Political and Protest Songs in Eighteenth-Century Scotland II

Songs of the Left

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The most narrowly political of eighteenth-century songs are the election ballads, of which Burns's are the best known. Drawing on earlier Scottish and English songs, and set above all to earlier tunes, the songs of this type are ephemeral—but generally vigorous. Their golden age in Scotland seems to have been in the following century, when the masses entered political life in the agitation preceding the Great Reform Bill. A bound collection in the Edinburgh Public Library, *Political Ballads and Pamphlets 1832–34*, preserves some seventy election songs composed between these years, as well as a small number of longer poems. Another example is *The Canvass, Noctes Musseburganae & Newhavanae, and Songs* (1834), 'a collection of political effusions which appeared during the late election'. ('The Canvass' itself is cast in the form of a play.) Many songs composed on Queen Victoria's visit to Edinburgh in 1842 are also preserved in the Edinburgh Public Library (Cowan 1842); and the significant thing about them, and about the 1832–4 songs also, is that most of them are parodies in the folk or popular manner. The Burns style of political ephemera is thus continued right down to the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. It draws on the same complex of lyrical traditions and deploys the same compositional habits as the 'private' exercises in popular modes of the Edinburgh drinking clubs, or of the parodies of Scots popular songs sung by Edinburgh lawyers on convivial occasions (McDiarmid 1956: 167–72; Pottle 1929: 270–1).

The term 'Left' is here used very broadly, to indicate every shade of opinion that is not specifically Tory or Jacobite. The principal songs of the eighteenth-century Left fall into four classes. First, there are the Whig and anti-Jacobite songs examined in Part I; second, Freemason songs, which are 'Left' in the sense that the clichés of their thought idiom are in tune with some aspects of deism and later liberalism; third, songs reflecting a specifically working-class or anti-landlord point of view at the social level ('songs of social protest'); and fourth, songs of the democratic movement at the time of the French Revolution. Each of the last three classes will now be examined, and assessed, where necessary, in relation to later political song.

Freemasonry in the British Isles is derived from the organisation of the brotherhood ('craft') of English and Scottish working stonemasons of the Middle Ages and sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries—the men who built the cathedrals. Like other guilds and crafts, the medieval masons had various rituals and ceremonies, and the secrets of the profession were as jealously guarded as those of doctors or, for that matter, printers, with their organisation by 'chapels'. The regulations of the English working masons are preserved in an MS known as the 'Constitutions of Masonry', the oldest texts we have, the *Regius* and *Cooke* MSS, dating from *c.* 1400; and Scottish masons in the sixteenth century gave their neophytes the 'mason word', which seems to have been imparted along with a whole series of esoteric questions and set replies such as those preserved in the Edinburgh *Register House* MS of 1696. In Scotland the Master Mason's Word was 'Mahabone', 'Mahabyn', 'Maughbin' or 'Machbenach', and when it was communicated the bodies of teacher and neophyte assumed certain positions in relation to each other which symbolised the Five Points of Fellowship. The first non-artisan we know to have been accepted into the craft was none other than John Boswell of Auchinleck in 1600, and there was henceforth a distinction between 'operative' (working) and 'accepted' members. By 1670 the Aberdeen Lodge had a majority of 'accepted' members including aristocrats and middle-class persons, and the same held good of the London Lodge by the second decade of the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw 'accepted masonry' develop into what its own handbooks describe as 'a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols' (Carr 1966); in Britain, that morality was strongly deistic and sentimentalist, and in Scotland it was perhaps the main channel by which anti-Calvinist and even non-Christian views achieved wide currency amongst ordinary people. Up until 1723 there was no necessary contradiction between British Freemasonry and orthodox Christianity, but in that year James Anderson's *Constitutions*—in the view of a hostile writer—removed 'almost all traces of Christianity'. In 1738 the *Constitutions* went a step further, when they were revised to state that '[Masons] being found in all nations even of divers religions, they are now generally charged to adhere to that religion in which all men agree (leaving each brother to his own particular opinion)'. J. A. Acker sums up the tenets of modern fully developed Freemasonry as follows (Acker 1959: 15 ff.):

> [It] allows a collection of gods to occupy its altar and thus reduces God to a vague Supreme Being, a nondescript Architect of the Universe . . . [It] regards Jesus Christ as a great teacher only, not as the Son of God and Savior from sin . . . Its teaching [is] Salvation by Merit. Masonry teaches that heaven is gained by good works . . not by faith, nor by Vicarious Atonement . . . [It] claims that all faithful Masons reach Heaven.

These are precisely the tenets to which Robert Burns was attracted, and which he sometimes professed—the exact opposite of the antinomianism he pilloried in his religious satires, and even of true Calvinism itself. On the continent of Europe Freemasonry was predominantly a liberal and even a revolutionary force. It was strongly opposed by the Catholic Church, which regarded it as hostile to all 'legitimate' authority in Church

and State. Condemned in bulls and encyclicals by seven Popes, including Leo XIII and Pius X, its contribution to the French Revolution has often been noted (Ledré 1956: 26–36).

Masonic songs were so popular in Scotland that they passed into oral circulation and became subject to the folk process. Gavin Greig in the early twentieth century gives three stanzas of a ballad with Masonic overtones, which he obtained from Mrs Imlah of Weetingshill (Greig 1909: XL, CLIII). These three stanzas derive from an earlier song, 'Adam in the Garden', with the burden 'To kiss her love with his apron on', which appears in a nineteenth-century London broadside (COL 348); it is noteworthy that the Aberdeenshire version shows considerable textual differences that are consistent with oral transmission. Yet eighteenth-century Masonic songs often have an exclusive 'Here's tae us, wha's like us' attitude which goes along with a consciousness that the outside world disapproves of Masons and that women are jealous of their secrecy. In so far as they are Scottish, these songs appear to take over into the Enlightenment some of the worst aspects of Calvinism, as, for example, the notion of an élite of Freemasons, harsh scorn for the lesser breeds without the craft (called, contemptuously, 'cowans'), and an element of persecution mania. The Masonic songs fulfilled, therefore, a paradoxical rôle. The vehicles of an anti-Calvinist and libertarian creed, they yet expressed attitudes in many respects akin to those of a religion to which Masonic theory was opposed. Yet some of their ideas are characteristically Burnsian, and they were—like Freemasonry as a whole—an intermediary between Augustan concepts of human dignity and the humanitarianism of Burns.

