinion of him in the Second Commonplace Book:

> I never respect him with humble veneration; but when he kindly interests himself in my welfare, or, still more, when he descends from his pinnacle and meets me on equal ground, my heart overflows with what is called, liking: when he neglects me for the meer carcase of Greatness, or when his eye measures the difference of our points of elevation, I say to myself with scarcely any emotion, what do I care for him or his pomp either?[160]

Burns's reflections on the great theorists highlight his true dismissal of materialistic grandeur – ultimately appreciating Blair for his worth ethic and attention yet, determining that 'he has a heart, not of the finest water.'[161] Burns's Ayrshire peers are worth far more than Blair in the eyes of Burns, with their suffering, sentimental hearts and honest, witty ways. The disconnect

[157] Kinsley, 'Notes' for 'Epistle to J. R******, Enclosing some Poems', p.63.
[158] Connell, 118.
[159] Hugh Blair, 'HUGH BLAIR, undated notes, 1787', in *Robert Burns: The Critical Heritage,* ed. by Donald Low (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), pp.81- 82, (p.81).
[160] Robert Burns, 'Second Commonplace Book', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* p.84.
[161] Ibid, p.84.

between Burns circles in Ayrshire and Blair's in Edinburgh is highlighted by Blair's recommendation to remove 'Epistle to John Rankine' from *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* ahead of the publication of the Edinburgh edition:

> The description of shooting the hen is understood, I find, to convey an indecent meaning: tho' in reading the poem, I confess, I took it literally, and the indecency did not strike me. But if the Author meant to allude to an affair with a Woman, as is supposed, the whole Poem ought undoubtedly to be left out of the new edition.[162]

Clearly, Blair's taste did not align with the bawdy verse and tales which were appreciated amongst Burns's rambunctious Ayrshire peers, with his initial ignorance of the sexual undertones of the imagery conveying the vastly different experiences of literature and homosocial bonding he had from Burns. Therefore, Burns's experience of like-minded men who had lived similar lives in rural Ayrshire, allowed him to cultivate a devil-may-care persona amongst a group of witty sinners.

Following Burns's experience of homosocial culture beyond Ayrshire (which will be discussed further in the following chapter), Burns's projections of masculinity became more refined, his self-fashioning differing significantly depending on his audience. In 1789 Burns began preparing the 'Glenriddell Manuscripts' to be presented to Captain Robert Riddell (1755-1794) and his wife Elizabeth as a token of gratitude for their hospitality. The couple were Burns's closest neighbours in the alien community of Dumfriesshire, where Burns moved to in 1788 to take up the lease of Ellisland Farm.[163] During the composition of the second volume of the Glenriddell Manuscripts, Burns re-evaluates his first Commonplace Book, reflecting on the manuscript:

> of my early years in which I had determined to write myself out; as I was placed by Fortune among a class of men to whom my ideas would have been nonsense — I had meant that the book would have lain by me, in the fond hope that, some time or other,

[162] Blair, 'Hugh Blair, undated notes, 1787', p.81.
[163] Nigel Leask, 'Introduction' to 'Glenriddel Manuscripts', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* p.171.

> even after I was no more, that my thoughts would fall into the hands of somebody capable of appreciating their value.[164]

Writing to a man of higher social status than those to which he had written his early verse epistles to, Burns's assertion of intellectual superiority over the men of the labouring class he belonged to is a far cry from his warm reference to his 'rustic compeers' in the Preface to the Kilmarnock edition and his equating of them in the epistles.[165] This refinement of his presentation of himself for different men from distinct spheres demonstrates an evolution of Burns's self-fashioning, which ultimately results in the augmentation or minimisation of specific facets of his masculinity depending on his audience.

Burns's experience of the domestic sphere in his adult life has been neglected in terms of scholarship, with little written about his position as a father. This is partly due to the lack of writing Burns produced on the subject - with the exception of 'A Poet's Welcome to his love-begotten Daughter'[166] which he wrote in 1785 to mark the birth of his first child Elizabeth. The poem is a blend of celebration for 'My bonie, sweet, wee Dochter!' (l.13) and defiance of the Kirk's religious fundamentalism. Isolated in Burns's *oeuvre,* the piece is a 'unique insight into the poet's reaction to fatherhood. However, Burns offers little guidance in this verse - his fatherly duty to pass on his guidance unfulfilled. His own father, William Burness worked with John Murdoch to produce written guidance in the form of a manual for is sons. Although William's *A Manual of Religious Belief, in a Dialogue between Father and Son* is Presbyterian guidance, written guidance from parents to children in the form of manuals and letters was not uncommon in the eighteenth century, however this guidance was predominately aimed at daughters. This conduct literature had a clear gender and class dynamic: 'Conduct literature addresses an audience of, almost exclusively young marriageable, women who are either already members of, or who aspire to join, the leisured classes.'[167] For example, John Gregory's (1724-1773) *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1761) offered instruction on conduct and behaviour, religion, and love and marriage for his

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[164] Robert Burns, 'Glenriddell Manuscripts Vol II', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* p.257.
[165] Robert Burns, 'Preface (Kilmarnock)', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* p.72.
[166] Robert Burns, 'A Poet's Welcome to his love-begotten Daughter; the first instance that entitled him to the venerable appellation of Father', in *K Vol 1,* pp.99-100.
[167] Vivien Jones, 'Introduction', in *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995), p.vi.

young daughters. These models were harder to come by for males, and as implied previously, Burns looks to his father, philosophy, sentimental fiction, and Fergusson as models of masculinity he can mimic. Burns's own attempt at producing this conduct literature can be found in his letters to his younger brother William Burns (1767-1790) in which Burns attempts to becoming a model for masculinity himself. William travelled from Longham to Newcastle and then London with his work as a saddler.[168] Between March 1789 until William's death in July 1790, Burns corresponded with him, offering his 'small knowledge and experience of the world'[169] to his younger brother in the absence of their late father. He goes on to encourage William to 'look into the living world about' him so he could decipher 'the strange creature, Man.'[170] Stressing the importance of observing masculine models, Burns echoes his obsession with 'Men, their manners and their ways.'[171] As the letters continue, Burns specifies his advice on conduct and behaviour – departing from the priorities of a 'ram-stam boy' and 'Fornicator' to champion a morally sound approach to life by eighteenth-century standards. In the 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet' Burns declares the '*Pleasures o' the Heart'* are 'The *Lover* and the *Frien'*,[172] equating platonic friendship with romantic relationships, while asserting their centrality in his life. Half a decade later his advice to his brother paints a different picture as he warns against 'forming connections with comrades and companions. - You can be pretty good company to yourself.'[173] Burns's dismissal of male friendship significantly contradicts his creative output and personal actions which largely align with the advocation of homosocial culture and bonding. In her chapter concerning eighteenth-century letter writing as a parent, Clare Brant assess: 'It is useful to recognise that the history of childhood is simultaneously a history of parenting and that the role of parent is a construction: one must learn it.'[174] Burns was constructing a new persona while writing to William – a paternal one - which resulted in a minimisation of the side of him which appreciated convivial homosocial culture. Although he declares he is a 'veteran' in romantic 'campaigns.'[175] Burns encourages his brother to avoid the 'universal vice, Bad Women.- It us an impulse the hardest to be restrained, but if once a man accustoms himself to gratifications

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[168] Maurice Lindsay, 'William Burns', in *The Burns Encyclopaedia* (Great Britain: Redwood Burn, 1980), pp.57-58.
[169] Robert Burns, letter to Mr William Burns, March 2nd 1789, in *Letters I*, p.380.
[170] Robert Burns, letter to Mr William Burns, 10th March 1789, in *Letters I*, p.385.
[171] Robert Burns, Letter to Murdoch, 15th January 1783, in *Letters I,* p.17.
[172] Robert Burns, 'Epistle to David, a Brother Poet', in *K Vol 1*, p.68, ll.105-106.
[173] Robert Burns, letter to William Burns, 10th February 1790, in *Letters 2*, p.14.
[174] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* p.63.
[175] Robert Burns, letter to William Burns, 5th May 1789, in *Letters I*, p.406.

of that impulse, it is then nearly or altogether impossible to restrain it.'[176] Burns's stern warning concerning women and sex is hypocritical – on the basis that he willingly enjoyed multiple sexual affairs throughout his life and clearly championed the conquests of 'Fornicators' as masculine accolades. As Burns fashions this new persona, he abandons crucial aspects of his personality to become the male role model for his younger brother. Brant further asserts that, 'Advice literature and novels warned women continuously against men's insincerity.'[177] Burns takes a similar approach, yet, clearly inverts the gender so that women are a valid threat to men's morality – contact with those sexually inclined could compromise the character of a good man. The paternal Burns was a new character, which lay further within the private domain than Burns's other personas. Nevertheless, it provides further evidence of the multiplicity of Burns's masculinities, as he projects this new form:

> The concept of character stresses that texts and people have disjunct as well as overlapping identities. Indeed, one of the attractions of the epistolary form in the eighteenth century was that it gave writers the opportunity to image themselves into different personae and personae of difference. Differences can be internal to a self and relations with others may bring out similarity.[178]

Overall, Burns's self-fashioning his masculinity in personal writings evidences a practice of projecting differing aspects of his masculinity. These masculinities are coloured by the physically intensive aspect of farming life; appreciation for the friendship of men of his class; his love of women and sex; his connection with Fergusson's work in Scots; and his familial responsibilities. Shades of his masculinity are at times augmented (as in the epistles) while at other times downplayed (as evidenced in his letters to William) which have led to mythologised personas. Despite the personal nature of many of these texts, Burns always presents himself to an audience (this audience can be imaginary, a group, one person, or the public) and his projection of masculinity clearly depends on who that audience is. This exploration of differing audiences and Burns's presentation of his masculinity for them will be discussed at length in the following chapter which will focus on Burns's vast experience of eighteenth-century club culture.

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[176] Robert Burns, letter to William Burns, 10th February 1790, in *Letters 2,* p.14.
[177] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* p.80.
[178] Ibid, p.26.

Chapter 3: Enlightened to Phallocentric: The Spectrum of Clubs and Class

> Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women, the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person, nor agreeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them a girl every way agreeable, in person, conversation, and behaviour, but without any fortune: which of them shall he choose.[179]

On the 11th of November 1780, unmarried men gathered in the upper floor rooms of John Richard's tavern in Tarbolton to debate this question – marking the first meeting of Tarbolton Bachelors' Club.[180] Established with his brother Gilbert Burns, Robert Burns presided over this initial debate which took the role of women, economic status, occupation, and marriage into account. This inaugural debate was Burns's first step into the web of club culture which was flourishing in the wider context of eighteenth-century improvement.

Vast and multifarious, the landscape of club culture in eighteenth-century Scotland cannot be simply defined. Peter Clark accounts for the proliferation and inevitable decline of club culture in Britain's long eighteenth century, sketching the differing themes, aims, and rules of clubs while simultaneously teasing out notable patterns. Clark illustrates the multiplicity of club culture in Scotland following the Glorious Revolution in 1688, honing in on Edinburgh as the Enlightened hub of sociability:

> Edinburgh had a number of religious societies and political clubs, together with a music society, antiquarian society, philosophical society, and convivial social clubs such as the Easy Club, formed about 1712 by a group of young men for 'mutual improvement in conversation that they may become more adapted for fellowship with the politer part of mankind.'[181]

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[179] 'Tarbolton Bachelors' Club', in *The Oxford Edition of Robert Burns Vol 1: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014) p.22.
[180] Nigel Leask, 'Introduction' to 'Tarbolton Bachelors' Club' in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* pp.17-18.
[181] Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.68.

