

ROBERT EDWARDS' COMMONPLACE  
BOOK AND SCOTS LITERARY  
TRADITION

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In 1603 with the Union of the Crowns Scotland lost its royal court, whose presence had for ages been a focus for the cultivation of music and poetry, sacred and secular alike in Chapel Royal or Music of the Household, with courtly makar in residence and visiting minstrel or *seannachie*. For a knowledge of the cultivation of courtly music and poetry of Scotland continuing in the realm into the seventeenth century we must draw on the surviving family libraries, often in manuscript, of the great houses or on the extant documents of musical education in such institutions as the burgh "sang schuil". Some of these have been studied in a series of articles current in the *Transactions of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*—the music-books of the family of Forbes of Tolquhon, Forbes-Leith of Whitehaugh or the books of David and Andro Melvill that are linked with the Aberdeen Sang Schuil. The valuable and extensive collection of music-books in manuscript made by the Maules of Panmure and the Ramsays of Dalhousie is the next to be studied. These are the property of the Earl of Dalhousie who has generously placed them on loan to the National Library.

No. 11 of the Panmure Music Library is a commonplace-book of music and poetry planned and compiled by Robert Edwards (1617-1696). His life-records are noted in Hew Scott's *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (Edinburgh 1925) Vol. 5, p. 367. He became Minister of Murroes Parish and may over a period of years have joined for music of devotion and recreation with the family of Maule of Panmure, who were his friends. A clergyman of wide musical culture, he cherished pre-Reformation polyphonic song and psalmody, part-song continental and Scottish as well as Scots ballad from oral tradition. He

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left us in his commonplace-book an extremely valuable record of several ages of music and song in Scotland and a key to the taste of an epoch.

In 1633, just at the time when Robert Edwards was compiling his commonplace-book of music and poetry, song and psalmody, a document was prepared, against King Charles' coming north, on the state of his Chapel Royal in Scotland. Music at its disposal was listed—"all sorts of English, French, Dutch, Spaynish, Latin, Italian and Old Scotch musick, vocall and instrumentall". This to a modern eye would clearly indicate art-song sacred and secular, part-writing (The resemblance in scope to Edwards' anthology is interesting). But a hundred years ago the reference to "Old Scotch musick" was understood very differently. William Daune, who printed and discussed the document in his *Ancient Scottish Melodies* took it to mean "the old popular music of Scotland", in fact the *native air* (Daune 1838: 159; on pp. 365-7 is printed "Information touching the Chappell-Royall of Scotland", signed E. Kellie). No art-music, no part-song of Scottish courtly provenance was envisaged. For many years afterwards opinion and even enquiry were firmly set in this direction.

New bearings in thought about song in Scotland date from the establishing of the existence of such a courtly repertory of song, the demonstration of its extent and of its nature, and the consequent discussion of a habit of courtly song-writing in Scotland during the sixteenth century. In the re-assembly of this repertory, from which a selection was published in *Music of Scotland 1500-1700* (Elliott and Shire 1957), Robert Edwards' anthology was a key document, as Dr. Elliott shows below (pp. 50-56). This holds true in general as in detail, for the words as much as for the music.

For knowledge of older Scots "lyric" poetry one had depended almost entirely on the summarising content of the great Bannatyne and Maitland Collections with the early Asloan Manuscript and the late, posthumous record of Montgomerie's writings in the Margaret Ker (the "Drummond") manuscript.<sup>1</sup> To these the critic or historian of literature would add the named list of songs, tales and dances from the *Complaynt of Scotland* of 1548 (Murray 1872) and the repertory of song drawn on for *travesti* in *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (Mitchell 1896-7). But when the evidence of the music-books was studied and adduced it became possible to demonstrate how many of these poems were songs, and in what traditions,

musical as well as literary, they had been composed and enjoyed.

