I

Manuscripts and Typescripts

1786

Burns, Robert. Letter, 1786, August 19, New Cumnock to Monsr. Thomas Campbell, Pencloe. 1 item (1 s.); 16.7 x 18.7 cm. Written from “Mr J. Merry’s Saturday morn.”

Farewell letter. Burns’s use of “this side of the Atlantic” suggests that the letter was written during the period he was contemplating emigrating from Scotland to Jamaica.

Thomas Campbell owned the small estate of Pencloe in Glen Afton, about 2 mi. from New Cumnock Kirk. In blue folder, stamped in gold on spine with bookseller’s description and transcription.

Letters, I, 48.

Holograph letter from Robert Burns to Thomas Campbell, August 19, 1786
1787

Burns, Robert.
“Cuif, Crank, Claw, Crushin.”
1 fragment; 3 x 10.5 cm.
Holograph manuscript from the glossary to Poems chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (Edinburgh, 1787).
The words Burns chose to explain in his glossary indicate the kind of readership he expected. The glossary to the Kilmarnock edition, anticipating readers primarily from the southwest of Scotland, had been only five pages, but, on the advice of his friends, for the wider audience Burns and his publisher could expect to purchase the Edinburgh and London editions, Burns expanded the glossary to twenty-five pages, even glossing quite simple variant Scottish spellings of words common both to Scots and English.

Burns, Robert.
“Yon High Mossy Mountains, Sae Lofty & Wide.”
[1787?].
1 item (1 s.); 23 x 18.5 cm.
Title from first line of manuscript.
Accompanied by a related letter of 1829.
Short lyric published in 1792, in the Scots Musical Museum, v. 2, with the altered first line “Yon wild mossy mountains” and other textual changes. The accompanying autograph letter signed dated 1829 from J. E. Perochon (Joseph Elias Perochon, a French Royalist and son-in-law of Mrs. Dunlop), outlines the provenance of the manuscript. He recounts that Burns “sent this song to my wife in the first year he began to compose his inimitable verses.”
Bound in full dark red morocco by Sangorski & Sutcliffe.

“Elegy on Sir J. H[unter] Blair.”
3 l.; 30 cm.
Holograph transcript in an unknown hand, with notes added in Burns's hand, and addressed in Burns's hand to Robert Aiken, Ayr [July 1787], with a printed copy of the same from an unidentified edition of The Poems of Robert Burns, p. 281–282.
Leaf 3 is addressed in Burns's hand, with the remnants of a seal.
The Scottish financier, and former Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Sir James Hunter Blair, Bt., died on July 1, 1787, aged 47. Like Burns, Hunter Blair was a freemason, and he had subscribed to eight copies of Burns’s Edinburgh edition. Only two weeks after Blair’s death, Burns (who was in Mauchline) wrote to his friend Robert Aiken enclosing “rather an incorrect” copy of his elegy (presumably this copy) and commenting that “The melancholy occasion of the foregoing Poem affects not only individuals but a Country. That I have lost a Friend is but repeating after Caledonia”
Letters, I, 128.

Tytler, Alexander Fraser.
Translation of a passage in the Third Book of Lucan’s Pharsalia.
1 sheet folded (4 s.); 23 x 18.4 cm.
Holograph manuscript, with cover note to Robert Burns, from George Square, Edinburgh, March 10 [1787].
A recurrent fascination of Scottish intellectuals was the relation between primitive cultures and modern civilization. Tytler, Professor of Universal History at Edinburgh University, sent Burns this extract (which concerns the ancient Druids and human sacrifice) to follow up a discussion they had the previous evening.

1788

Burns, Robert.
Letter, 1788 [January 12], to Clarinda.
Manuscripts and Typescripts / 3

3 items; 22 x 16.4 and smaller in green morocco binding measuring 29.3 cm.
Bound with prints of silhouette portraits of Burns and Clarinda.
In the first months of 1788, Burns and Mrs. M’Lehose wrote to each other frequently, sometimes more than once in a day. The published editions of their correspondence make clear that some letters had gone missing or had been omitted.