Evidently, a number of clubs had firmly planted their roots in Scotland prior to Burns's birth; these roots most deeply set in Edinburgh – the city of the Scottish Enlightenment. As previously illustrated in Chapter Two, male friendship was essential to Burns's rural life; however, the organised homosocial culture found in clubs was a more conscious Enlightenment project which thrived in the cultural capital. As highlighted in Chapter One, Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* suggests that morality requires mutual sympathy, which in turn essentially relies on sociability. Philosophical musing on man's inherently social nature were accompanied by a sociable Enlightenment expressed through male networks. Clubs provided a significant socialising space for men – a space which had the potential to be intellectual and convivial. Smith himself was a founding member of a homosocial club, the Select Society, alongside other prominent intellectual figures such as David Hume.[182] Most notable to this current study, is the homosocial nature of clubs – with male clubs dominating British club culture.[183] Rosalind Carr assesses the significance of this culture on the overall Enlightenment project and the production of the Enlightened man:

> In Scotland, heterosociality was deemed to be an essential feature of 'civilised' commercial society, but homosociality was also crucial to men's maintenance of a polite, but not effeminate, masculinity. This homosociality lessened women's ability to participate fully in the Scottish Enlightenment project.[184]

With the age of feeling came the threat of a generation of 'effeminate' men which, in theory, could be mitigated by men intentionally surrounding themselves with male peers who practiced self-command and politeness while restricting exposure to feminine models. The initial debate of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club reflects its masculine environment, one with a rural focus and distinct economic considerations given its membership, and its questionable focus on the value and purpose of a wife. While men were meditating the nature of marriage in male circles, women were being advised that 'without an unusual share of natural sensibility, and very peculiar good fortune, a woman in this country has very little probability

[182] 'Minutes of the Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1762', Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, ESTC T206741.
[183] For further reading on female homosocial spaces refer to 'Women and Intellectual Culture' in Rosalind Carr's *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*.
[184] Rosalind Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p.14.

of marrying for love.'[185] Women were provided with 'conduct literature', didactic literature written by men such as John Gregory, which offered a one-dimensional mould for femininity, while men were provided the space to meditate on the nature of masculinity amongst themselves; ultimately interacting with the construction of the Enlightened man.

The most substantial and far-reaching of these clubs was the Freemasons, with the eighteenth century seeing the emergence of 'modern freemasonry', which was born in the 'associational world of urban London during the late 1710s.'[186] By the second half of the century the British fraternity reached the continent[187] and by the turn of the century, over 500 lodges were recorded.[188] It is unsurprising that a man as clubbable as Burns was an eminent member of the organisation, especially considering that the 'concept of brotherhood was deeply important to Burns, and on the surface the Masonic ideal of brotherhood appears to coincide with Burns's own.'[189] Of course, membership to the fraternity was accompanied by the prospect of social mobility and personal advancement which appealed to many men in Burns's position, who were attempting to better their economic and social position.

The masculine nature of clubs was not wholly due to the exclusion of women, as clubs were themselves,

> discursively constructed within broader discourses of gender, progress, society, and the nation, and their role in the construction and performance of refined manhood was central. In this sense refined manhood in mid- to late eighteenth-century Scotland fits R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity: that masculinity is established as hegemonic through its association with cultural and institutional power, and that its performance both claims and reflects this power.[190]

Carr valuably illustrates the political and social power which the broader development of masculine homosocial spheres obtained while they simultaneously shaped the expectations of contemporary masculinity. Although Carr provides a crucial evaluation of the function of

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[185] Dr John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (London: John Sharpe, 1821), p.66.
[186] Andreas Onnerfors, *Freemasonry: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2017), p.14.
[187] Ibid, p.14.
[188] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800,* p.310.
[189] Corey E. Andrews, 'Caledonia's Bard, Brother Burns': Robert Burns and Scottish Freemasonry', in *Association and Enlightenment: Scottish Clubs and Societies 1700-1830,* ed. by Mark C. Wallace and Jane Rendall (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2020), pp.143-160 (p.153).
[190] Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture,* p.41.

clubs in the distillation of men's gendered expressions, Burns's construction and projection of gender in clubs is not confined to polite, refined masculinity. A one-dimensional view of the role of club culture in the development of masculinity fails to consider more secretive and obscene clubs such as The Beggar's Benison, where members carried out sexual rituals in one another's company.[191] This pitfall can lead to a failure to consider the projection of more explicitly sexual forms of masculinity such as priapic masculinity. As exhibited in Chapter Two, Burns rehearses various masculinities in personal writings which is followed by the projection of tailored expressions of masculinity for his immediate audience and environment. This tailoring and projection of multiple masculinities is illustrated by his writings produced for the various clubs he was a member of. As will be demonstrated in the current chapter, the clubs Burns was involved with illuminates the multiple masculinities available to construct and perform in homosocial spheres.

As commentators have indicated, clubs contributed to the construction and production of the refined, polite gentleman character. However, most studies have focused on clubs in Edinburgh and other central Enlightenment cities; overall failing to account for the masculinity constructed in rural clubs. Carr addresses the significance of social and economic factors in the construction of certain types of masculinity:

> More so than money, in order to participate in the associational public sphere in Scotland men needed to belong to a social rank that enabled them to perform a specific masculinity: that of the refined gentleman through social, uncompetitive conversation. Men's ability to speak without causing offence, and to listen as well as to talk, evidenced their 'civilised' self-control.[192]

Despite accounting for the barriers to performing a refined, genteel masculinity, Carr fails to explore the masculinities which were available to club men who belonged to a lower social and economic rank. Two clubs Burns founded – the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club and the Monkland Friendly Society- provide insight into the role of homosocial culture in the construction of masculinities outside of the mainstream intellectual clubs associated with Aberdeen, Glasgow and, to an even greater extent, Edinburgh.

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[191] David Stevenson, *The Beggar's Benison: Eighteenth Century Sex Clubs and Their Rituals* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2001), pp.37-38.
[192] Ibid, p.54.

The 'Rules and Regulations' of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club is the most substantial piece of primary literature pertaining to the club – these rules were recorded in the holograph of Burns's friend David Sillar. The recipient of two epistles - 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet' (1785)[193] and 'Second Epistle to Davie' (1786)[194] - Sillar was a crucial versifying companion to Burns before he found fame, with the fellow poet becoming a member of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club the year following its commencement.[195] As founders, Burns and Gilbert had created the club's rules, which primarily dictated the structure of meetings and the requirements of membership. In theory, the creation of this intellectually focused society, which like most clubs adhered to rigid rules, contrasts with the ram-stam, rebellious Burns projected to society in the epistles. Despite being at odds with the persona most evident in his early Ayrshire days, Burns enforces polite masculinity amongst members in club territory, strictly prohibiting, 'all swearing and profane language, and particularly all obscene and indecent conversation,'[196] in an attempt at self and social betterment. The tenth and final rule is illuminated with Burns's worldview, illustrating his call for a very specific type of man:

> Every man proper for a member of this Society, must have a frank, honest, open heart; above any thing dirty or mean; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the Club, and especially no mean-spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall upon any pretence whatever be admitted. In short, the proper person for this Society is, a cheerful, honest-hearted lad; who, if he has a friend that is true, and a mistress that is kind, and as much wealth as genteely to make both ends meet — is just as happy as this world can make him.[197]

Although an attempt to encourage polite, refined masculinity is evident, it exists alongside an appeal for a sentimental man who had romantic experiences with women. Fashioned in Burns's vision of a valuable man, requirements of this personal nature do not appear amongst the rules of more renowned intellectual debating societies such as the Select Society – with

[193] Robert Burns, 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet', in *K Vol 1,* pp.65-69.
[194] Robert Burns, 'Second Epistle to Davie', in *K Vol 1,* pp.240-241.
[195] Leask, 'Introduction' to 'Tarbolton Bachelors' Club', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals and Miscellaneous Prose,* p.18.
[196] 'Rules and Regulations to be Observed in the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* p.23.
[197] Ibid.

their rules purely focusing on the nature of debates and the club's structure. Clubs were a popular vehicle for change in the Enlightenment – a political and social space where masculinity was moulded. Instead of following the hegemonic masculine standard of politeness propped up by clubs such as the Select Society, Burns and Gilbert set a standard of masculinity which encompassed a range of the century's expectations of men, illuminating the varying masculinities available in the era. An examination of the minutes of clubs in Enlightened hubs, such as the 'Rules and Orders of the Select Society' verifies the similarities in concerns amongst the nation's clubs. Topics widely varied however, a preoccupation with gender and marriage is present. For example in November 1754 a debate concerning the impact that the 'Late Marriage Act' - an Act enforced in England and Wales which insisted on the Church of England carrying out a marriage ceremony and raising the legal age of marriage to 21, unless parents of the bride and groom consented[198]- would have on the public and nation rolled over multiple weeks, becoming the topic of conversation for an entire month.[199] The framing of this debate takes wide consideration of the economic and societal impact of the law which brought the validity of marriages in Scotland into question. On the other hand, the framing and tone of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club debate questions concerning gender and marriage (as exemplified at the beginning of the current chapter) appears to have a more personal yet paradoxically, universal approach. Overall, the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club exemplifies Burns's early engagement with ideas of marriage and gender roles. Although the space was discursive in nature, the similar social, geographical, and economic status of members leaves it up to debate whether they truly widened one another's worldview. Evidently, Burns designed the club rules and directed debating concerns to shape members into refined men of feeling who appreciated sexually pursuing women. The Tarbolton Bachelors' Club was not only Burns's first step into club culture but also his first most obvious attempt at utilising the public sphere to influence his peers by spreading his specific brand of masculinity.

Another social and intellectual development of the Enlightenment era was the creation and popularisation of libraries. With personal book collections extremely rare – especially in provincial areas – subscription and circulating libraries 'allowed provincial Scots to engage in some of the leading cultural priorities of the age, including the pursuit of politeness,

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[198] 'The Law of Marriage', *UK Parliament* <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/lawofmarriage-/> [accessed 22nd July 2025].
[199] 'Minutes of the Select Society of Edinburgh,1754-1762', Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, ESTC T206741.

sociability, and, above all, improvement.'[200] Like much of Enlightenment culture, Burns threw himself into the culture of associational reading – creating his own subscription library-inspired book club with friend and patron Robert Riddell of Glenriddell in early 1789.[201] Eagerly sharing the news of the commencement of this project, Burns writes to Peter Hill (a bookseller he met in 1787 while he was visiting Edinburgh),[202] to place his first order:

> The Library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun, under the direction of Captn Riddel, & ME! [...] Captn R- gave his infant society a great many of his old books, ekse I had written you on that subject; but one of these days I shall trouble you with a Commssion for "the Monkland friendly Society." - A copy of the Spectator, Mirror & Lounger, Man of feeling, Man of the world, Gurthrie's Geographical grammar, with some religious pieces, will likely be our first order.[203]

The library's initial collection reflects the tastes of its founders. Burns specifically curates a collection of texts which were influential to him; these formative texts playing a significant role in his educational development and the development of his masculinity. Prescribing texts which formed his view of himself as a man bears resemblance to instilling this masculinity to the members of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club through his rules and the nature of the debates. However, his enthusiasm for the society deteriorates over time. Further correspondence with Hill demonstrates this, with a letter in 1791 implying the literary tastes of his peers are 'damned trash.'[204] This literary snobbishness is a far cry from the open, respectful attitude members were demanded to have of one another viewpoints via the rules of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club. Burns's attitude to homosocial club culture had evolved by the 1790s, this evolution most markedly explained by his years in Edinburgh.

Despite frequently relocating and travelling throughout his life, the Freemasons remained a constant in Burns's adult life. In a letter to Sir John Whitefoord late 1782, Burns wrote the following:

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[200] Mark Towsley, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p.57.
[201] Nigel Leask, 'Introduction' to 'Monkland Friendly Society', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, p.160.
[202] Maurice Lindsay, *The Burns Encyclopaedia* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.183.
[203] Robert Burns, letter to Peter Hill, 2nd April 1789, in *Letters 1,* pp-390-392.
[204] Robert Burns, letter to Peter Hill, 17th of January 1791, in *Letters 2,* pp. 65-66, p. 66.

> we look on our Mason Lodge to be a serious matter both with respect to the character of Masonry itself, & likewise as it is a charitable society. This last indeed, does not interest you farther than a benevolent heart is interested in the welfare of its fellow-creatures; but to us, Sir, who are of the lower orders of mankind, to have a fund in view on which we may with certainty depend to be kept from want should we be in circumstances of distress or old age, this is a matter of high importance.—We are sorry to observe that our lodge's affairs with respect to its finances have for a good while been in a wretched situation.— We have considerable sums in bills which lye by without being paid or put in execution; & many of our members never mind their yearly dues or any thing else belonging to the lodge.—And since the separation from St. David's, we are not sure even of our existence as a Lodge.[205]

In his chapter in *Association and Enlightenment: Scottish Clubs and Societies 1700-1830,* Corey E. Andrews argues that Burns ultimately becomes disillusioned by Freemasonry's, 'compromised ideal of brotherhood,'[206] following his experiences in Edinburgh; marking the poet turning away from the fraternity. However, this early letter to Sir John Whitefoord[207] (circa November 1782) exhibits Burns posing his first challenge to the Masonic organisation, the year following his first venture into the club. Undoubtedly, Freemasonry played a significant role in Burns's social life, his unusual social mobility, and his success as a poet – both during his life and following his death. This early letter demonstrates his anxieties about the financial opportunities provided by this particular lodge, establishing his recognition of the possibilities Freemasonry could afford him (and the men of his lower social rank) if the lodge's affairs were swiftly resolved. Furthermore, the nature of this newly distinctive lodge is questioned as Burns confesses uncertainty surrounding the separation of the lodges in Tarbolton – with fewer members, fewer connections and opportunities were available. Freemasonry provided more than opportunity for self-improvement and refining masculinity, the fellowship found in the Masons, 'served not only as an outlet for companionship and diversion for members like Burns, but acted as a means for the creation of personal contacts that could prove valuable in time of distress or monetary need.'[208] Burns's experiences of

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[205] Robert Burns, letter to Sir John Whitefoord, November 1782, in *Letters 1,* pp.15-16.
[206] Andrews, 'Caledonia's Bard, Brother Burns': Robert Burns and Scottish Freemasonry', p.156.
[207] John Whietfoord (1734-1803) was the Master of St James's Lodge in Tarbolton.
[208] Corey E. Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Club Poetry* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p.270.

