

Fraternal Claims:
The Brotherhoods of Robert Burns

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Abstract: This essay suggests that a part of Burns's biography that can appear rebarbative, his male-identity, is also a crucial space of networking in the poet's career. His fraternal networks include in the first place, the exemplary ideological spaces of eighteenth-century Scots poetry (including the Jacobite leanings of predecessors such as Allan Ramsay), Burns's membership of the Crochallan Fencibles, his profession as an Exciseman and his place as militiaman in the Dumfries Volunteers. These latter three locations represent, certainly, complex spaces, but previous biographical readings of them tend to underplay these as the positive, imaginative spaces of creativity which are suggested in this essay. It is the argument here also that more critical attention needs to be paid to Burns's fraternal spaces to understand the configuration of patronage in his career and to bring into sharper focus a reading of gendered space, generally, in the poet's work.

In the twenty-first century Burns's masculinity remains a strong impediment to the recuperation of the writer in his full historical context. Burns the Exciseman, Burns the militia volunteer, Burns the freemason, Burns the Crochallan Fencible: these and other iterations all potentially represent Burns the rebarbative alpha male. However there have been those who seek to be apologists for the poor, beset bard, at least in the first two of these roles. Burns the taxman spoiling folk's fun and Burns forced into political loyalty are read as compromises of his real ideals. For instance, William Stewart in his book, *Robert Burns and the Common People* (1910) joins together a high-pitched cadence incorporating Burns's own words in the following passage:

[...] when the official coercion was applied - as it was bound to be - he made his submission, and democracy's greatest voice was stifled at the moment when democracy had most need of it. That, to me, is the real tragedy of Robert Burns. In his soul he was humiliated, and he was a proud man this peasant. "Burns was a poor man by birth and an exciseman by necessity; but - I will say it - the sterling of his honest worth no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind oppression might bend, but it could not subdue." (81-2)

Male-authority positions, so the inferences run are rebarbative spaces too for the poet. Few writers have had such judgemental biographers as Robert Burns. The old discredited notion of alcoholism, the moral turpitude, generally, that was such a keynote of early treatments have

given way over the year to the special pleading such as is frequently heard among Burnsians 'He was no worse than other men in his day', and the idea that his militia volunteering was a panicked reaction to the government harbouring doubts about his political beliefs. Biographically, and in ways that require expiatory engagement with the work itself, new paths remain to be found that avoid the old and (slightly) newer games of blame and praise for an individual now dead for two hundred and twenty years.

This essay brings into focus the four areas of Burns's maleness mentioned above in relation to his artistic career, arguing that what we see in all cases are (in some ways) spaces of enablement. In one sense such a proposition is axiomatic since poems, songs and letters were produced out of - and in the context of - these male 'identities.' But it remains not only a peculiar phenomenon of Burns criticism but of Scottish criticism too {in ways that are only fairly recently beginning to shift}, of reading the lesser, imperfect productions of Scottish literature (compromised as so much of its history is, so the argument goes, by deformed national status). To return to the axiom, what we have is what we have and we should expend our energy reading that material rather than producing counterfactual noises about what might have been if only Burns (and Scotland) had not been culturally, politically, historically so compromised.¹

Feminist criticism and gender criticism, more generally, have been slow off the mark with Burns, perhaps because the man who makes at least 5 women pregnant on at least 13 occasions is thought to be a hopeless case or too much of a sitting duck.² As well as the poet's personal behaviour his bawdry is also thought to be pretty distasteful by many Burnsians themselves through the nineteenth century and down to the twenty-first century. One of the most remarkable cases here is the private edition in 1911 of

1. See my starting-point discussion of this issue in "Robert Burns and the Scottish Critical Tradition" (Simpson 1997, 239-47).
2. Although see Sarah Dunnigan, 'Burns and Women' (Carruthers 2009, 20-33), for the beginnings of a more nuanced account of this area.

The Merry Muses of Caledonia (1799) by the editor of the Burns Chronicle, Duncan McNaught, the raison d'être of which is to dissociate the poet as far as possible from its production. The publication carries an introduction signed 'Vindex', meaning 'defender' or 'protector', one of the most explicit of frequent attempts by the 'Burns Movement' to throw a cordon sanitaire

around their bard.³ In the interests of fairness, however, it should also be added that McNaught makes a much more positive contribution than this, generally, to the Burns Studies of his day.⁴

Instead of denial, some critics have attempted to suggest a link between Burns's sexual libertarianism and his political 'radicalism'. However, such a claim is open to some challenge. The cultural roots of Burns's bawdry lie in traditions that are, if anything, more aristocratic (or at least have to do with male drinking club society, often of the hedonistic Tory variety), rather than with demotic politics of any kind. For instance, "Holy Willie's Prayer" (written in 1785), with its canting, hypocritical Calvinist comes from a line that, in Scottish terms, goes back through the Jacobite Tories via Allan Ramsay and to Archibald Pitcairne in texts such as the poem, "Lucky Spence's Last Advice" (c.1718) and the play *The Assembly* (written c.1691). Its strain of bawdry goes back even further through the Cavalier culture from the 1640s to 1680s and again to the plays of Ben Jonson attacking the Puritanical religious mindset.