It became evident, for instance—as I stated in a broadcast talk in 1954—how many of Bannatyne's "ballatis of luvē . . . songis of luvē" and "remeids of luvē" were songs, and court songs, part-writing, at that. It was possible, too, to show the courtly nature of the originals of "Godlie" versions whether Scots, English or continental. Indeed it meant the restoration of certain ghost songs, recorded tenuously in these two song-list sources: "For lufe of one" (Cf. Shire 1954), "Rycht sore opprest" or "Alace that same sweit face" (Elliott and Shire 1957). For all of these we may draw on Robert Edwards' book. For "O lustie May" (Bannatyne CCLXXIX) it was now clear, from the traces of repeated phrases retained by the Bannatyne scribe, that he had known the piece with its music. Robert Edwards gives us, besides musical parts, a full verbal text and he indicates precisely how these repeated phrases are to be sung (The reader and singer may care to compare this favourite Franco-Scottish part-song as edited from collated sources in *Music of Scotland* with the version presented in *An Elizabethan Song Book* by W. H. Auden, C. Kallman and N. Greenberg, who do not take into account evidence as to provenance, style or meaning of the song [Auden etc. 1957: XII-XIII, 226-9]).

The dating by style of music, outlined by Dr. Elliott, helps us to separate out into different epochs the very large number of "lyrics" recorded by Bannatyne and the Maitlands, many of which are anonymous and without indications of age. Thanks largely to Robert Edwards' book we can envisage styles in song-writing under King James V, first with his English Queen Mother, Margaret Tudor, long-lived if only intermittently at court, then with his French consorts of whom the second, Marie de Lorraine, substantially outlived him. An Anglo-Scottish style of song was uncovered in, for instance, "Alas that same sueit face" a variant of whose words was known in England about 1535. Franco-Scottish style, well substantiated, we see in "Lantron of Lowe" (Bannatyne CCLXXXIX) and "Support" (Bannatyne CCLXXVII), the first by Steill, whom I take to be the King's favourite, George Steill, dead in 1540. The words of the second song are from a chanson of Marot "Secourez moy ma Dame par amours", 1530 (Grenier XXXX: 451). Against these known songs, poems similar in style and content can be studied.

Later, Franco-Scottish styles appear side by side with Scots-Tottelian. A wide-spread dance-song pattern throws new light on metres of Alexander Scott as well as on the “much cuttit and broken” stanzas devised by courtiers of King James VI. And we can see writing of the later “Castalian” poets moving towards association with the “tuneful air” as written by Campion. In tracing all these lines we are indebted, more fully than can be stated in this summary, to evidence from Robert Edwards’ book.

I cite two instances only. With “Onlie to you in world that I loued best”, the words by Scott hitherto evaluated in isolation are seen to be closely involved with an earlier lyric, of which Scott’s poem is an “answer” or an “imitatio”, an “overgoing” (Shire 1954: 46-52). Scott’s making is involved, too, with the music, a French chanson that matches both pieces. Then “O Ladie Wenus heire complaine” supplies on the one hand the link between Scott’s “Depairte” and the music to which it was enjoyed. On the other hand, taken with the “moralisation” that survives to its music, it lets us glimpse a Scots song in Venus service that was enjoyed at the mid-sixteenth-century—that may quite possibly have been the one used in Sir David Lindsay’s *Thrie Estaitis* for the scene before Dame Sensuality’s bower (discussed informally Shire 1959b: 10).

We depend largely on musical evidence from Robert Edwards’ book in demonstrating how often Montgomerie’s poems were songs, written to match music already existing or written in the expectation that the words would be matched with music or set as part-song. This consideration has brought a fuller understanding of the courtly tradition, musical as well as literary, in which he was working, and with it a pertinent assessment of his individual achievement in this field. Attention was drawn to his close association with James Lauder, musician of King James VI’s court (Shire 1959a: 15-18). We no longer can believe that Montgomerie’s lyrics travelled to England to be set there by madrigalist or composer of lute-song as was asserted by the German critic of 1913 (Bolle 1913). Movement indeed is seen to be the other way: we find in Scots music-books such as this the English song in “the Scots way of it”.