Freemasonry began on the 4th of July 1781 in Tarbolton, where he moved up the ranks to become Depute Master of St James Lodge in July 1784.[209] Masonic connections proved useful throughout his career and the prospect that the space could 'foster social harmony by uniting different social, political, and religious groups,'[210] clearly appealed to Burns's appreciation of the concept of brotherhood, and his moral desire for equality amongst men across the socio-economic spectrum. This underlying ethos of equality amongst all men is a central thread in his early Masonic verse 'No Churchman am I' (1782), with a clear feeling of ambivalence to the social status of 'Peers'[211] and 'Peasants' (l.6) alike evident as the speaker refuses to differentiate treatment based on social standing. Here, Burns demonstrates his appreciation for, 'a club of good fellows, like those that are here,| And a bottle like this, are my glory and care' (ll.7-8). Freemasonry's radical ambition to unite men of differing social standings was to be accomplished through what Carr has generally characterised as a, 'lodge culture of male conviviality, primarily expressed through heavy drinking.'[212] Alcohol played a significant role in eighteenth-century male sociability, Clark notes that public drinking houses were crucial spaces for the triumph of homosocial clubs in Britain:

> Drinking establishments not only provided congenial shelter and support, but also supplied several of the key features of the social architecture of the voluntary association: heavy drinking, controlled social mixing, a combination of privacy and public openness, and a predominantly masculine environment.[213]

Evidently, drinking was masculine by nature in the eighteenth century and Burns's repetitive focus on the 'big-belly'd bottle' (ll. 4, 12, 16, 24, 28) in 'No Churchman, am I' emphasises the centrality of alcohol in these homosocial relations. Clark asserts that the excessive use of alcohol in clubs was not only a means of enjoyment through intoxication but also, 'encouraged social openness among members and a new sociable order based less on wealth, status, or seniority than on an ability to hold one's liquor.' [214] Burns's awareness of the equalising factor of alcohol is up for debate considering he never directly addressed this

[209] Leask, 'Introduction' to 'Tarbolton Bachelors' Club', p.17.
[210] Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture,* p.70.
[211] Robert Burns, Song [No Churchman am I], in *K Vol 1*, p.38-39, l.5
[212] Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture,* p.70.
[213] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800,* p.41.
[214] Ibid*,* p.226.

specific quality, however, its levelling power amongst men adds another dimension to what would at first glance appear to be a convivial drinking song.

Could all men truly be equal in the eighteenth century, purely by virtue of their maleness and membership of the same homosocial club? Could social and economic standing truly be dismissed in favour of masculine unity? Robert Burns's varied experiences amongst Masons of different social and economic standing makes for a valuable case study in the difficulties of achieving this goal of social harmony across the social spectrum.

In 1786 Burns set off to Edinburgh – a pivotal period of his life which was successful partially due to the significant connections made through Freemasonry. In his early days of residing in the capital, he brushed shoulders with elites such as Henry MacKenzie and the fourteenth Earl of Glencairn – men whom lay far outside the boundaries of his social class. Robert Crawford summarises the whirlwind of Burns's first days in Edinburgh, writing, 'less than ten days after his arrival to Edinburgh Burns's Ayrshire-connected friends there, several with Masonic handshakes, had made such a fuss of him he could hardly take it in.'[215] In detailing this period, Crawford's biography recurringly references Masons who aided and championed Burns at a crucial stage in his career, for example the Earl of Glencairn and William Creech.[216] Burns achieved social mobility through connections which stemmed from his Masonic membership, which is unsurprising considering the widespread nature of the fraternity. Clark illustrates the scale of the organisation in eighteenth-century Scotland, asserting that 'the total number of lodges warranted in the period up to 1799 came to 327.'[217] Burns's time in Edinburgh is coloured by experiences with other Masons. On the 13th of January 1787 he attended the Lodge Edinburgh St. Andrews No.48. He records the incident in a letter to John Ballantine the following day:

> The meeting was most numerous and elegant; all the different Lodges about town were present, in all their pomp.—The Grand Master who presided with great solemnity, and honor to himself as a Gentleman and Mason, among other general toasts gave, "Caledonia, & Caledonia's Bard, brother B—," which rung through the whole Assembly with multiplied honors and repeated acclamations.—As I had no

[215] Robert Crawford, *The Bard* (London: Pimlico, 2010), p.239.
[216] Ibid, p.243-244.
[217] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800,* p.310.

> idea such a thing would happen, I was downright thunderstruck, and trembling in every nerve made the best return in my power.[218]

Burns's letter paints a vivid image of the grandeur of this meeting, differing from the more humble gatherings he experiences in his hometown of Ayrshire. With such wealth, comes the opportunity to perform the masculinity of a refined, polite 'gentleman' - a masculinity which was limited to Burns and his economically suffering peers. Most significantly, this short paragraph exhibits Burns's initial shock at being lionized in Edinburgh. As previously alluded to, Burns's genius status was reliant on his ploughman image; this lionization of him also counted on the character of an uneducated, toiling man. Testimony of Burns stressing his farmer image in the capital is recorded by Alexander Smellie, the son of Burns's fellow-Mason Willian Smellie (1740-1795):

> He was dressed much in the stile of a plain country man; and walked three or four times from end to end of the composing room cracking a long hunting whip which he held in his hand [...] and though I was at that time very young, the cracking of the whip, and the strangely uncouth and unconcerned manner of Burns, always impressed me with the notion that he wished to assume the clownish appearance of a country rustic.[219]

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Burns projected his occupation in his writing and to his peers in Ayrshire – an aspect of his character which exuded a specifically masculine physicality. As Burns proceeded to Edinburgh he continued to project this aspect of his character which contrasted with the masculinity of the refined men of leisure he encountered in the city. Offering a fresh masculinity in the world of polite gentleman, Burns fashioned himself to become an exciting prospect to potential patrons. However, two days following the grand show of support at the Masonic lodge in Edinburgh, Burns wrote to close confidant Frances Dunlop (1730-1815) expressing discomfort surrounding the incident:

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[218] Robert Burns, letter to John Ballantine, 14th Jan 1787, in *Letters 1,* pp.82-84, p.83.
[219] Robert Kerr, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of William Smellie,* Vol.2 (Edinburgh: Alex, Smellie, Printer., 1811), p.350-351.

> to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head – I assure you, Madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences.[220]

Burns's admission insinuates he felt objectified by men of a higher socio-economic status – signalling a realisation of the circumstances of his fame while implicitly questioning the reality of the Masonic ideal of equality amongst all men. Andrews evaluates Burns's experiences of Freemasonry in the capital, suggesting that it 'offered the experience of convivial sociability in theory rather than practice, with a much greater social divide separating labouring members like Burns from the elite speculative ones.'[221] In Edinburgh, Freemasonry was a double-edged sword; on the one hand Burns could utilise the organisation to make meaningful connections which could advance his poetic career, on the other hand he became an objectified spectacle for men of higher social rank.

Despite his conflicting experience of club life in Edinburgh, the period was a creatively productive one with the publication of the second edition of *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* which contained twenty-two new poems and songs as well as revisions. Notably, the edition was dedicated to a club that Burns was not a member of – the Caledonian Hunt. Burns's experience with the Caledonian Hunt mirrors that of his experiences with the Freemasons in Edinburgh, with the club providing particularly significant career opportunities (via patronage) however, the socio-economic divide appears vast. Founded in 1777, the Caledonian Hunt was primarily made up of titled men – with the original twelve members consisting of four Dukes (including founder the Duke of Hamilton), four Earls, and two Baronets.[222] When Burns encountered them, their membership numbers had been increased to sixty.[223] The minutes from the 10th of January 1787 show that the Earl of Glencairn and Sir John Whitefoord - Burns's Ayrshire-Masonic ally - called for the clubs financial support of the poet:

> in consideration of his Superiour Merit, as well as of the Compliment paid to them, that Mr Hagart should be directed to Subscribe for one hundred Copys in their name,

[220] Robert Burns, letter to Frances Dunlop, 15th January 1787, in *Letters 1,* pp.84-86, p.85.
[221] Corey E. Andrews, 'Robert Burns, Club Society, and Convivial Sociability, in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp.230-241, p.237.
[222] William Ramsay, *The Royal Caledonian Hunt* (Edinburgh: 2008), p.137.
[223] Ibid, p.10.

> for which he should pay to Mr Burns Twenty-five Pounds upon the Publication of his Book.[224]

United, the club was a major funding source for the publication of the Edinburgh edition. As a token of appreciation for their patronage, Burns dedicated the Edinburgh edition to the club. Yet he clearly asserts that he is by no means subservient to the society of men who occupy a significantly higher socio-economic position than him:

> Though much indebted to your goodness, I do not approach you, my Lords and Gentlemen, in the usual stile of dedication, to thank you for past favours; that path is so hackneyed by prostituted Learning, that honest Rusticity is ashamed of it. — Nor do I present this Address with the venal soul of a servile Author, looking for a continuation of those favours: I was bred to the Plough, and am independent.[225]

Although undoubtedly grateful for the investment put forward by the club, Burns asserts his independence from these men of higher rank by distinctly reinforcing their fundamental class differences via emphasis of his laborious occupation. Burns's assertion of independence is a subtle rejection of this brotherhood of socially superior men – signifying a conscious step away from partaking in homosocial culture outside of his class boundaries. Furthermore, the Caledonian Hunt's social activity of game hunting is incompatible with Burns's own moral beliefs as he clearly 'abstained from poaching and was consistently opposed to shooting animals, especially out of season.'[226] Clark addresses the social and gendered power dynamics associated with hunting: 'Hunting remained an essential activity of country magnates, defining their patriarchal status and image, and played an important part in bringing together kinsfolk and neighbouring landowners.'[227] Hunting was more than a sport, it was a homosocial socialising ground exclusively available to landowning men of a high socio-economic status which reinforced a socially rarified form of masculine authority. Burns's contempt for hunting is underpinned in his literary work, such as in 'Song Composed

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[224] Ibid, p.11
[225] Robert Burns, 'Dedication' to '*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Edinburgh, 1787)', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose,* pp.74-75.
[226] Nigel Leask, *Burns and Pastoral: poetry and improvement in late eighteenth-century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.162.
[227] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800,* p.32.

in August' (c.1775)[228] and 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare' (1789)[229] and although he was associated with the Caledonian Hunt in both Edinburgh and Dumfries, where the club also met, there is no record of Burns being a formal member.[230] Overall, Burns subtly rejects the homosocial sphere of the Caledonian Hunt, thus rejecting their brand of aristocratic, leisurely masculinity. Burns's assertion of independence in his dedication marks a slight step back from certain homosocial spheres which failed to grant social equality amongst men in practice.

Burns's exposure to Edinburgh Freemasonry and the Caledonian Hunt illuminated the reality of the alleged classless sphere for men. Despite the illusion that clubs were open to all men it was in fact the case that 'in practice, however, most societies were socially selective. On occasions, there was token representation by people from well outside the main social orbit of members.'[231] Although he becomes aware of this reality in Edinburgh, Burns continues to promote the ethos of equality amongst men which is theoretically underpins Freemasonry. Underlying one of his most famous anthems 'A Man's A Man,'[232] is this call for equality amongst all men. Produced in 1795, the verse is written in the period following what Andrews argues was his departure from the Freemasons, yet Masonic ideals of universal male comradery are integral to the poem. Further influenced by Thomas Paine's (1737-1809) *The Rights of Man* (1791)*,* the poem is considered one of Burns's clearest endorsements for Republicism, with the notions of classless brotherhood striking a chord with the sentiments of French Revolutionaries. Concluding with the prayer 'That Man to Man the warld o'er, | Shall brothers be for a' that.—' (ll.39-40) Burns reinforces the call for classless fraternity which recurs in his *oeuvre.* Therefore, although Burns did turn away from homosocial culture to an extent following his lionization in Edinburgh, he continued to harbour and champion Masonic ideals in his work.