The paradox can be illustrated with reference to the despised 'cowans'. In the days before there were any 'accepted' masons the regular artisans—just like restrictionist trade-unionists of the early twentieth century—would not work with men, no matter how efficient, if they were not full members of the craft. For example, in the 'Statutis and Ordinanceis' of 28 Dec. 1598 'to be obseruit be all the maister maissounis within this realme' the King's 'Maister of Wark' laid down (Lyon 1900: 10):

> That na maister or fallow of craft ressaue ony cowanis to wirk in his societie or cumpanye, nor send nane of his servands to wirk wt. cowanis under the pane of twentie punds . . .

And in the early years of the modern Masonic movement, the Minutes of Mother Lodge Kilwinning describe a cowan as a Mason 'without the word' (Lyon 1900: 24). By this time, obviously, cowans could obtain the word and become fully recruited into the craft; they were not, that is to say, utterly reprobate; and yet the songs sometimes treat them as if they were inferior beings, as in this stanza of 'Let worthy brethren all combine' (F.M.P.C. 1763; 215):

> Ye fools and Cowans, all who plot,
> For to obtain our mystery;
> Ye strive in vain, attempt it not,
> Such creatures never shall be free.
> (St. III)

More rational, however, is this sentiment from a song in a Dumfries collection (Y.F.M.A. 1784: 23):

> You cowans together both ancient and young,
> Draw near a while to my merry song,
> You all will be Masons before it be long.
> *Up and down, derry derry, up and down,* &c.
> You are made for a trifle, the price is but small;
> Great Kings, Dukes, and Lords, Your brothers will call.
> Get aprons, get gloves, get drink, and that's all,
> *Up and down* &c.

Quite a number of songs stress the differences between Masons and the rest of the world, or the misconceptions which outsiders have about the Craft. Sometimes they do this seriously, sometimes with good-humoured laughter at the 'folk' legends concerning Freemasons that circulate in the community. 'Ye people who laugh at masons draw near, / Attend to my ballad without any sneer' (F.M.P.C. 1763: 240) deals point by point with outsiders' objections, while a piece entitled 'In Praise of Masonry' expresses the sentiments of slandered minorities in all ages (W.M.M. 1779: 307):

> In Spite of the prejudic'd hate
> The vulgar against us retain,
> Let us new attachments create,
> And strengthen each link to our chain:
> Without ceasing, they slander us still,
> And fling at us many a joke;
> But those, who of Masons speak ill,
> Are not worthy their wrath to provoke.
> (St. 1)

The popular belief that masons were in league with the Devil is the origin of one of the best stanzas in Burns's 'Address to the Deil' (Kinsley 1968: 171):

> When *MASONS'* mystic *word* an' *grip*
> In storms an' tempests raise you up,
> Some cock, or cat your rage maun stop,
> Or, strange to tell!
> The youngest brither ye wad whip
> Aff straught to Hell.
> (St. XIV)

In 'Here's a health to each one,' a song that appeared in most of the Scottish Masonic collections, it is stated that 'the world' claim 'the devil is nigh' at Masonic initiations (F.M.P.C. 1763: 238). Other misconceptions that arose quite naturally from Masonic secrecy were treated comically in in-group poetry. For example, there has been preserved an Epilogue of thirty lines in heroic couplets, where a Freemason's wife is terrified

because she thinks he will have to undergo some strange operation at his induction, only to find that he makes her 'full amends' in love and truth (F.M.P.C. 1765: 261). The implication is, presumably, that becoming a Freemason increases a man's sexual powers. In another Epilogue, 'Well—here I'm come to let you know my thoughts', the woman is highly delighted that her husband has been made a Mason; he came back 'so strangely altered for the better' that she wishes 'he were made a Mason every night' (F.M.P.C. 1765: 259). The general public seem to have jeered at the craft because they wore the apron, a woman's garment, and there were many allegations of effeminacy which are indignantly rebutted. Nevertheless, a certain sexual ambiguity is present even in the denials, as in ''Tis Masonry unites mankind', when love is placed second to brotherhood (F.M.P.C. 1763: 228):

Let wretches at our manhood rail:
  But those who once our judgment prove,
Will own, that we who build so well,
  With equal energy can love.

Tho' still our chief concern and care
  Be to deserve a brother's name;
For ever mindful of the fair,
  Their choicest favours still we claim.

(Sts. IV–V)

Many Masonic songs are bacchanalian, such as the following piece, which combines a statement of group solidarity with the assertion of two of the most fundamental values of the craft—honesty and freedom, the latter word carrying a strong connotation of 'liberality' (F.M.P.C. 1765: 239):

With plumb, level, and square, to work let's prepare,
  And join in a sweet harmony;
Let's fill up each glass, and around let it pass
To all honest men that are free.
  To all honest men that are free.

CHORUS

Then a fig for all those who are Free-masons' foes,
  Our secrets we'll never impart;
But in unity we'll always agree,
  And chorus it, prosper our art.
  And chorus it, &c.

(St. I and Chorus)

'What tho' they call us Masons fools' begins with the public's hostility, and ends with the claim that Masonry above all arts promotes the virtues of sentimentalism and the Enlightenment (F.M.P.C. 1763: 238):

It makes us courteous, easy, free,
Gen'rous, and honourably gay.
What other art the like can say?
Then here's to masonry.
(St. IV lines 5–8)

In some places the charitable activities of the craft are stated: 'The poor, oppress'd with woe and grief, / Gain from our bounteous hands relief' (F.M.S. 1759: 8). In others, it is asserted that Masonry fulfils one of the ideals of the Augustan Age, the 'methodisation' of Nature (F.M.P.C. 1763: 266):

For we the paths of virtue trace:
By us man's rugged nature is refin'd,
And polish'd into love and peace.
(St. V lines 2–4)

It is precisely Freemasons who are 'gen'rous', 'brave' and 'good', 'who think and act as they should' (F.M.P.C. 1763: 249), and achieve true knowledge painlessly—a position which can be united with stock eighteenth-century satire against pedantry and enthusiasm (F.M.P.C. 1765: 250):

Would a wry-fac'd physician, or parson excel,
In preaching, or giving a sanctify'd spell;
He first must read Galen and Tillotson thro',
E'er he gets credentials, or business to do,
Derry down, &c.

But these are all follies, Free-Masons can prove;
In the lodge they find knowledge, fair virtue, and love;
Without deaf'ning their ears, without blinding their eyes,
They find the compendious way to be wise.
Derry down, &c.
(Sts. III–IV)

The positive values of Masonry can merge into a rejection of the aristocrat who is *merely* the son of his father, or *merely* the owner of much land, like the 'belted Knight' of Burns's 'Is there for honest poverty' who is but a 'cuif' for a' that. 'Is there for honest poverty' has often been compared to the prose thoughts of Tom Paine in the Revolutionary period (Crawford 1960: 365). The passage now quoted from the Masonic 'Let worthy brethren all combine' is identical in spirit with 'Is there for honest poverty'. It would seem to follow that, however innocuous it may appear, the song expresses egalitarian tendencies (F.M.P.C. 1763: 255):

The wise, the noble, good, and great,
Can only be accepted here;
The knave or fool, tho' deck'd in state,
Shall ne'er approach the master's chair.
(St. IV)

In his bacchanalian moods, the democratic Freemason is superior to both kings and philosophers ('Here let no dull faces of business appear', F.M.P.C. 1763 : 239):

Adieu, sober thinking, detraction, and spleen;
You ought to be strangers where masons convene.
Come, jest, love, and laughter, ye joyful throng,
You're free of the lodge, and to masons belong.