This letter, the second that day from Sylvander to Clarinda.
Note the suspicious-looking mark on the paper where the poet has written, “I have read yours again: it has blotted my paper.” It is left to the reader to decide whether or not he or she is looking at the dried remains of a teardrop.
Bound by G. Walters.

Letters, I, 205.

Burns, Robert.
Letter, 1788, [February 14] to Clarinda.
1 item (2 s.); 22.4 x 20.4 cm.
Autograph letter signed from Burns as “Sylvander” to “Clarinda” (Agnes M’Lehose).
“Clarinda, matters are grown very serious with us . . . I esteemed, I lov’d you at first sight . . . I esteem you, I love you, as a friend; I admire you, I love you, as a Woman, beyond any one in all the circle of Creation. . . . Expect me at eight . . . yours most entirely—Sylvander.”
Bound by G. Walters.

Letters, I, 234

MacKenzie, Henry.
Letter, 1788, February 13, Brown Square, to Robert Burns, at Mr. Cruikshank’s.
1 item (4 s.); 19.4 x 13.5 cm.
Autograph letter signed with manuscript jottings adding up a column of numbers (1000, 500, 1500, 250 for a total of 3250) by Robert Burns relating to the print runs for the two issues of the 1787 Edinburgh Poems.

M’Lehose, Agnes.
Letter, 1788, February 5.
1 item (3 s.); 23.7 x 19.9 cm.
Unpublished love letter from “Clarinda” to “Sylvander,” written in the third person but signed “Clarinda.”
In this newly recovered letter, Clarinda writes, “I feel a sensation so delightful, so serene, as makes me almost hope that Heaven itself approves our union.” The letter had briefly surfaced in 1928 (see Glasgow Herald, March 31, 1928: Burns Chronicle, 2nd ser., IV, 1929), and then was again lost from scholarly awareness for nearly 80 years.

Holograph letter from “Clarinda” (Agnes M’Lehose) to “Sylvander”

Burns, Robert.
1 item (2 s.); 18.2 x 22.7 cm.
Illustrates Burns’s relationships with Robert Ainslie, Dr. Blacklock, Lord Glencairn, and John Miers. Burns recommends the profile painter John Miers to Ainslie. “Mr. Miers, Profile painter in your town, has executed a
profile of Dr. Blacklock for me; do me the favor to call for it, and sit to him yourself for me which put in the same size as the Doctor’s. . . . I propose hanging Lord Glencairn, the Dr. & you, in trio, over my new chimney-piece that is to be.” The “chimney-piece” is a reference to Burns establishing his home with Jean Armour.

Robert Ainslie was a law student in Edinburgh when he first met Robert Burns in 1787. Ainslie accompanied Burns on his border tour in 1787. He later practiced law in Edinburgh and is known as the author of several works on agricultural, legal, and financial subjects, as well as *A Father’s Gift to His Children* and *Reasons for the Hope that Is in Us*.

Burns, Robert. *Letter, 1788, July 18, to John Smith, Jr., Bookseller, Glasgow.*

Burns informs Ainslie of a suit between Dr. Adam and Mr. Nicol regarding comments repeated by a lady, Mrs. Mc****se [Agnes M’Lehose or “Clarinda” of the Clarinda-Sylvander correspondence]. He also asks Ainslie to inquire about a position for William Burns, Robert’s brother, in a saddler’s shop. Burns instructs Ainslie not to trouble himself with Hamilton. In the letter he also refers to Mr. Cruikshank’s role in the suit, as well as Dr. Blacklock and Signior Dasti, Jr.

*Letters, I, 309.*

Mitchell Catalogue, no. 889996

Burns, Robert.

Letter, [1788, October 11], to Robert Ainslie.

One of only two known letters to the Glasgow bookseller John Smith.

*Letters, I, 298.*

Burns, Robert.