What has been perceived as Burns turning away from Freemasonry following Edinburgh is a claim which fails to address the complexities of Burns's relationship with homosocial organisations. Furthermore, this claim fails to account for the practical changes in

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[228] Robert Burns, 'Song, composed in August', in *K Vol 1,* pp.4-6.
[229] Robert Burns, 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare limp by me, which a Fellow had just shot at', in *K Vol 1,* pp.465-466.
[230] Ronnie Young, 'Composing in August: Ecology and Hunting in Burns's Early Verse', unpublished conference paper (Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society Conference: Scots and the Environment, University of Stirling, June 2025).
[231] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800,* p.211.
[232] Robert Burns, 'Song - For a' that and a' that', in *K Vol 2*, pp.762-763.

Burns's agricultural workload with his uptake of an improving lease on Ellisland farm, which seen his free time restricted. The letters from his period in Dumfriesshire reveal a self-consciousness on Burns's part, as he expresses feelings of alienation which align with the decline in his consistent convivial sociability.[233] Nevertheless, it is evident that throughout his life, Burns exploited his clubbable nature to further his career, utilising his Masonic connections in an attempt to become more socially mobile. In turn, Burns was exploited by club men of a higher socio-economic status for entertainment purposes. His experiences with the Caledonian Hunt provided Burns with insight into the realities of his own position in homosocial cultures – with his socio-economic background ultimately inescapable. Despite celebrating and promoting brotherhoods in his life and work, his public dedication which prefaces the Edinburgh Edition, demonstrates a clear assertion of individuality; branding himself as idiosyncratic in the landscape of Edinburgh club culture. This individuality coincides with his uniqueness of experience: Burns is one of the few men from his social standing to brush shoulders with the elites of the Enlightenment period. Overall, Burns's unusual experience of homosocial culture across the socio-economic spectrum coincides with his unusual access to a spectrum of masculinities. The spheres he accessed and his masculinity are similarly embellished with nuanced and even contradictory facets.

Burns disseminated his phallocentric bawdy verse to men across the socio-economic ranks, often men he encountered via club culture. 'Bawdry' is the term used by Burns to describe his own sexually explicit works, declaring in a letter to Robert Maxwell in 1789 that, 'I intend to write BAUDY!'[234] 'Bawdry' is defined by Alan Bold as 'an attempt to portray sex in purely physical terms, to eschew the meta-physical apparatus that generations of poets have imposed on a basically simple event. Bawdry deals with the act of love, not the art of romance.'[235] By subtracting abstract ideas of romance, bawdy verse is grounded in purely physical realism - with comedic (and often satirical) intent at the heart of this physicality. It is crucial to note that bawdry differs significantly from other sexually explicit literature in this manner - for example pornographic material aimed to physically arouse and erotica was firmly situated in the context of love and romance.[236] This humorous core of bawdry is central to its appeal in homosocial spheres - it could level men through carnal and provocative humour. Burns's first experiment with the controversial genre appears in the first

[233] Crawford, *The Bard,* p.299.
[234] Robert Burns, letter to Provost Robert Maxwell, 20th December 1789, in *Letters 1,* pp.461-463, p.462.
[235] Alan Bold, *The Bawdy Beautiful: The Sphere Book of Improper Verse* (London: Sphere,1979), pp.xii-xiii.
[236] Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.19.

Commonplace Book with the eleven-line verse 'My girl she's airy' (1784).[237] The opening lines convey conventional symbols of romance before the verse descends into a manifestation of purely physical lust, which is signified through Burns's wordplay: 'Her taper white leg with an et, and a, c, | For her a, b, e, d, and her c, u, n, t.' (ll.9-10). It's position in the Commonplace Book implies that the poem was written for private purposes however, it does foreshadow what will become a substantial output of bawdry which comprises a significant portion of the 'reserved canon'.

Homosocial club culture provided significant stimulation for Burns's bawdy output, it was an effective way to promote camaraderie men through sexually fuelled humour. 'Libel Summons' (alternatively titled 'The Court of Equity' or 'The Fornicator's Court'), written in 1786,[238] has multiple club connections. Firstly, the poem is Burns's literary manifestation of the 'Court of Equity' - a fictional representation of Burns's Ayrshire cronies who were socially on trial for their sexual misdemeanour at the hands of the Kirk's voyeuristic obsession of the congregation. A 'string [of] illegitimate offspring,'[239] was the criteria for membership to Burns's imaginary club, where he humorously mocked a court setting by putting the 'Fornicators by profession' (l.5) on the stand. However, the only crimes Burns sees fit for his trial are those which 'Distain the Fornicator's honor' (l.26). Examples of failing to uphold this code of conduct include those who partake in *coitus interruptus:* 'He who when at lass's by-job,| Defruads her wi' a frig or dry bob' (ll.21-22). The line invokes dual readings by firstly, furthering the satirising of the Kirk with its implication that sexual acts are pointless without the prospect of reproduction. Secondly, the lines suggests that the failure to complete the sexual act with a woman minimizes the pleasure for the woman, overall belittling her role in an interaction which should afford equal enjoyment. Extremely provocative due to its sexual nature, these early lines set out the poet's intention to utilise bawdry to make controversial social commentary while also commenting on the nature of sexuality. The club undertones of the poem are also encoded in the intended audience, with it widely reported that it was written for the Freemasons.[240] The twelfth and thirteenth stanzas are particularly masonic:

Then, for that ancient Secret's sake,

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[237] Robert Burns, Song [My girl she's airy], in *K Vol 1,* pp.60-61.
[238] Robert Burns, 'Libel Summons', in *K Vol 1,* pp.256-262.
[239] Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Club Poetry*, p.259.
[240] Gerard Carruthers and Pauline Anne Gray, 'Introduction', in *The Fornicators Court* (Edinburgh: Abbotsford Library Research Project, 2009), pp.3-13, p.8.

You have the honor to partake;
An' for that noble Badge you wear,
You, Sandie Dow, our Brother dear,
We give you as a Man an' Mason,
This private, sober, friendly lesson.—

Your Crime, a manly deed we view it,
As Man alone, can only do it. (ll.103-110)

The Masonic connections are most evident in the plain description of Sandy Dow as a 'Brother' and a 'Mason'. Burns foreshadows Dow's Masonic identity with reference to 'Ancient Secret's Sake', with secrecy being a defining aspect of the organisation's identity. Dow dishonours the fornicator's code but is only faced with a 'friendly lesson,' escaping the trial relatively unscathed due to Masonic unity. Significantly, Burns emphasises the masculinity of the acts carried out by his group of Fornicators with the last two lines quoted. Although at points the poem promotes equally enjoyable sexual relations between men and women, Burns reinforces the shared priapic masculinity amongst these men – affording them power in their 'manly' actions which are socially and religiously interrogated outside of their club.

Burns's dabbling in bawdry gathers momentum over the years until it reaches a crescendo with the production of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* – the most substantial collection of bawdry attributed to him. The publication history and circulation of the collection is uncertain due to several factors, including censorship laws which prohibited the printing of sexually provocative material being enforced which were in place until the 1960s.[241] Furthermore, the collection was dedicated to the Crochallan Fencibles – a convivial Edinburgh club founded by William Smellie. The fact that various pieces from the collection exist in Burns's holograph, his known membership of the club, and his reference to the existence of 'a collection of Scottish songs I have for some years been making,'[242] have led commentators to attribute the collection to Burns. However, the lack of a complete textual witness has led to apprehension pertaining to the attribution of selected songs.[243] Despite the

[241] Pauline Mackay, 'Burns and Bawdry', in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.192-210, (p.197).
[242] Robert Burns, letter to John M'Murdo, February 1792, in *Letters 2,* pp.137-138, p.138.
[243] Texts with ambiguous or contested authorship have been avoided for this study.

long-standing mystery surrounding the controversial collection, Burns's connection with the Crochallan Fencibles and their founder William Smellie is apparent. Due to the loss of the club's official records, the most authoritative account of the club's activities is Robert Kerr's *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, & Correspondence of William Smellie*. The second volume describes intricacies of the club set up, with a 'considerable number of literary gentleman'[244] holding memberships to the club which saw participants bearing 'some pretended military rank or title, as colonel, major, captain, &c.'[245] With 'the days of true heroism [...] over,'[246] the Fencible's citation of militant structures recalled historic, noble masculinity while in practice, they were driven by humorous and witty sparring which celebrated phallocentrism. Combining wit, conviviality, and intellectual argument, this fresh masculinity of the Enlightenment period was embodied by the interactions between Burns and Smellie:

> To the Crochallan club Mr Smellie introduced the celebrated Scots poet Burns in 1787, when in Edinburgh on occasion of publishing his poems. When the members of that club got Burns and Smellie together at their jovial meetings, they always endeavoured to pit against each other in a contest of wit and irony.[247]

William Smellie was an influential Edinburgh printer and polymath, most significantly compiling and editing the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.[248] His 'wide knowledge of literature and science' clearly made him an intellectual opponent suitable for Burns. If the club was comprised of men in a similar vein to that of Smellie, Burns had finally found a club in Edinburgh which shared his appreciation for convivially infused intellectual driven debates alongside an appetite for bawdy song.

While full authorship of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* cannot be attributed to Burns, the collection reflects some of his most notable literary skills; it is full of satire which is brimming with provocative social and political commentary, showcases his talent at collecting and adapting songs, celebrates male sexuality, and brings together its intended

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[244] Kerr, *Memoirs of William Smellie,* p.256.
[245] Ibid, p.256.
[246] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* ed. by Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2009), p.151.
[247] Kerr, *Memoirs of William Smellie,* p.259.
[248] S.W Brown, 'Smellie, William', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 24th May 2008 < https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25753> [accessed 9th July 2025].

audience – the men of the Crochallan Fencibles: as Andrews argues, 'Burns mobilized representations of masculinity, often exaggeratedly sexual, as means of unifying club members.'[249] While there is a widespread assumption that bawdy material was propelled by people of lower socio-economic position due to its roots in rural folk tradition, it was fact 'middle to upper-class male society that did most to preserve sexually explicit materials in print.'[250] The poor author of 'Libel Summons' had found a larger homosocial space in the high-class city of the Enlightenment to convey his libertine-inclined message. Verse in *TMM* reflects pieces written before Burns found the Crochallan Fencibles, for example 'Act Sederunt O' The Court O' Session' (1784)[251] bears similarities to the more substantial 'Libel Summons', however, this piece is more explicitly phallocentric. With the backdrop of the Edinburgh courts, it too comments on the states interference with sexuality, repeating that the law deems, 'That stantin' p---ks are fau'tors a',| An' guilty o a high transgression'[252] However, instead of focusing on the act of heterosexual sex which requires a female counterpart and ideally results in pleasure for both parties, this phallocentric verse has a hyper-focus on male physicality. To Andrews, the verse:

> indicates that the direction of Burns's club verse was changed quite radically from the representation of sympathetic, affirmative sexuality seen in 'Libel Summons' to one much more focused on male sexuality in and of itself, often to the outright exclusion of concern for women who threatened to entrap and curtail that sex drive.[253]

Despite the growth of the polite public sphere, male reproductive organs did occupy a small corner of courtrooms in eighteenth-century Britain. The 'impotency trials' in England and France were legal proceeding where wives attempted to annul their marriage on the grounds of their husband's 'impotency' - a term which 'was used to describe a range of conditions that we would term sexual dysfunction.' [254] In *Castration, Impotence, and Emasculation in the*

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[249] Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Club Poetry*, p.305.
[250] Pauline Mackay, '"Low, tame, and loathsome ribaldry": Bawdry in Romantic Scotland', *European Romantic Review*, 27.4 (2016), pp. 433-448, (433), doi:10.1080/10509585.2016.1190086.
[251] Robert Burns, 'Act Sederunt O' The Court O' Session' in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia,* introduction by G. Ross Roy (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999 [1799]), p.94.
[252] Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia,* introduction by G. Ross Roy (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999 [1799]), p.94, ll. 3-4 & ll. 7-8.
[253] Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Club Poetry,* p.321.
[254] Barabra Chubak, 'Impotence and Suing for Sex in Eighteenth-Century England', *Urology,* 71:3 (2008), pp.480-484 (p.482), doi:10.1016/j.urology.2007.10.058.