Let monarchs run mad after riches and power,
Fat gownmen be dull, and philosophers sour;
While the claret goes round, and the company sings,
We're wiser than sages, and richer than kings.
(Sts. IV–V)

It is like the superiority assigned by Burns to Tam o'Shanter in the alehouse: 'Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious.' The revolutionary slogan of Fraternity is the Masonic virtue *par excellence*: as the song 'King Solomon, that wise projector' has it—'Our Maxims are justice, morality, / Friendship, and brotherly love'. Indeed, this lyric document shows more succinctly than any other how the most characteristic of Burns's attitudes—the great Burnsian positives (apart from sexual love)—are similar to the positives of Freemasonry (F.M.P.C. 1763 : 252):

We meet like true friends on the level,
And lovingly part on the square:
Alike we respect king and beggar,
Provided they're just and sincere.
We scorn an ungenerous action,
None can with free-masons compare;
We love for to live within compass,
By rules that are honest and fair.
(St. II)

A principal attraction of Freemasonry is no doubt its elaborately systematised ritual; and one is tempted to dwell on the paradoxical synthesis of the rational and the symbolic, the stylized and the radical, which this involves, and to see in Mozart's 'The Magic Flute' the epitome of this contradiction. Certainly much Masonic song was concerned with the craft's internal organisation, with the ceremonies of passing from one degree of Masonry to another, rather than with any political content; that is, its purpose was the cohesion and maintenance of Freemasonry itself. There were songs for the lowest grade, that of the entered apprentice, such as Matthew Birkhead's 'Come let us prepare, we brothers that are' (T.T.M. 1740, IV: 362; Ramsay 1876 II: 165), where the political content is decidedly favourable to the establishment; thus the free and accepted Mason is to eschew 'All idle debate / About church or the state, / the springs of impiety and treason' (St. VI). In Charles de la Fay's 'The Fellow-craft's song' ('Hail Masonry, thou craft divine!') a Mason is said to excel other men as men do the brutes, and the emphasis

is on 'Sweet fellowship, from envy free, / Friendly converse of brotherhood' (Charmer 1749, 1: 290); while the song ascribed to the next grade, the Master, is a solemn praise of 'mighty eastern Kings, and some / of Abram's race, and monarchs good / Of Egypt, Syria, Greece, and Rome', who understood 'true architecture' (F.M.P.C. 1761: 75). 'Though bigots storm, and fools declaim', by Brother Blacklock of the lodge at Dumfries, has a somewhat more revolutionary undertone than the formal songs assigned to various degrees. The chorus combines exclusive élitism with the spirit of a rather vague *Internationale* (F.M.P.C. 1761: 81–2):

> O'er all the earth let masons join,
> To execute one grand design,
> And strike amazement into fools,
> Who laugh at masons and their tools.

Brother Blacklock's third stanza, though still concentrating on individual self-improvement, adds an ominous new virtue to the traditional fraternity:

> Let ev'ry mason then prepare
> By virtue's mould his work to square;
> And ev'ry task adjusted be
> By the level of equality.

Equality and the other virtues are nevertheless *exclusive*; they are not to pass over into society at large but are to be practised within the lodge behind an impenetrable Mason-barrier of secrecy.

For industrial protest songs, trade union verse, and songs and poems expressing a typically proletarian outlook, one has to go to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; yet these more recent working-class songs are no doubt descended from, or at the very least are analogous to songs of earlier centuries. Very few such prototypes have survived in Scotland and it is the great English collections of broadsides that contain the ancestors of Burns's 'Man was made to mourn', such as 'The Poor Folks Complaint' of *c.* 1675 (Rollins 1929–32, III: 12–15):

> Whilst you so surfeit with Excess,
> and with great plenty are rewarded,
> The Poor do languish in distress,
> and still their Cryes are not regarded . . .
> (St. II)

That such songs were widely known and sung in Scotland may be deduced from Burns's mention of his grand-uncle whose 'most voluptuous enjoyment was to sit down & cry, while my Mother would sing the simple old song of, *The Life & Age of Man*' (Ferguson 1931, 1: 246). More specifically trade-union in its appeal, though hardly 'proletarian' in the accepted sense, is the 'Petition of the Clerks and Apprentices of Writers to the Signet, and Writers in Edinburgh' addressed 'Unto the Lords of Council

in Session' and dating from the 1820s at the very latest (C.B.N.C. 1764–1853: fol. 47):

> We've struggled long, chill penury to hide,
> But now Necessity o'ercomes our pride;
> Though modesty conceal'd our pressing need,
> Our hollow stomachs would cry out for bread;
> And sure this humble prayer's more grateful far
> Than empty sounds of hunger at your bar.

TheWriters' Clerks are paid threepence a page for copying, but are employed in this unprofitable fashion for hardly a fourth part of the day, simply because their masters take on more clerks than they need in order to 'cut a shine'. The rest of the time they spend on errands for their masters, taking down rolls, passing signet letters, or 'trudging idly through the Outer-House'.

> Full many a tedious year has past away,
> Since writers' Clerks have got increase of pay;
> And e'en this ill we might with patience bear,
> Had not each necessary grown so dear.
> A Writer's Clerk, full fifty years ago,
> On thirty pounds a-year could be a beau:
> But now, on that same sum we scarce can hide
> Our naked skin, and meat and drink provide . . .
> If we're employ'd to copy any paper,
> For instance, to a Hosier or a Draper,
> Our charge is truly not a farthing more
> Than what it was a century before;
> But, if we need a hat, a coat, or stocking
> (With great submission, is it not provoking?)
> Our Draper says, he cannot sell them under
> Five times the price they cost in 1700.

Although 'other tradesmen join in combinations / To raise their wages, or desert their stations', all the clerks and ApprenticeWriters will do is to petition genteelly for an increase in the copying rate of one penny per page.