Burns's "The Fornicators Court" (1786) was never published in Burns's lifetime. It exists in three manuscript sources, as well as in a privately printed book: only a couple of dozen copies of this book were produced. Walter Scott owns one and his possession of it speaks of one of many overlooked continuities between Burns and Scott: bawdry passed around with the drinks and tobacco in exclusively male society.⁵ Yet again, with Scott's interest in the text we have highlighted the 'aristo' cultural strain.

This print version from the early 1820s might in fact be the best text we

3 This private print edition carries the title-page note, "For subscribers only. Not for Sale" and on the same page in capitals, "A Vindication of Robert Burns in connection with the above publication and the spurious editions which succeeded it".

4 McNaught was the fiercely scholarly editor of the *Burns Chronicle* (journal of the Burns Federation) from 1893-1925.

5 For a published facsimile of Walter Scott's copy, see Burns (2009).

have for the poem, and it may actually derive from another (potentially superior) manuscript source now lost. This is not the place to go into detail, but the general point needs to be made that the careful iteration of the text (and its transmission down to the circle of Scott) derives most importantly from Burns's membership of drinking clubs such as 'The Crochallan Fencibles formed in Edinburgh in 1795 (even as 'The Fornicators Court' is a text that predates the material in the Fencibles collection, *The Merry Muses*). The preservation of the (superior

Walter Scott) text is the result of the tradition of Scottish male sociability out of which it comes. This is all of: boozy, frivolous, and at the same time a matter of some cultural pride.

The point has been made that the title of this Fencibles club is parodic of (loyal) militia of the period, and so it is. However, the further attempt to have this point suggestive of Burns's revolutionary politics does not hold much water. There were Whigs among the Crochallans, including Burns's printer-friend William Smellie, whose political radicalism has been talked up but on the basis of very slight evidence. Smellie retained the admiration until his death of such conservatives as Sir John Dalrymple and Edmund Burke. Smellie was also responsible for the ado-masochistic initiation of Burns into another drinking club that left Burns relishing the exquisite pain of his inaugural thrashing. In response to this one might say, "radical political activity, my backside, or rather Burns's! Another Whiggish member of the fencible was Henry Erskine. Erskine was politically liberal, but the sometimes-cited enmity between Erskine and Henry Dundas William Pitt's Home Secretary was as much about the rivalries within the tight legal circle of Edinburgh (and probably much more so) as it was about the larger ideological politics of the 1790. The fencibles also included Peter Hill on his way to becoming one of the most 'respectable' burgesses of Scotland's capital during the early nineteenth century period of wars between Britain and France. Burns's friend Alexander Cunningham, close to the poet until his death, was likewise a fencible, and the correspondence between the two men is notable for their plague on all your houses attitude to party politics and to foreign affair.

If we want to find a context for a song such as 'Why shouldna poor folk mowe' (or 'fornicate') it is in this kind of attitude. The song, part of

the collection The Merry Muses of Caledonia (1799), which is probably to some extent the club songbook for the Crochallan Fencibles, begins:

When Princes and Prelates and her-headed zealots

All Europe hae set in a print mowe,

The poor man lies down, nor envies a crown,

And comforts himself with a mowe. –

And why shouldna poor folk mowe, mowe, mowe,

And why shouldna poor folk mowe:
 The great folk hae siller, and houses and lands
 Poor bodies hae naething but mowe. - (Kinsley 1968, 668-9, lines 1-8)

This cynical, disengaged outlook on politics is found again in Burns's poem, "The Rights of Woman". Painites or Wollstonecraftians will look in vain here too for a particularly radical Burns; it begins:

While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,
 The fate of Empires, and the fall of Kings;
 While quacks of State muse each produce his plan,
 And even children lisp the Rights of Man;
 Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention
 The Rights of Woman merit some attention, - (Kinsley 1968, 661, 1-6)

These feminine rights, according to our jaunty narrator are to be "protect[ed]" (line 8), treated with "decorum" (16) and "admire[d]" (Kinsley 1968, 661, 28). "Ah ça ira! The Majesty of Women!!!", concludes this narrator with more of the hot fervour of the French lover (and in a turn to regal language) than of the Jacobin.