Long Eighteenth Century, Anne Greenfield accounts for the significant presence of compromised male sexuality in eighteenth-century British literature. Burns contributed to this tradition with the collection and adaptation of songs such as the bawdy version of 'John Anderson, my Jo' where Burns ventriloquises a female character who expresses frustration with her husband's inability to sexually satisfy her as he ages.[255] Greenfield argues that these symbols of compromised male sexuality reflected wider societal worries as, 'people were highly concerned about male sexual function because their patriarchal institutions depended on it.'[256] Despite the impotency trials confinement to English and French courtrooms, they mirror a wider eighteenth-century anxiety concerning male sexuality. It has been reported that:

> In all impotency trials, once the defendant had rebutted the accusations made against him, it was necessary to conclusively prove his sexual capacity to the court. Various proofs were admissible, ranging from compurgation, in which a set number of witnesses testified to the potency of the accused, to the embarrassing trial by congress, in which the accused engaged in sexual intercourse or masturbation before an audience.[257]

Clearly an invasive and humiliating ordeal, these trials exposed a husband's seeming lack of masculinity on a public scale. In *The Yard of Wit,* Raymond Stephanson scrutinises eighteenth-century phallic imagery to chart the significance of male physicality in the period's renewed sense of masculinity. He argues that, 'The erection served variously as a directly proportional sign of the successful will and assertiveness of the male brain or of the masculine character.'[258] Following this logic, 'the castrated, impotent, or small-yarded man predictably embodied a semiotic stamp of male failure ranging from literary satires to the more complex imperfect enjoyment traditions to personal lampoons.'[259] Thus, the men who were subjected to impotency trials suffered a failure of masculinity in the eyes of eighteenth-

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[255] Robert Burns, 'John Andreson, My Jo', in *TMM,* pp.53-55. It should be noted that Burns has two adaptations of this song – one bawdy, which was included in the *TMM,* and a clean version which belongs in the 'official canon'.
[256] Anne Greenfield, 'Unmanning', in *Castration, Impotence, and Emasculation in the Long Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Anne Greenfield (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp.1-18, (p.8).
[257] Chubak, 'Impotence and Suing for Sex in Eighteenth-Century England', p.483
[258] Raymond Stephanson, *The Yard of Wit: Male Creativity and Sexuality, 1650-1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p.74.
[259] Ibid, p.79.

century audiences. 'Act Sederunt O' The Court O' Session' subverts this public humiliation of men through legal processes, repeatedly showcasing the phallus as a physical symbol of patriarchal authority which mocks sexually invasive institutional practices. Through his imagining of a priapic spectacle, Burns unifies his male cronies from differing social backgrounds through an assertive projection of masculine power.

Corey E. Andrews has argued that Burns self-consciously utilises his club poetry to voice 'the deep beliefs not only of a club of like-minded men but for all of Scotland.'[260] However, this argument fails to consider the masculinity of his club writings – writings which did vary in nature however, ultimately focused on the production, projection, and celebration of masculinities. Like clubs themselves, Burns's experiences with clubs were multifarious; with class often diminishing the probability of finding true equality amongst a band of brothers. Overall, the homosocial sphere of clubs provided a crucial environment in the production of Burns's complex masculinities and demonstrate the poets endeavour to shape the masculinities around him. The following chapter will further expand on ideas of gender and power which were referenced in the above section concerning *TMM*.

[260] Andrews, *Literary Nationalism in Club,* p.216.

Chapter 4: Expressions and Interrogations of Masculine Authority

> Man was made to reason, woman to feel: and that together, flesh and spirit, they make the most perfect whole, by blending happily reason and sensibility into one character.[261]

Articulating the dualism associated with gender in the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) confronts the problematic perception that women were naturally emotional while men were drawn to reason. A remodel of the Cartesian dualism which severs the body and mind, this dichotomy and its gender implications is of course, outdated. As previously discussed, the rise of sentimentalism witnessed a shift to society finding it widely admirable for men to become more empathetic beings. Although it was perceived they were not naturally drawn to emotion, they were encouraged to act accordingly to the operations of sentiment alongside reason. Maureen Harkin argues that Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* illustrates sympathy as 'characteristically feminine', while male feeling is 'moderated' by reason to produce 'socially beneficial actions.'[262] Despite Enlightenment philosophers suggesting that women could be valuable examples of sympathetic feeling, they ultimately associated women with unmeditated compulsive emotionality. While Wollstonecraft rearticulated the notion that 'man was made to reason', Burns outlined a sentimental model of masculinity is his early poem 'Man was Made to Mourn' (1785),[263] illustrating his unique prioritisation of feeling in his concept of masculinity. Furthermore, women's capacities clearly go further than the body and an interrogation of historical social structures quickly evidence's the ways in which the world was set in a vicious cycle against women's articulation of reason. Gerda Lerner points to the centrality of education in underpinning the patriarchy: 'the different rates of achievement, the different interests and activities of men and women were due to their sex-specific education. The systematic educational disadvantaging of women was the root cause of their perceived inferiority.'[264] Nevertheless, the shadow of this dualism is far-reaching, and although theorists such as

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[261] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* ed. by Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2009), p.68.
[262] Maureen Harkin, 'Adam Smith on Women', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith,* ed. by Christoper J. Berry, Maria Pia Paganelli, and Craig Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.501-520, (p.517).
[263] Robert Burns, 'Man was Made to Mourn, A Dirge', in *K Vol 1,* 116-119.
[264] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.192.

Wollstonecraft attempted to deconstruct it, it haunted gender theory until the rise of feminism in the twentieth century.

Historically, this widely accepted dualism was a crucial justification of the unbalanced power dynamic between men and women, with men's perceived capacity to master the mind holding significant power in the Enlightened landscape while women were reduced to the status of unreasonable brings. Val Plumwood assesses the power that the notion of reason holds in Western social structures, asserting that, 'exclusion from the master category of reason which in liberation struggles provides and explains the conceptual links between different categories of domination.'[265] Those excluded from the 'master category' include people of colour and non-humans but most pertinent to this current study is women. Additionally, Connell asserts that the association with men and rationality played a role in establishing hegemonic masculinity. This concept of hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the 'configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.'[266] Connell's concept was a significant development in understanding masculinity in relation to gender power structures where hegemonic masculinity represents the idealised form of masculinity which a society deems valuable, consisting of qualities which oppress women as well as marginalise certain groups of men. As outlined in the introduction, the polite, refined man of reason was the standard of hegemonic masculinity in eighteenth-century Scotland. While qualities such as physical dominance impact women on an individual basis, men's monopoly over the power of reason informed collective societal structures.

The notion of patriarchy has 'lost favour with many women's and gender historians of the eighteenth century'[267] due to the complexity of the power structures as they pertain to masculinity:

> patriarchy was not simply about women and men; it was a broad system which incorporated hierarchies of age, rank and marital status. Indeed, recent work shows that manhood was not made or lost through men's exercise of patriarchal authority over women: manhood was also forged through men's relationship with other men,

[265] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.4.
[266] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities,* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995)*,* p.77.
[267] Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.126.

> and men as well as women "undermined, resisted, or simply ignored patriarchal imperatives" Manhood did not equate with patriarchy.[268]

Therefore, while women were open to oppression partly due to the institutional belief in the reason/emotion dichotomy, assessing masculinity purely on patriarchal acts which oppressed women fails to account for the complexities of masculinity and power. However, authority over certain women was an aspect of male life and a part of masculine identity; disregarding the significance of the gendered aspect of the social hierarchy would fail to capture the complete conditions of Burns's masculinity. So far, this study has neglected straightforward categories of gender by demonstrating that gendered expressions exist on a spectrum, with geographical locations, historical context, class, and audience greatly influencing the articulation of Robert Burns's masculinity. As Dunnigan states, Burns's 'poetry does not deal in such simplistic polarities.'[269] Nevertheless, straightforward and problematic perceptions of gender did inform the gender hierarchy in Burns's lifetime and he did interact with this hierarchy in his work, sometimes subtly while other times more explicitly.

This chapter will focus on the gender hierarchy which Burns both reinforces and interrogates in his writing, with an evaluation of writing which highlights male authority. While this does address patriarchal acts and writings which aimed to subdue women, it is not limited to this outlook in its scope as the broad theme of masculine power encompasses writing about men as well as women. Firstly, returning to Burns's sexually explicit work provides significant evidence of women being harmfully dominated in the physical sphere and Burns's exploration of sexual politics. Secondly, turning to Burns's writing about women's rights and education to evaluate his response to women's liberation discourse, which was contemporary to him, demonstrates his awareness and contemplation of conversations concerning women's rights – such as his interaction with Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Finally, a close reading of Burns's narrative masterpiece 'Tam o 'Shanter' will illuminate the complexities of gender roles and masculine authority in the poem.

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[268] Ibid, p.127.
[269] Sarah Dunnigan, 'Burns and Women', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.21.

Pauline Mackay argues that there is a cohesive sense of reasoning behind Burns's preoccupation with sex, denoting that this controversial aspect of his life and work is underpinned by a sexually liberated moral code:

> We might consider the view, then, that the bard's flippant approach to matters sexual and indeed, to the institution of marriage, communicates an alternative code of morality which prioritizes carnal desire and sexual fulfilment as the foremost preoccupation of humanity.[270]

As explained in the introduction, recent years have seen the public wrestle with the morality of Burns's romantic and sexual relationships in light of the MeToo movement. However, as outlined in 'Libel Summons', Burns explores the boundaries regarding sexual misdemeanours as he plays with the idea of a male code to humorously determine that the greatest sexual transgression is disrespect of the act itself. 'The Fornicator' (c.1785)[271] opens *TMM* and sets out Burns's prioritisation of sexual fulfilment while signifying that this principal interest is an aspect of normative masculinity. The opening lines, "Ye jovial boys who love the joys, | The blissful joys of Lovers' (ll.1-2) addresses his intended audience of bawdy brothers. Despite the subject of this poem being his relations with a woman, this clear signalling of the homosocial context enforces the intended masculine audience. This is further highlighted in the final stanza which champions the fornicator's identity:

> Your warlike Kings and Heros bold,
> Great Captains and Commanders;
> Your mighty Cèsars fam'd of old,
> And Conquering Alexanders;
> In fields they fought and laurels bought
> And bulwarks strong did batter,
> But still they grac'd our noble list
> And ranked Fornicator!!! (ll.41-48)

[270] Pauline Mackay, "Low, tame, and loathsome ribaldry": Bawdry in Romantic Scotland', *European Romantic Review*, 27.4 (2016), pp. 433-448 (p.441), doi: 10.1080/10509585.2016.1190086.
[271] Robert Burns, 'The Fornicator', in *TMM*, p.1.

Burns's references to men of power who historically have thrived due to military success conveys that noble men have a streak of promiscuity. This connection with 'great' men underpins the proposition of this alternative model of hegemonic masculinity via institutional validation: 'it is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony.'[272] The stanza connects these figures to sex and violence, endorsing these acts as forms of masculine expression through the authority of male figures. Overall, 'The Fornicator' justifies sexual debauchery by situating it as a condition of normative masculinity, by embedding carnal desire in a line of traditionally brave and fêted men. Here, Burns ultimately provides a bodily alternative to the mindful model of hegemonic politeness and reason; by expressing, in verse form, the authoritative nature of priapic masculinity.

Despite asserting that fornication is a standard of masculinity to his audience of male cronies, Burns also writes of sexual acts in a satirical manner. 'Holy Willie's Prayer' (1785)[273] - Burns's great dramatic monologue – deploys sexual language humorously to mock William Fisher, highlighting his religious hypocrisy. As he confesses his sins, Holy Willie's admission builds until he recounts the intercourse he had with women:

> Wi' Leezie's lass, three times – I trow-
> But Lord, that friday I was fou
> When I cam near her;
> Or else, thou kens, thy servant true
> Wad never steer her. (ll.50-54)

Brimming with excuses of intoxication and doubtful promises of never committing the act again, his confession is weak and especially scandalous considering his strong belief that he is one of the elect – a Calvinist notion that certain men are predestined for salvation. Holy Willie's power is initially encoded in his position as a Kirk elder and in his masculinity, which Burns masterfully unravels as he highlights the religious hypocrisy of the elder while simultaneously underscoring his failure to confidently embrace his need for sexual fulfilment. Unlike Burns who proclaims his manly desire for intimacy with women, Holy Willie attempts to justify his sin by arguing that flesh is weak, exhibiting a pessimistic view of human nature as fallen to excuse his behaviour:

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[272] Connell, *Masculinities,* p.77.
[273] Robert Burns, 'Holy Willie's Prayer', in *K Vol 1,* pp.74-78.