Genuinely urban songs of protest did not become common until even later in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, rural social lyrics often took the form of songs in praise of the beggar's life, like the popular sources of Burns's *Jolly Beggars* (Crawford 1960: 130–43) or 'Johnnie o'Braidiesley', in which a poacher's exploits are praised (Greig 1909: xxxiii). In general there is a distressing lack of genuine lower-class songs of protest from eighteenth-century Scotland, with the notable exception of Burns. That there are so few in the song-books may reflect either the social backwardness of Scotland or the 'establishment' bias of the compilers, who may have included only socially harmless material, preferring ballads and love-songs to anything that hit out strongly at their class. If the latter explanation is correct, it automatically places a

very significant limitation upon the much-vaunted 'democracy' of the educated in eighteenth-century Scotland; and indeed the survival of one or two lyrics of quite strong social protest makes one feel that this second hypothesis may very well be true.

Such social criticism as has come down to us is very often associated with wars and soldiers, as in the various versions of 'De'il tak the wars hurried Billy frae me', which go back to the late seventeenth century (Durfey 1959, 1: 294). The following lyric by an educated writer who has managed to concentrate the point of view of *The Beggar's Opera* or *Jonathan Wild* into ten lines, is yet full of a radical compassion for the underdog and hatred for those at the top (COL. 1762: 105):

> The soldier disbanded, and forc'd for to beg,
> May talk of his wars and his suff'rings so hard:
> But tho' seam'd o'er with scars, and with never a leg,
> His wants we neglect, nor his courage regard;
> And the lass that is poor,
> Is sent for a whore,
> With hemp and with hammer to make her complaint;
> But if you have money,
> All honours are done ye,
> A coward's a hero, a whore is a saint.

In a nineteenth-century song preserved by oral transmission and now part of the repertoire of the Aberdeen folksinger Jeannie Robertson, 'Twa recruitin' sergeants', the sergeants paint conditions in the army as much less dangerous than those experienced by a ploughman on the average farm if, for example, his horses and oxen were to get out of hand; and they pointedly criticise the ploughman's employer, 'the greedy auld farmer', and the mouldy fare he provides for his workmen (Robertson 1960: JFS 4001). The theme that life in the army guarantees freedom from the oppression of civilian life, is exactly that of a song of the mid-eighteenth century, here reproduced in full (U.S.S. 1781):

> My yellow mou'd mistress, I bid you adieu,
> For I've been too long in slavery with you,
> With washing and scouring I'm seldom in bedy
> And now I will go with my sodger laddie,
> My sodger laddie, my sodger laddie,
> The kisses are sweet of a sodger laddie.
>
> With the crust of your loaf, and dregs of your tea,
> You fed your lap doggie far better than me,
> With rinning and spinning, my head was unsteady,
> But now I will go with my sodger laddie,
> My sodger laddie, &c.

For yarn, for yarn, you always did cry,
And look'd to my pirn, ay as ye went by;
Now the drums they do beat, and my bundle is ready,
And I'll go along with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie, &c.

As women with men are always for use,
For washing and dressing, or plucking a goose;
Or drawing a chicken to make his diet ready,
O happy I'll be with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie &c.

A soldier that's marry'd, I always do see,
Has always most money, if so they agree,
He calls her his honey, his dear and his lady,
Then I will go with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie, &c.

If my fortune be bad, the truth I will tell,
It was through a bad mistress that so it befel;
If she sent me an errand, she cry'd, ay, where stay'd ye,
For which I will go with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie, &c.

I went to the well, and lost a burn stoup,
And when I came home, she kicked my doup;
O was not this hard, by such a fine lady,
For which I will go with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie &c.

I'll always be ready, with needle and soap,
For possing and patching to serve the whole troop,
I'll be loving and kind, and live like a lady,
When I go abroad with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie, &c.

In heat of battles, I'll keep on the flank,
With a stone in a stocking, and give them a clank.
If he be knock'd down, though he be my daddy,
I'll bring all his clink to my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie, &c.

For robbing the dead is no thievish trick,
I'll rifle his breeches, and then his knapsack,
But yet on a friend I'll not be so ready,
If he's been acquaint with my sodger laddie.
My sodger laddie, &c.

Then as rich as a Jew, I'll return yet I hope,
And ask my old lady if she's found her burn stoup,
And all my days after, I'll live like a lady,
On the gold I've got, with my sodger laddie
  My sodger laddie, my sodger laddie
  The kisses are sweet of a sodger laddie.

This song can well be taken as a test piece for the appreciation of the popular lyric. To many it will seem the merest doggerel, but to those attuned to popular conventions, more especially the Scottish ones, it will seem excellent of its kind—first, because of its perfect adaptation of words to tune (it is a parody of 'My sodger laddie is over the sea' in *The Tea-table Miscellany*, Ramsay 1876, 1: 205); second, because of the frequently adroit management of assonance and half-rhyme in the second couplet of many stanzas; third, because of the repeated fulfilment of the expectations aroused by the contrast between the initial masculine and final feminine rhyme patterns within each stanza; and fourth, because its radical social content is so perfectly fused with the character of the protagonist. In many ways the piece looks forward to Burns, in particular to the values of *The Jolly Beggars*. There is also a similarity between the criticism of luxury in *The Twa Dogs* (Crawford 1960: 172–3) and the servant's 'You fed your lap doggie far better than me'; and yet in some ways this anonymous lyric goes farther than Burns generally does. The conflict of classes is manifest at the individual level in a clash of *wills* between mistress and 'slavey', and the latter's dearest wish is for revenge—to vanquish her ex-employer through the use of sarcastic humour, and then to have riches and luxury herself. One of the finest oppositions in the song appears in St. III, between the mistress's nagging economic exploitation and the drum-beats symbolising freedom; and another is the contrast within the girl's own character between her self-will and her generosity—once away from her immediate cramping environment, she will be 'loving and kind' to her own man, and in addition serve the whole troop. Altogether delightful is this strong personality's unhesitating acceptance of her femininity—the principal way to freedom open to her is through her rôle as woman, to love and serve. Even in the grim context of a battle-field where the camp followers loot the corpses, she will still serve, though in a superficially unfeminine way, by attacking some perhaps wounded man with a stone wrapped in a stocking. The grim realism of this piece demonstrates what could be achieved, even before Burns, by the popular tradition itself and makes one wish that such a strain could have been transmuted in the following century into a realistic art-poetry of urban Scotland.

It is surely significant that David Herd, the greatest Scottish song collector of the century, preserved a version of 'The Hunting of the Wren', which implies that this allegorical and perhaps revolutionary song, full of barely concealed threats of direct violence and libertarian share-out, was in oral circulation in the eighteenth century. (Hecht-Herd 1904: 200–1):

'Will ye go to the wood?' quo' Fozie Mozie,
'Will ye go to the wood?' quo' Johnie Rednozie,
'Will ye go to the wood?' quo' Foslin' ene,
'Will ye go to the wood?' quo' brither and kin.