Letter, 1788 August 23rd, Mauchline, to Mr. Robert Ainslie, writer.

Enclosed with an annotated copy of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*.

Burns met Robert Ainslie (1766–1838) in early 1787 when the poet was in Edinburgh seeing a new edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* through the press, and Ainslie subscribed to two copies of the work. Ainslie and Burns became intimate friends and Ainslie accompanied Burns on the initial part of his Border tour in May 1787. This is Ainslie’s copy of *Poems* with his signature on it. Burns has filled blanks in over thirty places, giving the names of people referred to in the volume. In most cases Burns followed the practice of giving the first initial, followed by the number of asterisks which represent the omitted letters, and ending with the last letter of the name in question. Local readers would have had little difficulty filling in the blanks, but...
Edinburgh readers would not have had the same familiarity with the subjects. “Death and Doctor Horn-book” was written in early 1785 but was not included in the Kilmarnock edition of 1786. In this copy of the Edinburgh edition Burns fully identifies the subject of his satire as John Wilson, schoolmaster at Tarbolton. To supplement his teaching salary Wilson operated a grocery shop where he also sold medicines. At no cost to his clients the schoolmaster would dispense medical advice and then sell them the required remedies. Tipped in to the front of this volume is a portion of a letter from Burns to Ainslie postmarked Dumfries OC 18 [1788]. It seems most likely that a later owner rather than Ainslie himself has tipped in this fragment because the addressee would have had the entire letter in his possession and would not, one supposes, have cut up the letter and tipped in only a portion of it.

Letters, I, 329.

Burns, Robert.
Fragment from an excise ledger in the poet’s hand.
[1788–1796?].
1 item (2 s.); 3.5 x 16.3 cm.
43 words in the poet’s hand.

Burns, Robert.
Fragment from an excise ledger in the poet’s hand.
[1788–1796?].
1 item; 3.1 x 11.3 cm.
6 words in the poet’s hand.

1789

Burns, Robert.
Letter, 1789, January 17 to John Smith, Jr., Glasgow.
1 sheet folded (4 s.); 23 x 18.6 cm.
Burns asks Smith to send him the value of nine copies of “my book which I sent you last from Kilmck. and are yet unaccounted for, by John Glover, Carrier to Mauchline [crossed through] Dumfries.”

Together with Burns’s July 18th 1788 letter above, one gets a sense of the complexity and delay in settling accounts where both individual subscribers and multiple booksellers were involved. These are the only two letters known to the Glasgow bookseller John Smith.

Letters, I, 355.

Burns, Robert.
“An Address to the Unco Guid.”

In a running dispute the Reverend William Auld, minister at Mauchline, charged Burns’s friend Gavin Hamilton (1751–1805) with unnecessary absences from church, setting out on a journey on a Sabbath and habitual neglect of family worship. The Presbytery of Ayr found in Hamilton’s favor, as did the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr on appeal. The pitting of Auld Licht (conservative) against New Licht (liberal) aroused considerable interest and animosity in the vicinity, and gave rise to Burns’s great satire “Holy Willie’s Prayer.”

Burns sent a copy of Randall’s Christian Benevolence to John Leslie with the following inscription: “To Mr John Leslie from Robt Burns, As a remembrance of his interest in the Case
lately before Ayr Presbytery—June 1789.” Burns then transcribed the entire text of his poem “An Address to the Unco Guid or the Rigidly Righteous,” signing the work Robt Burns. This appears to be the only known manuscript in the poet’s hand of the work. A collation with the first printing of the poem, in the 1787 Edinburgh edition, shows several minor differences and one major variant. In stanza seven, where Burns points out that “To step aside is human,” the last two lines read “And just as lamely can ye mark, / How far perhaps they rue it.” The manuscript version appears to make better sense with the word “plainly” in lieu of “lamely.”