But yet—O L—d-confess I must—
At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust;
And sometimes too, in warldly trust
Vile Self gets in;
But thou remembers we are dust,
Defil'd wi' sin.— (ll.37-42)

As Holy Willie attempts to justify his actions as a ramification of original sin, the syntax begins to deteriorate, which further undermines the speaker's claim to authority. Ultimately, by breaking the fornicators code of conduct which is follows in the slightly later 'Libel Summons', Holy Willie's sexuality fails to meet the standard of masculinity set by Burns and his cronies, adding another dimension to the mocking nature of the poem. Furthermore, Holy Willie passively references the women he has sexual interaction with, being barely able to muster attraction for them while sober. This significantly contradicts with Burns's vocal appreciation of the women that he is romantically involved with, which is present throughout his epistolary and poetic writing. Overall, Holy Willie's masculine power is undercut by his inability to fully admit to his sexual attraction. Therefore, Burns's early sexually explicit work demonstrates a moral code for men who wish to partake in fornication; encoded within this is a standard of masculinity. In Burns's *oeuvre,* being sorrowful or dishonest about sex diminishes a man's claim to authority.

The women in Burns's bawdy works were not granted the same validation as Burns and his cronies who had laid out this alternative moral code which posited foundational rules concerning carnal impulses. Perceptions of sex changed with the rise of polite culture: the eighteenth century was a transitional period when, as Karen Harvey writes, 'the desiring, appetitive early-modern woman was replaced by her prudish, passive and constrained nineteenth-century successor. Affectionate but asexual, this lust woman was a counterpart to the newly domesticated middle-class woman at home.' [274] This new expectation of femininity did not align with Burns's heterosexual sexually liberating ethos. One of his most famous pieces of bawdry to be included in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia,* 'Nine Inch Will Please A

[274] Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century,* p.4.

Lady' (1789)[275] sees Burns ventriloquise a rural female persona, subverting the expectation of sexually ambivalent femininity. Drawn from the bawdy trope of the 'rural female labourer as a sexually promiscuous woman,[276] Burns scrutinises sexuality from a perspective which was situated in the literary genre but was unfashionable in contemporary sexual politics. As the female speaker brags about her previous sexual exploits, her voice becomes less passively feminine with a distinct sense of male-bravado shining through:

> O Leeze me on my Charlie lad,
> I'll ne'er forget my Charlie!
> Tway roarin handfu's and a daud,
> He nidge't it in fu' rarely. (ll.13-16)

This boastful, masculine voice resembles Burns's infamous letter to Robert Ainslie – commonly known as the 'Horse Litter Letter' - written in March 1788. There, Burns details a sexual encounter with Jean Armour:

> I have f——d her till she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But, as I always am on every occasion, I have been prudent and cautious to an astonishing degree. I swore her privately and solemnly never to attempt any claim on me as a husband, even though anybody should persuade her she had such a claim (which she had not), neither during my life nor after my death. She did all this like a good girl, and I took the opportunity of some dry horse litter, and gave her such a thundering scalade that electrified the very marrow of her bones. Oh, what a peacemaker is a guid weel-willy p——le! It is the mediator, the guarantee, the umpire, the bond of union, the solemn league and covenant, the plenipotentiary, the Aaron's rod, the Jacob's staff, the prophet Elisha's pot of oil, the Ahasuerus' Sceptre, the sword of mercy, the philosopher's stone, the Horn of Plenty, and Tree of Life between Man and Woman.[277]

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[275] Robert Burns, 'Nine Inch Will Please a Lady', in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia,* introduction by G. Ross Roy (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999 [1799]), pp. 32-34.
[276] Cathy Lynn Preston, "The Tying of the Garter": Representations of the Female Rural Laborer in 17th , 18th , and 19th - Century English Bawdy Songs, *The Journal of American Folklore,* 105.417 (1992), pp.315-341 (p.315).
[277] Robert Burns, letter to Robert Ainslie, 3rd March 1788, in *Letters 1,* pp.250-251.

Phallocentric, ostentatious, and violent, the letter is characteristic of the most problematic aspects of Burns's masculinity to twenty-first century audiences. Writing about his sexual experience with a heavily pregnant Armour, Burns's degrading depiction of the violent encounter is a shocking departure from the 'Man of Feeling' brand he had built, cementing his priapic nature as an important aspect of his masculinity. Moreover, his assurance that he had safeguarded himself from a legal commitment to Armour through marriage contradicts the rules of respect he had set out for himself and his fellow fornicators in 'Libel Summons'. His authority over her resides in the sexual control he presents and in his manipulation of their relationship status. With his failure to fulfil his own duty of respect which comes with the 'manly deed', Burns emphasises his masculinity through the phallocentric nature of the letter. Presenting male genitalia as a diplomatic instrument which can mediate between sexes, and as a sacred entity through the biblical imagery, Burns's repetitive focus on the phallus conveys the distinct power of male sexuality. As with all Burns's work his intended audience is often as crucial as the subject of his writing. While most sexually explicit eighteenth-century writing concerned heterosexual encounters the techniques used to 'represent male bodies allowed men to look at those bodies in homosocial environments.'[278] Burns does not only convey power over Jean Armour but asserts his power in the personal homosocial relationship with Robert Ainslie. Raymond Stephanson connects male creativity, homosociality, and sexuality, asserting that, 'male creativity was imagined primarily as a sexual site, and one's relative position in the public hierarchy of male authors was importantly connected to one's perceived manliness as a writer with a network of homosocial connections.'[279] While the letter brims with male bravado concerning a sexual encounter, the championing of his own phallus though metaphorical language is an assertion of creative power as well as sexual power to the homosocial acquaintance.

With its inclusion in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, 'Nine Inch Will Please A Lady' also has a crucial homosocial context. While the poem 'conveys a sexually active female character who rejects notions of feminine passivity,'[280] it is written by a man for the comedic relief of his male cronies. Cathy Lynn Preston assesses the significance of sexual politics in depictions of the rural female's body in bawdy songs, arguing that:

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[278] Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century*, p.45.
[279] Raymond Stephanson, *The Yard of Wit: Male Creativity and Sexuality 1650-1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p.21.
[280] Pauline Mackay, 'Burns and Bawdry', in *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns,* ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 121-134 (p.130).

> Using the portrayal of sexual intercourse to depict intrusion into the female body and control of the female body and female sexuality, these songs were statements of gender-based power struggles in which men were often portrayed as attempting to assume, as assuming, or as having assumed a position of gendered dominance.[281]

While 'Nine Inch Will Please A Lady' is written from the point of view of a female, her body is controlled by her lust for men. Her carnal impulses culminate in the closing stanza:

> It's no the length that maks me loup,
> But it's the double drivin.—
> Come nidge me, Tam, come nudge me, Tam,
> Come nidge me o'er the nyvel!
> Come lowse and lug your battering ram,
> thrash him at my gyvel! (ll.19-24)

With detailed analysis of her sexual wants, the speaker is presented as possessing an uncontrollable desire for the physical attention of a male. Phallocentric, this stanza presents the male sex organ as having ultimate control over the delirious woman who appears desperate to interact with it. This phallic power is emphasised through the physical force implied by the metaphorical description of the phallus as a 'battering ram'. Defined by her aggressive sexual appetite, the speaker is a manifestation of bodily urges, lying purely on the 'body' side of the 'mind/body' dualism which informs the 'reason/emotion' dichotomy. Therefore, on the surface this song appears to liberate women from the manmade box of sexually passive femininity. However, the author's gender; the intended masculine audience of the Crochallan Fencibles; the authoritative position of the phallus; and the restriction of the persona as having purely physical motivations presents a different set of problematic portrayals of women.

Similarly, the second air of ‘Love and Liberty – A Cantata’ (1985,[282] alternatively named ‘The Jolly Beggars’) takes on the voice of another lustful woman who is defines herself by her sexuality: ‘I once was a maid, tho’ I cannot tell when, | And still my delight is

[281] Preston, 'The Tying of the Garter', p.315.
[282] Robert Burns, ‘Love and Liberty – A Cantata’, in *K Vol 1,* pp. 195-210.

in proper young men'(ll.57-58). The reserved piece is a series of connected humorous songs which presents an alternative society of vagrants who celebrate carnal desire and conviviality as central preoccupations of humanity. Despite the maid's gender, she is admitted into a convivial sphere:

> 'And still I can join in a cup and a song;
> But whilst with both hands I can hold the glass steady
> Here's to thee, my hero, my sodger laddie.' (ll.78-80)

While Burns offers a rare glimpse of a woman partaking in drinking infused social activity, the speaker reinforces her focus on men, ultimately toasting the man who she had intercourse with. While 'Nine Inch to Please A Lady' reinforces masculine power through sexual dynamics while it contributes to the narrative that women were primarily motivated by their bodies and not their minds, 'Love and Liberty – A Cantata' is a mosaic of masculine orientated humorous verse which celebrates sexuality across humanity.

Instructive and patronising, the opening lines of the earlier verse 'O leave novels' (1784)[283] do not set the poems intended humorous tone when read with a contemporary awareness of patriarchal structures which confined women to domestic duties: 'O LEAVE novels, ye Mauchline belles,| Ye're safer at your spinning wheel' (ll.1-2). The poem continues with an attempt to justify this request, with Burns asserting that 'witching books' (l.3) - novels with sexual undertones - will make women vulnerable 'prey' (l.8) for 'rakish rooks like Rob Mossgiel' (l.4) - Burns's name for his self-fashioned, ram-stam persona. Despite the poem's reputation as playful and flirtatious, focussing on the gender dynamics of the initial verse expose the power Burns asserts as 'Rob Mossgiel', while women are implicitly subordinated. Firstly, women are encouraged to return to a domestic duty. This follows with their capacity to reason being diminished by the corruptive nature of the novel which was a common complaint of the time with 'alarmist rhetoric about the corruption of impressionable minds'[284] aimed at women. Furthermore, women are presented as both weak and animalistic in their status as prey. Meanwhile, Burns's projected character is calculated, asserting authority via his perceived control over the women with a 'tongue that's smoothly hung' (l.9). While

[283] Robert Burns, 'O Leave novels &c.', in *K Vol 1,* p.58.
[284] Marina MacKay, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.6,

writings such as the 'Horse Litter Letter' explicitly evidence an exercise of masculine authority in the personal and restricted homosocial sphere of correspondence with a male confidant, texts such as 'O leave novels' illuminate Burns's implicit power in a patriarchal society more widely.

Although it could be argued that there was naive unawareness of male authority in this early poem to the Mauchline Belles, 'Burns was not unaware of the pressures of female emancipation,'[285] with the Enlightenment laying the foundation of the 'rights-based discourse and individual liberty that would form the basis of liberal feminism in the nineteenth century.'[286] By the time he composed 'The Rights of Women' in 1792[287] he was clearly aware and engaging with notions of female emancipation yet, his presentation of gender roles did not progress much further from the much earlier 'O Leave novels'. With the title alluding to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (which was published in the same year), Burns demonstrates an awareness of her pioneering feminist work which had 'seized the revolutionary moment to make a case for women to be treated as the moral and intellectual equals of men.'[288] Criticism of Wollstonecraft was not rare during her lifetime, with her name and work 'tarred with the brush of French-style liberty, free thought, free love, irreligion, the undermining of family life, and all those things that were anathema both to conservative political orientation and to nineteenth century evangelicalism.'[289] Despite the bard and Wollstonecraft sharing some radical beliefs, his short response to her work 'dilutes the revolutionary spirit of Wollstonecraft's feminist vision.'[290] Burns frames the poem with the West's pressing political concerns of 'the fall of Kings' (l.2) and 'The Rights of Man,' (l.4) which had been stirred up by the French Revolution, before turning the attention away from popular Painite radicalism towards the rights of women. By initially highlighting the pressing political concerns which are dominating the largely masculine political sphere, his call for women to be afforded 'Protection,' (l.8) 'Decorum,' (l.16) and 'Admiration' (l.28) are belittled

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[285] Robert Crawford, 'Robert Fergusson's Robert Burns', in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority,* ed. by Robert Crawford (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp.1-22 (p.14).
[286] Kate Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.200.
[287] Robert Burns, 'The Rights of Woman – Spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night', in *K Vol 2,* pp.661-662.
[288] Robert P. Irvine, "Burns's Politics 'In Another View': Late 1792/Early 1793", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 41:1 (2016), pp.143-173, p.145.
[289] Jean Grimshaw, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Tensions in Feminist Philosophy', in *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy: A Radical Philosophy Reader,* ed. by Sean Sayers and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.9-26 (p.9).
[290] Dunnigan, 'Burns and Women', p.30.