'What to do there?' quo' Fozie Mozie, &c.

'To slay the wren,' quo' Fozie Mozie, &c.

'What way will we get her hame?' quo' Fozie Mozie, &c.

'We'll hyre carts and horse', quo' Fozie Mozie, &c.

'What way will we get her in?' quo' Fozie Mozie, &c.

'We'll drive down the door-cheeks', quo' Fozie Mozie, &c.

'I'll hae a wing', quo' Fozie Mozie,
'I'll hae anither', quo' Johnie Rednozie,
'I'll hae a leg', quo' Foslin' ene,
'An I'll hae anither', quo' brither and kin.

That the song survived in Scotland into the nineteenth century is certain from Peter Buchan's version, which he entitled 'Johny Rednose' (Hecht-Herd 1904: 315–16):

Where are ye gain? quoth Hose to Mose,
Where are ye gain? quoth Johnny Rednose,
And where are ye gain? quoth brethren three,
To shoot the wren, quo' Wise Willie.

Where will we saut her? quoth Hose to Mose,
Where will we saut her? quoth Johnny Rednose,
Where will we saut her? quoth brethren three.
In quids an' tubs, quoth Wise Willie.

What will we do wi her? quoth Hose to Mose, &c.
We'll make a feast o' her, quoth Wise Willie.
Wha will we hae at it? quoth Hose to Mose, &c.
We'll hae dukes an' lords, quoth Wise Willie.

The revolutionary implications of the final reference to Dukes and Lords are perhaps more sinister than anything in David Herd's text. A. L. Lloyd calls the song (which is of course, English in origin) an 'anthem of the partition and sharing of the body of a

royal sacrifice, in this case, the king of the birds, the wren'. He goes on to say that 'when it was recorded from an old shepherd of Adderbury West, near Banbury, he banged the floor with his stick on the accented notes and stamped violently at the end of the verses, saying that to stamp was the right way and reminded of old times. What memories of ancient defiance are preserved in this kind of performance it would be hard to say, but we know that the wren-hunting song was attached to a pagan mid-winter ritual of the kind that Church and authority fulminated vainly against—particularly in the rebellious period at the end of the Middle Ages when adherence to the forms of the Old Religion was taken to be evidence of subversion, and its partisans were violently persecuted in consequence' (Lloyd 1967: 96). From 'The Hunting of the Wren' to the French Revolution seems emotionally a short step, though culturally they are poles apart.

One product of the eighteenth century whose ferocity equals 'The Hunting of the Wren' is Burns's 'The Tree of Liberty'. Since the rest of this article is concerned with the background of this song in popular poetry and its text is little known I shall reproduce it in full (Kinsley 1968: 910–13):

Heard ye o' the tree o' France,
  I watna what's the name o't;
Around it a' the patriots dance,
  Weel Europe kens the fame o't.
It stands where ance the Bastile stood,
  A prison built by kings, man,
When Superstition's hellish brood
  Kept France in leading-strings, man.

Upo' this tree there grows sic fruit,
  Its virtues a' can tell, man;
It raises man aboon the brute,
  It maks him ken himsel, man.
Gif ance the peasant taste a bit,
  He's greater than a lord, man,
An' wi' the beggar shares a mite
  O' a' he can afford, man.

This fruit is worth a' Afric's wealth,
  To comfort us 'twas sent, man:
To gie the sweetest blush o' health,
  An' mak us a' content, man.
It clears the een, it cheers the heart,
  Maks high and low gude friends, man;
And he wha acts the traitor's part
  It to perdition sends, man.

My blessings aye attend the chiel
  Wha pitied Gallia's slaves, man,
And staw a branch, spite o' the deil,
  Frae yont the western waves, man.
Fair Virtue water'd it wi' care,
  And now she sees wi' pride, man,
How weel it buds and blossoms there,
  Its branches spreading wide, man.

But vicious folks aye hate to see
  The works o' Virtue thrive, man;
The courtly vermin's banned the tree,
  And grat to see it thrive, man;
King Loui' thought to cut it down,
  When it was unco sma', man;
For this the watchman cracked his crown,
  Cut aff his head and a', man.

A wicked crew syne, on a time,
  Did tak a solemn aith, man,
It ne'er should flourish to its prime,
  I wat they pledged their faith, man.
Awa' they gaed wi' mock parade,
  Like beagles hunting game, man,
But soon grew weary o' the trade
  And wished they'd been at hame, man.

For Freedom, standing by the tree,
  Her sons did loudly ca', man;
She sang a sang o' liberty,
  Which pleased them ane and a', man.
By her inspired, the new-born race
  Soon drew the avenging steel, man;
The hirelings ran—her foes gied chase,
  And banged the despot weel, man.

Let Britain boast her hardy oak,
  Her poplar and her pine, man,
Auld Britain ance could crack her joke,
  And o'er her neighbours shine, man.
But seek the forest round and round,
  And soon 'twill be agreed, man,
That sic a tree can not be found,
  'Twixt London and the Tweed, man.

Without this tree, alake this life
  Is but a vale o' woe, man;
A scene o' sorrow mixed wi' strife,
  Nae real joys we know, man.
We labour soon, we labour late,
  To feed the titled knave, man;
And a' the comfort we're to get
  Is that ayont the grave, man.

Wi' plenty o' sic trees, I trow,
  The warld would live in peace, man;
The sword would help to mak a plough,
  The din o' war wad cease, man.
Like brethren in a common cause,
  We'd on each other smile, man;
And equal rights and equal laws
  Wad gladden every isle, man.

Wae worth the loon wha wadna eat
  Sic halesome dainty cheer, man;
I'd gie my shoon frae aff my feet,
  To taste sic fruit, I swear, man.
Syne let us pray, auld England may
  Sure plant this far-famed tree, man;
And blythe we'll sing, and hail the day
  That gave us liberty, man.

I have elsewhere commented on the many plantings of Trees of Liberty in Scottish towns in 1792 and again in 1797 (Crawford 1960: 247). The use of trees as political symbols in British popular poetry can be traced at least as far back as the legend of King Charles II and the oak in which he was supposed to hide after the battle of Worcester. Thus in one respect at least songs of right-wing royalism are among the antecedents of 'The Tree of Liberty'. In 1776, for example, there appeared 'The Royal Oak Tree', by members of the Royal Oak Society, Edinburgh (GF. 1777: 213):

Ye true Sons of Scotia together unite,
  And yield all your senses to joy and delight;
Give mirth its full scope, that the nations may see
We honour our standard, the Great Royal Tree.
  All shall yield to the Royal Oak-tree:
    Bend to thee,
    Majestic Tree!
  Chearful was He, who sat in thee;
  And thou, like him, thence honour'd shall be.
(St. 1)

In the third stanza, the obvious leap is made from Charles's tree to the ships of the British navy, made of oak, and in the fourth and final one the Great Royal-Oak becomes the emblem of the whole British nation, of which Scotia is seen to be a part. The oak, it is claimed, is superior to the botanical ensigns of all other countries—'the poor trifles of each distant coast', as they are called.