Blacklock, Thomas.
“Dr. Burns, Thou Brother of My Heart.”
1 item (2 s.); 32.2 x 19.4 cm.
August 24 1789, as printed with Burns’s reply in Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. Transcribed with additional notes by Sarah Blacklock, the poet’s niece. Burns’s decision in summer 1786 to abandon his planned emigration and instead go to Edinburgh followed an encouraging letter from a blind clergyman–poet, Dr. Thomas Blacklock. An Ayrshire colleague had sent Blacklock, by then living in Edinburgh, a copy of the newly-published Kilmarnock edition, and Burns later wrote to Dr. John Moore that Blacklock’s letter of September 1786 “fired me so much that away I posted to Edinburgh without a single acquaintance in town.” (Letters, I, 145) In 1789, the two friends exchanged rhyming epistles (initiated by this poem), and Blacklock, like Burns, contributed songs to Johnson’s Scots Musical Museum. Burns’s response to Blacklock’s poem began “Wow, but your letter made me vauntie!” and confided his acceptance of a government job: “I’m turn’d a Gauger.” While the manuscript was made available to Burns’s biographer, James Currie, no manuscript was known to James Kinsley. The Roy Collection version is the only known manuscript and constitutes unique evidence from a friendship of crucial importance in establishing Burns’s poetic reputation.

1790

Burns, Robert.
“When I Sleep &c.”
[ca. 1790].
1 l.; 22 x 17.8 cm.
Date from Kinsley.
Kinsley title: “Ay Waukin O,” (287.)
This page gives two alternative drafts (8 lines in all) for the third stanza of Burns’s song “Ay waukin,” or “Summer’s a pleasant time,” first published as song 213 in Johnson’s Scots Musical Museum, volume III (Edinburgh, 1790), but without indication of Burns’s authorship. The first version includes a variant line found in none of the other extant manuscripts of this song. In green morocco binding by C. Walters.

Burns, Robert.
Portion of a letter.
File copy of a letter from the Thornhill Letter Book.
[c. 1790].
1 l.; 9 x 20 cm.
Following the success of the Edinburgh edition, Burns sought a government position as an officer in the Excise. He was commissioned on July 14, 1788, and served until his death, first based at the farm at Ellisland, and then, from November 1791, in the town of Dumfries, where for a time in 1794–1795 he served as Acting Supervisor. A “strong oak chest” containing excise documents from the Thornhill...
Dr. Burns, thou brother of my heart,
Both for thy virtues and thy wit,
Hold it always dearest for thee,
Rays on nature's bounty bright.
With pleasure on thy breast to dwell,
And shower thy soul with all the Muses.
Whether he laugh with easy grace,
And swallow down the grapes three.
Nay, but the softer passions are,
And gush the soul with grief surging.
The Nymphs were evidently sold
To love, for organ tunes to build.
And again, for joy to know,
With sense of late how matters go.
How little thy much loved John has felt
What tremblers the fear of wealth?
Whether, the Muse pretends to smile,
And all thy present cares become?
Whether bright hope has eloped
And how thy dealing in arts there?
For me, with grief, simply great
Since I saw my hero's boundless bent.
Spurts directly my heart, I mean.
But grief, and health, my returns.
No more of gloomy thoughts or fancy,
I loath all surgery, live all day.
By turns my book, my friend, enjoy.
And there my declining hours pass,
Happy while not these hours remain;
Yet Burns could form the character

With modest recall of former
Salute our once his humble servant,
Edin. August 24th, 1803
Thomas Blacklock.

What think you of this my good friend? I know
honestly scarce you that it rejoices the heart of
your every sincere friend so

Sarah Blacklock
office (near Ellisland), purchased at a
sale of Burns's effects by the anti-
quary Joseph Train, was exhibited by
the Greenock Burns Club in 1859, and
pages from it in Burns's handwriting
were among the relics displayed in the
Glasgow Memorial Exhibition in
1896. In a case restored by Ethering-
ton with a copy of the engraving
“Robt Burns & Nanse Tinnock the
hostess at Mauchline,” published
Mar. 1, 1805, Vernor & Hood, etc.