There is no space here to review the many interesting literary questions raised by the instrumental music in the Edwards anthology, the pieces for cittern or keyboard (And now we do enter the realm of “old popular music of Scotland”). What words were sung, we wonder, to this early record of “The

lass of Petie's Mill"? How often do we find a broadside with a tune here in Scotland quite different in idiom from the one to which it was current in England? Contrariwise, to what tune did Edwards sing the verses "Vale fa hir doun by" which are without music in the manuscript? Along both these lines of enquiry we can from his pages glean new information about the *native air* in the earlier seventeenth century.

Of the verses inscribed without associated music some are fine poetry. Two short pieces and a ballad are printed in *Poems from Panmure House* (Shire 1960): "O Lord I am thy creature recreated", "Evin as the heart hurt in the chasse" and "The Sheath and the Knife" or "Leesome Brand". The most exciting are the ballad versions, obviously from oral tradition. There is a good "Little Musgrave". There are two unique texts. One, complete, is an important version of "Leesome Brand" or "The Sheath and the Knife", numbers 15 and 16 in Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Child 1956: I, 177-87). Its discovery means a reconsideration of a European ballad-tree and a re-assessment of versions of Child's No. 5, "Gil Brenton", with which extensive mingling of motifs is seen to have taken place. The second is fragmentary, a *chanson d'aventure* of two brothers, one lamenting like Poor Dissaware or the Lad of Lorne. Received apparently in eight-line stanzas, it is, I believe, recorded by Edwards while he was in two minds as to what its form should be—he is trying to impose on it a refrain-line, perhaps with associated music in mind.

One interesting item of music with the title "Sir Lamuel" is in the style of a sixteenth-century dance tune. It is very likely indeed that this entitling indicates that to the dance tune words were sung concerning Sir Lamuel, Sir Launfal of English romance and French *lai*. Indeed the music matches the stanza-form of the version composed by Thomas Chestre during the fourteenth century, as can be seen by the sample stanza here underlaid. We know from "Sir Lambewell" of the Percy Folio Manuscript that a long verse narrative in octosyllabic couplets was current in Britain in the mid-seventeenth-century. A fragmentary text in the same metre was recorded in Scottish courtly circles of the reign of King James VI.<sup>2</sup> Robert Edwards' tune, the musical sections taken without repeats, will serve for the octosyllabic couplet form if an alternating refrain is added.<sup>3</sup> His "Sir Lamuel", then, may indicate a "romance" sung in the sixteenth century to an up-to-date dance tune or a verse narrative meeting a current piece

of dance music and remodelled "to its tune"—a process known to have marked the making of many a broad-side ballad. Was there once, sung to a dance-tune, a "ballad of Sir Lamuel" that has not survived?

Such is the value of Robert Edwards' *Commonplace Book*—both for the evidence it affords and for the questions it raises—that a full page-by-page account of its contents is in preparation, with the texts of all songs and ballads not known in print.<sup>4</sup> The interest for scholars is by no means exhausted. So many documents and source-books of early Scottish Music have come to light recently, flushed as it were by the publication of the central repertory, that a much extended series of concordances has been established and a fresh review is envisaged of earlier music of Scotland in all its variety.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> These manuscripts have been edited for the Scottish Text Society, the relevant volumes being: Asloan MS. New Series 14 and 16; Bannatyne New Series 22, 23, and 26, Third Series 5; Maitland Folio New Series 7 and 20; Maitland Quarto New Series 9; Montgomerie's Poems First Series 9, 10, 11, and 59.
- <sup>2</sup> In copy of Lydgate's "Troy Book" of Scottish ownership, Cambridge University Library MS Kk.5.30 f 11 (now bound at end of volume).
- <sup>3</sup> A refrain, for example, as found in text 4 of No. 20 in *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* Vol. 1. Ed. Bertrand Harris Bronson, Princeton 1959.
- <sup>4</sup> In a forthcoming volume for the Aberdeen University Studies Series.

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