in contrast. Neglecting to address Wollstonecraft's central call for women to be admitted to educational spheres and respected as rational beings, Burns affords women with mere superficial 'rights'. Moreover, the poem reimagines the body/mind dualism through the association of women with nature, with women described as:

> The tender flower that lifts its head, elate,
> Helpless, must fall before the blasts of Fate,
> Sunk on the earth, defaced its lovely form,
> Unless *your Shelter* ward th' impending storm. (ll.9-12)

Plumwood categorises those who belong to each side of the nature/reason dualism, demonstrating the number of beings and entities who are not permitted to the realm of reason:

> Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the nonhuman world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes.[291]

By emphasising this association of women with nature through imagery, Burns cements women on the 'nature' side of the dualism, further excluding women from the sphere of reason while simultaneously dehumanising them. This, in turn belittles their appeal for equal rights with men. Wollstonecraft's call for women to be 'considered not only as moral, but rational [...] instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being,'[292] is overlooked by Burns. Observations of masculinity are embedded in 'The Rights of Woman', with male action being a central concern of the verse. Reflecting on historical standards of masculinity, Burns recalls a period 'when rough, rude man had naughty ways: | Would swagger, swear, get drunk, kick up a riot,' (ll.18-19) asserting that this has changed with the promotion of 'well-bred men' (l.22). Considering Burns's appreciation of rude verse, alcohol, and convivial sociability (as already explored earlier in this thesis), the assertion that hedonistic men had disappeared from society might seem to show a lack of self-awareness on Burns's part. However, his view here appeals to his intended reader, the actress Louisa Fontenelle while it

[291] Plumwood, *Feminism and Nature,* pp.19-20.
[292] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman,* pp.42-43.

promotes the Enlightenment's movement towards politeness. He notes that the move towards a more refined, polite masculinity based on reason has become hegemonic, conveying that this has been a positive change for women who are no longer frequently disturbed by men who 'invade a lady's quiet' (l.20). A result of modernity, the value of politeness in the late eighteenth century is embedded into the poem as Burns 'reproduces a connection between women's place in society and historical progress particularly characteristic of Scottish Enlightenment conjectural history.'[293] By doing so, the verse implies that the position of women has already been significantly bettered with the cultural and social developments of the century.

The final call for women to be afforded 'Admiration' focuses on a male act, with men being responsible for 'fluttering Female hearts' (l.26). Kate Barclay argues that during this period 'love and patriarchal power were intricately entwined,'[294] with eighteenth-century men having the responsibility to enact love while women were passive objects to be love. Here, Burns reinforces this act of patriarchal authority – with the women's 'right' for admiration being contingent on the male actor or agent who will afford her such adoration. Carruthers asserts that the poem's main concern is, 'Why bother with politics when the delights of women are there to take the attention of men.'[295] In this regard, the text undermines the political and social concerns of Wollstonecraft with male pleasure, action, and authority, these being the primary motivations of the poem, rather than the kind of female emancipation that the title misleadingly suggests. Despite Burns's search for a female companion with 'intellectual as well as sexually compatibility,'[296] his insincerity in 'The Rights of Women', as well as its androcentric approach and priorities, convey his participation in upholding patriarchal notions which disadvantaged women in regard to their articulation and fulfilment of intellectual potential.

However, suggesting that Burns conveys a one dimensional, expectation of gender roles across his *oeuvre* fails to acknowledge his interrogation of the validity of received expectations of gender in works such as 'Tam o' Shanter' (1790).[297] Burns's narrative masterpiece is 'often celebrated and critiqued for its traditional constructions of gender.'[298]

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[293] Robert P. Irvine, "Burns's Politics 'In Another View': Late 1792-Early 1793", p.146.
[294] Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power,* p.110.
[295] Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2006), p.74.
[296] A.L Kennedy 'Love Composition: The Solitary Vice' in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority,* ed. by Robert Crawford (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp.23-39, (p.29).
[297] Robert Burns, 'Tam o' Shanter. A Tale', in *K Vol 2,* pp.557-564.
[298] Dunnigan, 'Burns and Women', p,31.

One of the poet's most significant canonical works, it divides scholars on the presentation of gender: does Burns uphold patriarchal notions or criticise male authority? The piece is a patchwork of themes and reflections which include male sociability, carnal appetite, the objectification of women, alcohol, and marriage, with the framing of a supernatural folk story narrated by a local man. This multiplicity leads to a,

> set of secular readings: the celebration of drinks and social pleasures as allies against the darker aspects of life; the dominance of the masculine spirit over the feminine; the transience of the bloom or snowflake of pleasure compared with the storm and darkness outside the bubble of the present; and the continuing power of the irrational and supernatural over the fragility of reason.[299]

Christopher Whyte argues that the biggest obstacle to critical evaluation of the poem does not lie with its multiplicity but with the familiarity of the tale which has paradoxically become 'invisible' through its popularity.[300] In 'Defamiliarizing Tam O' Shanter' he closely depicts the poem, unravelling the construction of the poem to deliver a closer reading of the piece, asserting that readings of the poem tend to succumb to the belief that:

> Burns simply depicted what he saw, and what can be seen around us today. He neither created nor parodied, but merely transcribed. And to question the validity of the roles he immortalises is in some subtle way to insult the social practice of ordinary men and women throughout the country.[301]

As evidenced by Whyte, Burns's depiction of gender roles in the poem has been a significant area of critical tension amongst Burns scholars. In 2000, Carruthers and Dunnigan co-authored an article titled 'Two Tales of 'Tam o' Shanter', taking a dualistic approach to the poem, delivering a masculine orientated interpretation of the poem alongside a feminine one. This creative approach to the text demonstrated the drastically conflicting readings of the poem which arises with differing gendered lenses. Resulting from the plethora of characters

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[299] Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGilivray, *Scottish Literature,* ed. by Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan, and Alan MacGilivray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp.146-170, (p.167).
[300] Christopher Whyte, 'Defamiliarizing 'Tam O' Shanter'', *Scottish Literary Journal,* 20:1 (1993), pp.5-18 (p.5).
[301] Ibid, p.5.

who reflect varied aspects of gender roles, the poem is both an illustration and interrogation of the spectrum (and the confines) of gendered expressions in eighteenth-century Scotland.

Dunnigan argues that ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ exists in a world where 'women aren’t welcome,'[302] which is quickly established in the first stanza with the narrator setting a scene of boozy conviviality: 'While we sit bousing at the nappy, | And getting fou and unco happy' (ll.5-6). Notably, the narrator involves himself and the reader in this scene with his use of pronoun, indicating his own maleness and the intended male audience. This lively centre for socialising contrasts with home, 'Whare sits our sulky sullen dame| Gather her brows like gathering storm' (ll.10-11). Whilst Tam (and the narrator) thrive in the public sphere, Tam's wife Kate is resigned to the private and isolated sphere of domesticity, like all the 'gentle dames' (l.33), whom the narrator eventually addresses. Immediately, the narrator divides the genders, creating a climate of conflict amongst the sexes. Kate remains a constant threat to Tam throughout the poem, with the initial pathetic fallacy applied to the realm of married women conveying their intimidating nature. Whilst Tam is being pursued by the hoard of witches, Kate remains a consistent worry for the narrator who reminds the reader that: 'In vain thy *Kate* awaits thy coming!| *Kate* soon will be a woefu' woman!' (ll.203-204) This stormy imagery and repetitive reminder of the threat of Kate clashes with the unthreatening presence of eighteenth-century women who were subordinated by the gendered hierarchy. Burns has already set out an alternative presentation of gender to his contemporary audience by presenting Kate – and to an extent the feminine- as a category to be feared by their husbands, thus furnishing women with a degree of power. Furthermore, Kate embodies reason over appetite, with the narrator pointing to it being wise for Tam to have 'ta'en thy ain wife *Kate's* advice' (l.18). Tam's position sits in contrast to Kate: for example, to Robert Crawford, Tam represents, 'a loss of male and masculine power – a loss of rationality not just to the powers of drink and the devil but to a threatening female who is literally bewitching.'[303] Tam's rationality is momentarily lost through his prioritisation of carnal and convivial driven acts - drunkenness and sexual dissipation; acts which impact or are inspired by his body. The couple lie at either side of the mind/body dualism with Kate corresponding with the mind (and the historically masculine position of the dominant party within marriage) and Tam with the body. However, Kate is physically absent from the poem, she is an

[302] Sarah Dunnigan and Gerard Carruthers, 'Two Tales of 'Tam o' Shanter', in *Southfields,* 6 (2000), pp.36-43, < https://electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives179.htm> [accessed 5th August 2025].
[303] Crawford, 'Fergusson's Burns', p.19.

intangible concept of a wise but nagging wife who the narrator himself imagines while he follows an intoxicated Tam on his fantastical adventure. Kate in some ways recalls Burns's personification of his own inner rationality which he outlined in a letter to Captain Richard Brown: '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 ither grievances.'[304] Written in 1788, this letter foreshadows the projection of reason which is present in 'Tam o' Shanter.' Seen in this context, Kate is not a fully-fledged character in her own right; rather, she is a construction of the notion of reason – Tam's own reason which recurringly haunts his questionable decision making, shaped as it is by his lust and drunkenness instead of rationality. Kate Barclay draws attention to the dependency that eighteenth-century wives had on their husbands when it came to identity, stating that these women were 'denied separate identities as individuals, but instead understood themselves in relation to their spouses.'[305] Therefore, Kate is not a ground-breaking illustration of a woman who can reason, but instead is an extension of Tam's character, representing his supressed rationality (and thus, his Enlightened masculinity) if overcome by his dominant convivial and sexual expressions of masculinity.

While the wives identities are dependent on their husbands, the 'witches in a dance' (l.115), introduce a refreshing infusion of female agency to the poem. Directly contrasting with 'the male fellowship at Ayr,'[306] the witches dance is a gender-flipped representation of the male convivial sphere which Burns championed and thrived in. However, the 'largely female'[307] community has distinctly demonic overtones with the 'hedonistic community of women-dancers'[308] seducing three of the poem's most prominent male figures – the Devil, Tam, and the narrator. Despite the initial image of female agency, the witches' convivial pleasure is contingent on 'auld Nick' (l.120) who 'screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl' (l.123). However, his authority is undermined by his attraction to the central witch Nannie who is subjected to his voyeuristic gaze. 'Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain' (l.185). This unconcealable attraction conveys the power which feminine sexuality holds over him. Tam's own uncontrollable desire for the young witch is made explicit at the poems 'drink-fuelled,

[304] Robert Burns, letter to Captain Richard Brown, 7th March 1788, in *Letters 1,* p.257.

[305] Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power,* p.114.
[306] Carol McGurik, *Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p.156.
[307] Ibid, p.156.
[308] Ibid, p.157.

sexually motivated climax'[309] when he exclaims, 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!' (l.189), announcing his lewd infiltration of the feminine space. Thoughts of Kate (or rationality) are completely absent from this section of the poem, as Tam uncontrollably yields to his bodily instincts. Both Nannie and his own body exercise authority over Tam, whose objectification of women has been exposed by his own rash words. Additionally, the narrator falls victim to the allure of Nannie, his inclusion in the masculine infused voyeuristic cohort emphasised by 'his participation in Tam's excitement over the dancing witches.'[310] The identity of the narrator has been one of the most puzzling questions which has confronted critics of the text. John C. Weston provides a thorough evaluation of the narrator's identity and position in the piece, concluding that he is not Burns, 'but an exaggerated version of a good part of him,'[311] and is a man torn between Tam's values (the pleasures of camaraderie, drink, sex, song, and dance) and Kate's values (respectability, responsibility, moral truths, and Calvinistic rigor).'[312] With his voice dominating the poem (the only exception being Tam's outburst), the narrator seemingly holds the ultimate power as the authoritative voice, a claim which is accentuated by his masculinity; which determines his inclusion in convivial spheres, his claim to reason, and his sexual authority. However, his exposure of his own voyeuristic tendencies undermines his authority, as he is carried away by the sexual anticipation of the scene he describes. Overall, the men of the poem represent masculinity which has been destabilized by feminine sexuality. The allure of this excessive sexuality, in hand with a weakened ability to rationalize under the influence of alcohol, undermines the masculine authority of the narrator, protagonist, and the Devil himself.