1791

Burns, Robert.
Promissory note, April 6, 1791, Dum-
fries to Alexander Crombie, Dalswin-
ton.
1 item (2 s.); 8.5 x 20 cm.
This record, carrying an official six-
penny tax stamp, for a loan of 20
pounds that Burns gave to a local mason indicates the way that in late
18th century small towns, handwrit-
ten drafts and IOU's substituted for
more formal banking. The reverse
shows that Burns subsequently
endorsed the IOU over for repay-
ment to a Dumfries architect,
Thomas Boyd.

Burns, Robert.
Letter, 1791, [October?] to Robert
Cleghorn.
1 item (4 s.); 19 x 12 cm.
With a proofsheet of The Whistle
enclosed.
Robert Cleghorn, of Saughton, was a
fellow-member of the Edinburgh
club the Crochallan Fencibles. With
this letter enclosing for Cleghorn one
of the author’s twelve proof-sheets of
The Whistle, Burns hinted at confi-
dential personal problems on which
he wished advice, and told Cleghorn
that he was giving up the farm at
Ellisland.
Letters, II, 112.

Tytler, Alexander Fraser.
Proof Sheets for “Tam o’ Shanter: A
Tale.”
p. 199–201; 25 cm.
“Tam o’ Shanter: A Tale” was published
in Francis Grose, The Antiquities of
Scotland, second volume (London,
1791).

From the library of Alexander Fraser
Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, with his
marginal emendations. Among those
to whom Burns sent the separate off-
prints of his poem was the lawyer and
historian Alexander Fraser Tytler
(1747–1813). Tytler wrote a detailed
largely-appreciative response, but
advised Burns to cut as out-of-place
the four lines Tytler has marked on
this copy (“the hit at the lawyer and
priest”), advice Burns took when
reprinting “Tam o’ Shanter” in Poems,
Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (1793).
Holograph note: “Burns left out these
four lines desire as being incongruous
with the other circumstances of pure
horror.”

1792

Burns, Robert.
Letter, [1792, February?], Dumfries to
John McMurdo, Drumlanrig.
1 item (2 p.); 25.5 cm.
With original envelope (one sheet
now unfolded) addressed to “John
McMurdo Esq., Drumlanrig. With a
parcel.” Notation on envelope in
McMurdo’s (?) hand: “1792 Mr.
Burns.”
Roy, 499A; Ferguson 604 (misdated
1793, corrected in MLN, Nov. 1951)
In the first section, Burns writes:
“... here is the six guineas [owed
McMurdo]; I now don’t owe a
shilling to man–or Woman either.” In
the second section, Burns writes: “I
think I once mentioned something to
you of a collection of Scots songs I
have for some years been making.
to ruins. It is one of the eldest parishes in Scotland, and still retains
these privileges: the minister of Ayr is obliged to marry and baptize in
it, and also here to hold his parochial catechising. The magistrates
attempted,

Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
    Evanesing amid the storm.—
Nae man can tether time or tide,
The hour approaches Tam maun ride;
    That hour o' nights black arch the key-flame,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;
And sic a night he takes the road in
As ne'er poor finner was abroad in.

The wind blew, as 'twad blown its leaf;
The rattling flowers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd
Loud, deep, and long, the thunder bellow'd:
That night, a child might underland
The deal had busines on his hand.

       Whal uncomon fue a big grey mornay, Maggie!
A better never lifted leg,
Tam delpit on thre' dub and mire,
Desponding wind, and rain, and fire:
Whyles holding fa't his gude blue bonnet;
Whyles crowning o'er an auld Scots bonnet;
Whyles glowing round wi' prudent care;
Whyles boggles catch him unawares;
Kirk-Alaway was drawing nigh,
Where gaiets and hoolies nightly cry.

By this time he was crost the ford,
Where in the saw the chapman fmeet'd;
And pa't the birks and malle flane,
Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
And thro' the whis, and by the cairn,
Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the tree, aboon the well,
Where Mungo's mither hang'd herelf:
Before him, Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near, and more near, the thunders roll;
When, glimmering thro' groaning trees,
Kirk-Alaway fearn in a bleeze;
Thro' ilk a bore the beams were glancing,
And loud refoyled mirth and dancing.