In the Shakespeare bicentennial celebrations of 1764 David Garrick sang 'Shakespeare's Mulberry-Tree' as he held in his hand a cup said to be made of the tree, which was supposed to have been planted by Shakespeare's own hand (GF. 1777: 211). The sentiment is that all trees shall yield to the Mulberry tree, symbol of our greatest writer (and again it is significant to find Scots identifying themselves with the English nation and their bard, as is evidenced by the reprinting of the piece in so many Scottish song books):

> Fill, fill to the Planter, the cup to the brim;
> To honour the country, do honour to him.
> (St. VIII, lines 3–4)

The song we have noted above, 'The Royal-Oak Tree', was designed to be sung to the tune of 'Shakespeare's Mulberry Tree', and the members of the Edinburgh Royal-Oak Society were also responsible for a Cantata called 'The Tree of Friendship' (NG. 1776: 161), which identifies the Royal Oak with Masonic values and unites friendship (fraternity) with liberty. As King Charles, pursued, mounts the oak, he is convinced that friendship is superior to all crowns:

> Hail to the Royal, hail to the Royal Tree!
> Protector of our liberty . . .

The Oak, now the Tree of Friendship, is Britain's greatest boast; our lives and liberties are lost without it, and indeed our trade depends upon it, since our goods are both carried and protected by vessels made from its wood. Let us then twine round it like woodbines. The Tree of Friendship is in a sense genuinely classless, for

> Should any pretend
> To affront our good friend,
> Let the foe be a duke, lord, or clown,
> With our Oaks fast in hand,
> By our friends we'll firm stand,
> And then knock the proud boaster down.

Friendship is thus merged into liberty, and Scotland into England. A mason-like generosity and charitableness are metamorphosed into a general love of all humanity:

> Firm as the Oak let us stand, friends sincere let us be:
> Our purses are ready,
> Open to the needy,
> In this let all Britons, all mankind agree.

In 'The Tree of Friendship' a strain derived from freemasonry comes together with a 'rightist', pro-Stuart tendency; interestingly enough, the piece was later printed in *The True Loyalist; or Chevalier's Favourite*, a privately printed Jacobite production of 1779.

Trees also had sexual significance, as can be seen from a two-page sheet with music in the Madden Collection at Cambridge entitled 'The Tree of Life' and beginning 'Come prick up your ears and attend, sirs'. This sheet is part of a collection made by Reuben Burrow, the late eighteenth-century mathematician. The Tree of Life is the Penis, just as it is in Burns's famous so-called 'Blackguard' letter to Ainslie of 3 March 1788 (Ferguson I: 200):

> O, what a peacemaker is a guid weel-willy p-le! It is the mediator, the guarantee, the umpire, the band 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.

In St. III of the Madden Ballad this tree is called a 'true universal', and an idea of the song's humour can be derived from Sts. VI and IX:

> But chiefly in Ireland this Plant it best thrives,
> As well can be prov'd by their Widows and Wives;
> Its root is so stout and so strong, I insist on't,
> That most of their Natives entirely subsist on't . . .
>
> It cures all dissentions 'twixt Husband and Wife,
> And makes her look pleasant thro' each Stage of Life;
> By a right application it never can fail,
> But then it must always be given IN TAIL.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Burns either knew a version of the Madden Ballad, presumably from oral transmission, or that he knew another ballad using the same 'floating folksong' ideas.

The identification of trees with various countries ('The poplar and the pine, man') was quite common in the late eighteenth century; and there exists 'The Fable of the Trees' ('Once on a time when great Sir Oak'), a poem of 64 lines printed in a newspaper, *c.* 1790, where England is identified by the Oak and Scotland by the Fir (P. & M.: fol. 19, *verso*). In 1789 the celebrations of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 took on a new significance, and many songs were composed and sung for these occasions. All are an essential part of the background, not just of 'The Tree of Liberty', but of the other revolutionary songs of Burns whose authenticity is not in doubt, such as 'Is there for honest poverty?' and 'Scots wha hae'. 'A Song sung at the Anniversary of the Revolution of 1688, Held at the London Tavern, Nov. 5. 1792', designed to be sung to the tune of 'How imperfect is expression', begins as follows (P.B.: 6):

See! bright LIBERTY descending,
O'er the verdant hills and plains:
And bold GALLIA, nobly sending
FREEDOM and relief from CHAINS,

and goes on to welcome the idea of a world-wide chain of revolutions:

May the CAUSE which they're protecting,
Spread thro' every STATE and CLIME:
That MEN on their RIGHTS reflecting
REVOLUTIONS well may time . . .

But as human INSTITUTIONS
Are by nature prone to change:
Let succeeding REVOLUTIONS,
Wise and equal LAWS arrange.

(Sts. IV, VI)

Mr Dignum's song on the same occasion, the anniversary in 1792 of the Revolution of 1688, was to be sung to a tune with peculiarly un-revolutionary associations, which not inaptly, perhaps, symbolises the connection between the earlier cult of sentiment and the later Revolution—'The tear that bedews Sensibility's Shrine'. After all, Burns embraced both sensibility and revolution and, at the level of theory, both were found in Rousseau. Dignum's final stanza (St. IV), however poor poetically, is an excellent *contemporary* documentation of the mood of 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive' (P.B.: 7):

France, we share in the rapture thy bosom that fills,
While the Genius of Liberty bounds o'er thine hills;
Redundant henceforth may thy purple juice flow,
Prouder wave thy green woods, and thine olive trees grow!

While the hand of philosophy long shall entwine,
Blest emblem, the laurel, the myrtle and vine;
And Heav'n thro' all ages confirms the decree,
That tears off their chains, and bids millions be free.

The imagery of vegetation predominates in these droppings of the stuffed owl—superabundant wine, green woods, olive trees, and those plants associated with ideology and with enlightenment. Naturally enough, there were anti-revolutionary songs just as there were anti-Jacobite songs, and one of the earliest of these, W. T. F. Fitzgerald's 'A Loyal Song', depicts the contrast between Left and Right specifically in terms of different tree images (P.B.: 27):

The young mind's the best soil, the Sophists agree,
Where to plant, with success, th' atheistical tree;
Whose fruits are false reason, hypocrisy, plunder,
But the fruit we will blast, and the tree cut asunder.