The poem ends with the offering of an underwhelming moral, following Nannie violently removing the tail from Tam's horse Meg, in her bid to catch Tam for exposing her. The narrator ends the poem with a moralising proposition:

> 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,

[309] Mackay, 'Burns and Bawdry', p.205.
[310] Ibid, p.331.
[311] John C. Weston, 'The Narrator of Tam o' Shanter', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900,* 8:3 (1968), pp. 537-550 (p.538).
[312] Ibid, p.545.

Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare. (ll.219-224)

Arguments concerning the interpretation of this moral have differed significantly. For example, in the twentieth century a 'castration theory' came to light,[313] which is problematised by the fact that Meg is clearly gender female. James Kinsley asserts that:

> The moral burden of the poem is, inevitably, ironic: the admonitions against infidelity and indifference to a wife's advice, against drunkenness and lecherous fancies, are sound enough glosses on 'this tale o' truth', whether the events are history or fable; but if Tam's experience is to be taken as hallucination, the final moralitas is deliberately absurd, placing his terrifying adventure in categories of crime and punishment that do not correspond.[314]

The irony of the mock moral further undercuts the narrative authority, implying that the narrator himself cannot grasp the unreasonable and inharmonious delivery of justice. The moral is consciously aimed at men (with the reference to 'mothers' only emphasising women's exclusion as readers), reinforcing in the final lines that the poem, 'can't evade its entrenched masculinism.'[315] Just as the beginning appeals to the convivial enjoyment of the men in the pub, the resolution of the poem appeals to authoritative masculinity by keeping 'the female and the feminine in their rightful subject place,'[316] with the feminine ultimately suffering when challenged by the masculine. Despite the consistent undermining of Tam's authority throughout the narrative, ultimately masculinity triumphs with the comic moral unifying Tam, the male narrator and the male reader at the expense of the feminine. Overall, the moral of the poem further complicates the poem's representation and interrogation of gender roles; ultimately reinforcing the collective power which masculinity maintains, while simultaneously undercutting singular male authority through the absurdity of the narrator's reasoning. 'Tam o' Shanter' is a prism through which Burns refracts his own expressions, experiences, and observations of gender and masculine authority to simultaneously confront, undermine, and reinforce gender hierarchy.

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[313] Whyte, 'Defamiliarizing 'Tam', p.6.
[314] James Kinsley, 'Notes' for 'Tam o' Shanter', in *K Vol 2*, p.564.
[315] Carruthers and Dunnigan, 'Two Tales'.
[316] Crawford, 'Fergusson's Burns', p.17.

In conclusion, Burns was clearly aware of the gender hierarchy and, in turn, the authority which accompanied masculinity; his interaction with these notions is complex. On the one hand, Burns reinforced his own male authority via phallocentric writing which illustrated a problematic sexual power dynamic. Furthermore, Burns mocks Wollstonecraft's seminal feminist writing, and in so doing demonstrates his androcentric priorities and distinct lack of liberal attitudes towards women's rights. By contrast, 'Tam o' Shanter' conveys a more complex attitude to gender roles and male authority with the poem illustrating the inevitable power of masculinity and the inescapable subjugation of the feminine. Moreover, Burns's long narrative poem confronts this power dynamic by undermining each male character's authority, ultimately questioning the validity of all-encompassing masculine power. Burns also interacts with the gendered parallel of the body/mind dualism. He implicitly underpins the validity of the notion that women are emotional, close to nature, and ultimately orientated by their body – with no capacity to reason. However, he presents men as more complex, as they can access both sides of the dichotomy through his championing of sentimental feeling and carnal instincts alongside his rationality.

Conclusion

Robert Burns's masculinity forms a uniquely complex and nuanced spectrum of gendered expressions, which embodies various notions of masculinity from the mid to late eighteenth century. Sentimentality lies at one end of this spectrum, with Burns's strong sympathetic outlook clearly formed by a series of biographical and literary influences. Burns's appreciation of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is clearly encoded in his specific intertextual reference to the philosopher's work and his appreciation of a sympathetic outlook. The product of exclusively male enlightenment spaces, Smith's promotion of sympathy also informed the wider sentimental movement which in turn, produced the 'Man of Feeling' archetype, famously outlined in Mackenzie's novel. Greatly appreciated by Burns, this novel evidently influenced Burns's expectations of how a man should conduct himself – providing a model of sympathetic masculinity for the relatively isolated Ayrshire boy. This expectation for men to be led by feeling was propped up by William Burnes's championing of feeling alongside education and religion. The family patriarch's influence cannot be underestimated when considering Burns's perceptions of masculinity. Burnes introduced his son to key Enlightenment concepts despite their isolation from thriving Enlightenment cities. These biographical, philosophical, and literary formations of sympathetic tendencies culminated to produce Burns's 'Man of Feeling' persona which was most extremely enacted in the epistolary character of Sylvander, which he created in his personal writing to Agnes McLehose. Sylvander outwardly achieves the centuries sought after 'manly tear', displaying the emotional and physical capacity of moral weeping. More publicly, Burns enacts both sides of the Smithian sympathetic interaction in 'To a Mouse' – becoming the ultimate 'Man of Feeling' who can sympathise with the smallest of creatures while emphasising his validity as an object of sympathy. Here, he embodies the masculine notion of reason, presenting that his ability to rationalise leads to distressing anxiety of the future. His sentimentalism is a key aspect of his life and work, forming an aspect of his masculinity which conveys his thinking and acting through feeling.

While sentimentalism lies at one extreme of the spectrum, Burns's entire character is clearly fashioned to appeal to the different audiences he is writing for, which in turn impacts the form of masculinity he presents. Aspects of sentimentalism remain in the epistles, where Burns finds affinity with men who are experiencing similar financial anxieties. However, the

voice found in the epistles differs from the overtly emotional voice of Sylvander, as Burns experiments with a cheekier persona; bonding personally with Ayrshire's ram-stam boys over sexual pursuits of women and mocking men of a higher socio-economic status by portraying them as effeminate. Burns's socio-economic identity is contingent on his position as a farmer, which has warranted some critical attention. However, this study has demonstrated that Burns's continuous emphasis of this occupation forms a crucial aspect of his presentation of himself as a man. By highlighting labouring toil in his verse, prefaces, and commonplace book, Burns conveys his agricultural occupation as central to his character; this physical strain for economic advancement embodying the masculine nature of manual labour which R.W. Connell outlines in *Masculinities*. This presentation of his masculinity is emphasised by his contrast with Coila in 'The Vision' - a poem which embodies his early attempts at fashioning himself in the image of a 'ploughman poet'. Thus, Burns's friendships amongst men of his socio-economic position and his repetitive attention to himself as a man of physical labour demonstrate that his status as a working-class man critically impacts his presentation of his masculinity. Burns's early life and writing is characterised by his creation of his own literary brotherhood, where he honours the sympathetic hearts, sexual tendencies, and hard work of his poor friends. He admits the late Robert Fergusson to this brotherhood on the grounds of their common suffering; finding a model for masculinity in the educated poet who wrote in Scots – a language which had been largely feminized throughout Burns's life due to the primary role women had in transmitting Scots song. However, when Burns positioned himself as a model of masculinity for his younger brother William, he turned away from the priorities of the brotherhood he had designed in his literary output. Burns's advice to William opposes the sexually-charged, rebellious character he had presented in the epistles, conveying a paternal side which largely disapproves of his own masculine values. Thus, Burns both emphasised and downplayed aspects of his masculinity, ultimately demonstrating that class and audience deeply influence the fashioning of his masculinity.

The impact of socio-economic rank and intended audience on Burns's presentation of masculinity is further demonstrated by his interaction with club culture. Burns forms his own clubs in rural areas with his writings as a founder of these clubs providing fascinating insight into his attempts to influence the masculinity of the men around him. The final rule of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club promotes his specific blend of sentimental and sexually charged masculinity, which he sets as a standard for prospective members. This attempt at utilising his own brand of masculinity as a model of masculinity to be emulated by others is conveyed by

his choice of literature for the Monkland Friendly Society as he curates a list of texts which were essential to his own formation of masculinity. Burns's involvement in Freemasonry tells a different story, with Burns exhibiting significantly less control in the club due to his lower socio-economic position. The idea of classless brotherhood, promises of conviviality, and prospects of social mobility which Freemasonry promoted appealed to the poor farmer with literary ambitions and an appetite for homosocial companionship. Although he does access this society, and in doing so displays a degree of social mobility, he never finds true equality amongst his male peers in Edinburgh lodges due to his lionization which is heavily informed by his socio-economic position. Overall, Freemasonry fails to meet Burns's expectations of a classless brotherhood, yet he continues to hold the concept in high regard. The Crochallan Fencibles is where Burns finds a sphere which fulfils his appetite for convivial fuelled intellectual sparring. Here, Burns unifies members through his sexually explicit bawdry; via humorous phallocentric writing, Burns appeals to men across the differing socio-economic ranks by appealing to their shared masculinity Significantly phallocentric, this bawdry caters specifically to men by promoting masculine authority through phallic power.

Lying at one extreme end of the spectrum, this male dominance conveyed via phallocentrism is an aspect of Burns's life and work which propels masculine authority through androcentric depictions of heterosexual relationships. While men are afforded the privilege of reasoning and feeling, he almost exclusively portrays women on the 'body' side of the 'mind/body dualism', conveying a lack of depth in his writing about the opposite sex. While Burns's *oeuvre* portrays masculinity and masculine authority as multifaceted and complex, his work is primarily androcentric with the feminine rarely permitted into the sphere of reason. However, 'Tam o' Shanter' provides an exception to this tendency, when Burns critically interrogates the validity of masculine authority, conveying his inconsistent interaction with gender roles and power. Overall, Burns's interaction with male authority is complex insofar as he affirms power structures which favour males through phallic power and the discrediting of women's liberation discourse, while also highlighting the fragility of those men who are considered to embody masculine authority.

While it could be argued that Burns's masculinity is contradictory – encompassing aspects which cannot exists within one man – this study has demonstrated that these gendered expressions exist simultaneously on a spectrum, each a valid and important aspect of his gendered expressions. Of course, these expressions depend on a variety of contexts including the audience which these expressions were presented to and the standards of masculinity

which were promoted in late eighteenth-century Scotland. Thus, Burns's unique social mobility (which was afforded him following his poetic success and propelled by the Freemasons) is critical to his display of such a diverse range of masculine expressions. Burns accesses spheres of men from different walks of life. These men's different occupations and lifestyles, as well as the various social setting which he finds himself interacting with them in, impacts which nuanced masculinity he presents. Each one of these expressions are as valid as the other, therefore there is no fundamental nature of his masculinity – it must be considered wholly as a spectrum when addressing the gendered dimensions of his life and creative output. Thus, further research into the men of the eighteenth-century rural labouring class could provide a more multifaceted understanding of masculinities, which do not prescribe to the rarified hegemonic model. Furthermore, literary and historical influences such as the rise of sentimentalism, the centrality of club culture, and the culture of bawdy verse blend to explain that each of Burns's masculinities were the product of the specific moment he lived and wrote in. While concerns surrounding the morality of Burns's masculinity remain in public and academic consciousness, this study has conveyed the importance of accounting for historical, literary, and biographical contexts to produce a fruitful understanding of a topic which could be subjected to an excessive level of moralising. Further studies of Burns and gender should account for the historical contexts which have been surveyed here to illustrate an accurate picture of Burns's relationship with gender.

While Burns lived and wrote in the eighteenth century, his varied masculinities address the pertinent question which fuels the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity': what does it mean to be a man? Burns diverse range of masculine expressions demonstrates that there is not a uniform answer to this query – gendered expressions contain multitudes which are crucially influenced by social, economic, biographical, and geographical factors. Furthermore, one can inhabit varying masculinities – Burns was simultaneously a sympathetic 'Man of Feeling', a father-figure, the subject of objectification, a rebellious ram-stam boy, a friend to many men, a toiling labourer, an adulterer, Sylvander, and a self-proclaimed 'Fornicator'.

There is undoubtedly scope for further research on the reception of Burns's masculinity, and the ways in which it was read and understood by various audiences in the years, decades, and centuries following his death. As demonstrated in the introduction, this reception often reflects contemporary social concerns – such as the MeToo movement – and this can be charted since Burns’s death with varying movement, tropes, and stereotypes

manipulating his masculinity to further agendas or align with what is fashionable. These contexts have included moralistic and patriarchal Victorian values; the twentieth-century socialist 'hard-man' tropes; to the rise in sexually liberated outlooks in the later twentieth century. This thesis represents significant progress towards a fuller interrogation and understanding of the creation of a mythology which has dominated perceptions of Burns – in many ways the archetypical Scottish man- from his death to the present day.

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