Inspiring, bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us for'n:

Wi' tippeny, we fear nae evil;
Wi' u' squeebie, we'll face the devil;
The swats fur greem'd in Tamnie's noodle,
Faire-play, he can dae a boddlin;
But Maggy flood, right fair aloonit's d
Till by the heel and hand admonith'd,
She veer'd forward on the light;
And, wow! Tam spair an unco fight.

Warlocks and witches in a dance,
Nae cothill breet new Frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys and reels,
Put life and mattle in their backs.—
A winnock-bunker in the Eath,
There fat and Nick in shape o' them:
A toazick tyke, black, grim, and lage;
To aigh, a good mister was his charge:
He followed the pipes and garth them skirl;
Till roof and rafters a' d lawd dirl.—
Coffins flood round, like open preffes,
That flaw'd the dead in their laft dress's;
And the same deeville cameral flight;
Each in its cauld hand held a light;
By which heroic Tam was able
to note upon the half table,
A murderers bains, in gibbets-airns;
Twa fppa-lang, wee, unchristian'd bairns;
A thief, new cutted frea a rape,
Wi' his lait gaf his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi' blood red-ruffled;
Five scymitars, wi' murder curled;
A gutter which a babe had frangled;
A knife a father's throat had mangled;
Whom his ain son of life bereft;
The grey bairns yet flack to the heat;
Wi' main of horrible and awful;
That even to name was he unlawfu';—
Three lawyers tongers, tur'd in side out;
Wi' ley beam'd like a beggar's cloot;
Three griefs' hearts, rootten, black as much;
Lay flinking, vile, in every neuk.

As Tamnie glower'd, amaz'd and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew.
I send you a perusal of what I have gathered. I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, & five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice you. When you are tired of them, please leave them with Mr. Clint of the King's Arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world . . . 

The “collection of Scots songs” to which Burns refers was his manuscript of “The Merry Muses of Caledonia.” The songs included in this collection were circulated to a few chosen friends. The manuscript disappeared after Burns’s death, possibly removed from his papers by Dr. James Currie. In 1799 a collection of songs appeared anonymously, but bearing Burns’s working title. The following year Currie included this letter in his edition of Burns’s works, but added a spurious sentence: “A very few of them [the poems] are my own.” (Liverpool, 1800). The extra sentence may have been intended to play down Burns’s role in producing the collection of bawdy poems.

John McMurdo (1743–1803) was Chamberlain to the Duke of Queensberry at Drumlanrig. He and Burns probably met in 1788 and remained friends until Burns’s death in 1796.

Burns’s poem “Bonnie Jean” was written about McMurdo’s younger daughter. McMurdo became one of the trustees of the money raised for Burns’s widow and children.

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“The foregoing Ballad was composed as I galloped from Cumbertrees to town, after spending the day with the Family of Mayfield.”

Not seen by Kinsley.

1794

Burns, Robert.
Letter, 1794, May, to Collector Syme, Reyedall. 
2 l. (2 s.); 20 x 16.5 cm.
Letter with poem “To Mr. Syme—with a present of a dozen of Porter,” addressed to Collector Syme, with contemporary endorsement in another hand, dated May 1794. This extempore verse, annotated as written at the “Jerusalem Tavern, Dumfries, Monday even,” was included by James Currie in his *Works of Robert Burns* (1800), but without Syme’s name in the title or in line 4 of the poem.

1796

Roscoe, William.
“Rear High Thy Bleak Majestic Hills.”
[1796].
1 l.; 29 x 23.5 cm. and 1 engraving

1800

Burns, Robert.
“What Ails You Now Ye Lousie—”
1 item; 30 x 18.4 cm. and smaller.
Burns’s answer to “Epistle from a Taylor to Robert Burns.”

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