(St. IV)

After a historical passage in which the author avers that 'our forefathers of old' were deceived by the republicans' arts, when they trusted fanatics and presbyterianism, the Royal Oak itself is called in, as the direct opposite of 'th'atheistical tree':

> Till at length the whole nation were glad to restore
> That good Constitution which bless'd them before;
> They no longer endur'd the Republican yoke,
> But hallow'd the boughs of our fam'd Royal Oak!
> (St. VIII)

Another right-wing song sheet of 1792, significantly entitled 'The Contrast', is noteworthy for its precise pictorial emblems. On the left, in a circle, is English Liberty; on the right, in a circle, French Liberty. English Liberty is Britannia holding the scales of justice, a lion at her feet and a ship to her right; she sits beneath a tree, presumably an oak. French Liberty is a Medusa-like harridan with a trident on which a human head is impaled. Her right foot rests on a prostrate decapitated body, and in the background an aristocrat hangs by the neck from a street lamp. Beneath English Liberty is written 'Religion, Morality, Loyalty, Obedience to the Laws, Independence, Personal Security, Justice, Inheritance, Protection, Property, Industry, National Prosperity, Happiness'; and beneath French Liberty, 'Atheism, Perjury, Rebellion, Treason, Anarchy, Murder, Equality, Madness, Cruelty, Injustice, Treachery, Ingratitude, Idleness, Famine, National and private Ruin, Misery'. Below them both is 'WHICH IS BEST? *The New Hearts of Oak*' (P.B.: 28). The popular consciousness at the time of the French Revolution seems to have expressed itself rather rigidly in emblems, and to have tended towards tree-symbolism above any other. There are songs specifically against Tom Paine, such as 'Mighty Tom Paine', printed apparently at Hull, Yorkshire (P.B.: 38), and the 'Life and Character of Mr Thomas Paine, put in Metre, and inscribed to the Society against Levellers and Republicans' (P.B.: 41). The first line is 'Wicked Tom Paine', and the last stanza with its 'do or die' line reminiscent of the French Tennis Court Oath, belongs to the same context of agitation and counter-agitation as the 'Let us do, or die!' of Burns's 'Scots wha hae':

> Britons be brave,
> Let us such knave,
> Sedition's torch supply!
> For Freedom's cause,
> In equal laws,
> Resolve to live—or die!

It is interesting to note these anti-Reform sheets associating the idea which Burns expressed in the line 'A man's a man for a' that' directly with Paine himself. Thus J. Aitkin of Castle Street, Leicester Fields issued a prose broadsheet with an engraving 'Pain, Sin and the Devil—Tres Juncti in Uno'. From the mouth of 'Pain' issues, in comic-strip fashion, 'Rights of Man', and from that of Sin, 'Sedition'. The title is 'Intercepted Correspondence from Satan to Citizen Paine; Wherein is discovered a

secret Friendship between Honest Thomas and a Crowned Head in spite of his avowed principles of Opposition to all Monarchy'—a technique of popular satire with many antecedents, including Burns's own 'Address of Beelzebub'. The broadsheet contains the sentence 'And then there's this King that they talk so much about, and that *thou* took'st so much pains to prove was but a *Man*, and that a *Man* was but a *Man*, make the most of him—thou was't right, I applaud thee . . .' (P.B.:43). 'God save the Rights of Man' (P.B.:57) is a run-of-the-mill revolutionary parody of 'God Save the King'; but 'Whitehall Alarmed! And a Council Called' (P.B.:58), in twelve stanzas to the tune of 'Come let us prepare', is more significant. With rather heavy irony, it depicts the privileged classes opposed and besieged by Reason, and the internationalism of the Burnsian 'Tree of Liberty' is paralleled in stanza IV:

> Nor can we by force,
> Now alter the course
> ENQUIRY and REASON are taking;
> By Land and at Sea,
> They cry *to be free!*
> The *powers* of the world are shaking.

The last part of St. III of Burns's 'Here's a health to them that's awa' (Kinsley:662), which reads 'Here's freedom to him that wad read, / Here's freedom to him that wad write!', is similar to the crudely sarcastic St. XI of 'Whitehall Alarmed':

> To darken the mind,
> Let the press be confin'd,
> A LAW against Reading and Speaking
> Such bondage might pass,
> Among the low class,
> And let it be call'd their own seeking.

A doggerel rightist song of ten stanzas beginning 'What a pother in this land, about our French neighbours' and set to the tune 'O the golden Days of good Queen Bess' has the chorus 'Long may Old England be fam'd for hospitality, / Liberty and property, and no equality'. It also has a reference to trees of liberty, in a stanza condemning the forcible export of revolutionary ideas (P.B.:63):

> How these gallant French heroes through Flanders do roam,
> Glad to get their bread and cheese any where but at home.
> But whilst their poles of Liberty in every town they plant,
> At home their wives and children, are crying out for want.
> Long may Old England, &c.
>
> (St. II)

Seizing on Burke's reference ('Learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude'—p. 117), Thomas Spence started a periodical

Pig's Meat 'publishing in Weekly Penny Numbers, at No. 8 Little Turnstile, High Holborn', in which a translation of the Marseillaise appeared (P.B.:75); and there is a 35-line broadside, without printer's or publisher's name, entitled 'Citizen Guillotine, A New Shaving Machine', ironically set—with a touch of delightful cockney verbal humour—to the tune 'Bob Shave a King'. There is an engraving of swine bringing a guillotine down on a calf's head, with a boar in the foreground; a house with the sign 'Revolution Place'; and 'The King's Evil Cured Gratis' is inscribed above a door with the sign 'Dr. Guillotine'. Seven lines may be quoted (P.B.:68):

Long live the Guillotine,
Who shaves the Head so clean,
Of Queen or King:
Whose power is so great,
That ev'ry Tool of State,
Dreadeth his mighty weight,
Wonderful Thing!!!

A broadside printed and sold by R. Hawes at the Constitutional Liberty Press of 107 Whitechapel Road and called 'Libertas Dei Gratia! or the Proclamation of Liberty' has the distinction of being poetically more abysmal than anything yet quoted. But it is interesting for its engraved Tree of Liberty, with leaves twining round a pole.

The London political versifiers of the seventeen-nineties came even closer to the Burnsian 'Tree of Liberty' than anything I have so far examined. Not merely did they insert occasional references to the emblem, or use an engraving as an illustration—they also wrote poems and songs entirely devoted to the revolutionary symbol. There is, for example, 'The Tree of Liberty. A New Song, Respectfully Addressed to the Swinish Multitude. By their Fellow Citizen, William England', with its 'Come all ye' beginning —'Friends of Liberty a while attend' (S. & P.:19). The author sets contemporary events in a historical context. 'Some short time since' Britons were freer than anyone else, but the American revolution changed all that:

Brave Washington the MAN WAS HE,
Who nourish'd up fair Freedom's Tree,
Which brought forth fruit abundantly:
A noble treat, delicious, sweet,
And PAINE declar'd it was complete,
So wish'd it universal.

The slaves of despots view'd this Tree,
And hop'd such fruit at home to see,
When they returned thither.
Some seeds procur'd during their stay,
They brought across th' Atlantic sea . . .
(St. III lines 4–9, IV lines 4–5)

The seeds did not grow speedily because of the opposition of Priestcraft and Aristocracy; whereupon Reason and Philosophy began to plant Democracy and root out the evil of Superstitious Bigotry. Louis's broken promises led to his just execution, and when George III heard of it he reacted like the idiot he was:

> This news when Numps our King had got,
> He gogl'd, grinn'd, and cry'd, What, what!
> What! have they slain my brother?
> Is this the fruit of Freedom's Tree,
> That grew in England antiently?
> Which was so cut and hewn away,
> Down to the root it to destroy?
> But perhaps, the same may me annoy;—
> Oh! how PAINE makes me shudder.
>
> (St. VIII)

When George ordered his minions to seek out any of the stump remaining behind, they rooted up the shoots that were beginning to appear in the solid ground, cut them down, and sent them far across the sea—an allusion 'to those Patriotic Worthies, Margarot, Muir, Skirving, Palmer, Gerald, &c. now suffering Exile in the Cause of Parliamentary Reform'. But no matter how the tyrants strongly support one another, the grumbling swine will still write to proclaim the tidings of liberty on every side. There was even an inn, club, bookshop or printshop in Haymarket called the 'British Tree of Liberty', operated by Citizen Lee, and another Branch, 'The Tree of Liberty, No. 2, St. Ann's Court, Dean-street, Soho; where may be had variety of cheap Patriotic Publications'. From this second shop, Citizen Lee issued an address to Mr Burke entitled 'The Swinish Multitude', whose invective is more concretely intransigeant and more succinct than is usual (S. & P.:38):

> *Apostate!* beware and with Caution advance,
> The Ground you are treading is fertile as France.
> If you once overheat and inflame the *Old Bull*
> He'll toss the rich Dogs from their soft *Packs of Wool.*
> Tumble down, &c.
>
> (St. V)

Lee also published a 'Tree of Liberty' that is earlier in date of composition than William England's piece, to the tune of 'Shakespeare's Mulberry Tree' (S. & P.:38). This establishes a direct factual link between the Tree of Liberty songs, Garrick's song, and the Royal Oak tradition. Here is Lee's lyric in full:

> The great Reformation approaching we hail,
> 'Gainst Statesmen and Priests, Truth and Reason prevail,
> Triumphant the Planters of LIBERTY see
> Preparing the Soil of the Globe for the Tree.

CHORUS

All shall yield to FREEDOM's fair Tree,
Bend to thee
Blest Liberty!
Heroes are they now planting thee,
And all their great Names immortal shall be.

Away with the Splendour and Pomp of a court,
Our Toil shall no longer the Baubles support.
No longer the Slaves of a Statesman and King,
Inspired by the Muses of Freedom we Sing.
All shall yield, &c.

Ye Trees of Corruption in Courts that abound,
The Fruits ye produce are a Curse to the Ground;
In the Soil where ye flourish no others can grow
But now see the Axe at your Root aim the blow.
All shall yield, &c.

May Heav'n guard the PEOPLE of Britain and France,
And crush all their Foes where'er they advance,
An end to the Councils of Traitors combin'd,
The downfall of Tyrants and Peace to Mankind.
All shall yield, &c.

How great in the Ages to come, and how dear
Your names and your Conquests great Heroes appear.
With Rapture they'll read, and your Actions review,
While under the Shade of the Tree rais'd by you
All shall yield, &c.

A comparison between these two run-of-the-mill English 'Tree of Liberty' songs and the Burnsian one does much to substantiate the view that the Scottish poem is *not* the work of 'some talented literary criminal of the early nineteenth century' (Crawford 1960:251), but belongs to the decade of the seventeen-nineties. Henley and Henderson, it will be recollected, say 'we may charitably conclude that Burns neither made the trash nor copied it' (1896–7, IV: 107). Now we may agree that in intrinsic poetical quality 'The Tree of Liberty' is inferior to 'Is there for honest poverty?', 'Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?' 'As I stood by yon roofless tower', and 'Scots wha hae'. But it is not *so* inferior as to lead us to be certain that Burns did not write it; and when it is set beside the William England-Lee-Bollard songs just quoted, which really *do* deserve the appellation of 'trash', then the difference in quality is so great as to strengthen our conviction that a poet of Burns's agreed stature could, conceivably, have written it. In any case it is undesirable to pass judgment on 'The Tree of Liberty' as poetry until the

sources have been studied in some depth and the piece has been set against the English propagandist songs of the time. Any other verdict is insufficiently comparative because the songs used as a necessary standard are either those of other revolutions and other cultures, or else other political songs by Burns which are attempting quite different statements and using quite different images. The most recent opinion, that of James Kinsley, holds that 'such a device as the allegorical tree of liberty was unlikely to raise Burns to his highest powers, but the manner here is less firmly and finally expressive and less richly vernacular than that of Burns when he is fully engaged' (1968:1528). To this it may be objected, first, that Burns was raised to his highest powers of *prose* expression in the passage on the allegorical Tree of Life already referred to, and to a rather high pitch in poetry by the allegorical figure of Coila in 'The Vision'. 'The Tree of Liberty' may not be Burns's best work; but one cannot argue against it by suggesting that allegory as such is somehow un-Burnsian. Second, 'The Tree of Liberty' is a *song*, and bears the same relation to its sources as many other Burns songs. The manner is no more and no less 'richly vernacular' than is that of 'A red, red rose' or 'Ae fond kiss' or 'Bonnie wee thing'; and it was surely as natural for Burns to use for this lyric the contemporary specialised vocabulary of Spencean and Painite revolutionaries, common to the Left in both England and Scotland, as it was for him to employ—with success—the Scots-English of family worship in the central stanzas of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. In Kinsley's view 'the question of [Burns's] authorship of "The Tree of Liberty" remains open'; but, nevertheless, even those who are disposed to deny it will profit from the light which a study of its sources can throw on Burns's other revolutionary songs. And even if 'The Tree of Liberty' is not by Burns, it still remains the most thoroughgoing of all the 'songs of the Left' to emerge from Scotland during the eighteenth century.

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