There is a remarkable consistency from the beginning of Burns's career as a poet through the 1790s in inhabiting male spaces of escape or fantasy albeit that these spaces have real cultural purchase. Nowhere is this more true than in relation to his own biography as father of an illegitimate child. In May 1785 his family servant Elizabeth Paton had given birth to the poet's daughter and some months later, into 1786, he penned "The Fornicators Court". The scenario of this poem is a fantasy, up-turned version of an ecclesiastical court of censure for fornication. In the text condemnation is poured on those who do not proudly admit their enthusiastic sexual congress. It is typical Burnsian tour de force of extended conceit (the kind of aesthetic deployment that is all too often simply not mentioned in Burns criticism: too often through the centuries Burns critics have not

really seemed to like it all that much when Burns is simply being clever or 'arty' with words or ideas). The fornicators meet in the woods away from prying eyes and have their styles of sexual congress described according to their pretensions as Freemasons and their everyday trades. The text culminates with the depiction of one sexual denier being publicly humiliated at the town cross for three and a half hours, all but naked with just a string tied tightly about his penis to protect his modesty. All of this presided over by the woman with whom he has been secretly liaising. There are here clear textual overtones of sadomasochism, of the male space that was in a sense opening up culturally in the later eighteenth century, though also (in another sense) closing down in its private confraternity. This is a radical cultural space, certainly, though not necessarily politically so. In the case of "The Fornicators Court", Burns, in his private artistic space, is cocking a snook at the kirk authorities. As with "Why shouldna

poor folk mowe" or "The Rights of Woman", we might see likewise in the earlier "The Fornicators Court", the somewhat paradoxical sight of Burns's social disengagement and positive creativity spurred on by the cultural context of his day, the local or the more international. Here is a Burns retreating individually and also imaginatively into a fraternal space, a man who is very much not the "poet of the people".

If the Romantic period is a watershed for the idea of the intense engagement of the 'writer in society', then early in his career Burns deals with his own artistic isolation through imagining male friends or at least half-imaginary poetic colleagues. During 1784-86 Burns pens a series of verse epistles (whose inspiration derives ultimately from Alexander Pope via Allan Ramsay, rather than because this was the *modum naturalem* of the Ayrshire countryside). He writes one of these to John Lapraik, who was a songwriter in Scots to a small extent rather than a poet. Lapraik eventually writes a body of poetry in Scots, publishing his poems in 1788. Similarly, Burns writes to David Sillar, who produces his book of poems in 1789, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, and only then- several years later - does Sillar write verse responses to Burns's original poetic overture. Burns's third poetic correspondent that he addresses in his verse-epistle period is William Simpson, who is never properly published in his lifetime, and who may have collaborated with Burns on one poem, "Robert Burns's Answer [to a tailor]". In other words, when we look at the context

for Burns's verse epistle period of 1784-6, he is working hard to fabricate a poetic community around him at this time. Again, we need to be aware that writing in Scots (in poetry if not in song) is not a very favoured mode in the west of Scotland. It reeks of Jacobitism, Episcopalianism, Catholicism even until Burns appears on the scene and only slowly, following his *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* in 1786, Presbyterianizes poetry in Scots. Burns's transference of Scots poetry into Ayrshire enables Lapraik *et al.* to follow him.⁶

As mentioned apropos "The Fornicators Court", Freemasonry was important to Burns: from the craft the poet derives, arguably, his most important cultural sustenance, a fraternal *esprit de corps* that pertains to large extent throughout his migrations around Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire and in the Scottish capital (it is out of the crucial Masonic rather than any political context that the connection, for instance, between Henry Erskine and Burns comes about). It is through the Ayrshire Enlightenment, and the strong Masonic component therein, that Burns takes up what is in some ways an oppositional stance to popular Ayrshire culture.

We see this in the poem, "The Ordination" (1786). In this text Burns, the man of 'moderate' Presbyterian culture, objects to the aspiration of a congregation in Kilmarnock electing its minister rather than - his preferred way that it should be done - the choice being left to the parish heritors.⁷ In a familiar Burns trick of painting the hypocritical Calvinist, the Kilmarnock 'wabsters' (or weavers) of the parish are depicted as drunk upon scripture as well as alcohol. They are also aligned by Burns, the man of the Enlightenment, with a backward Old Testament outlook. The poet depicts Common Sense, standing here both for (Thomas) Reidian philosophy and also Scripture predicated on morality, being whipped through the streets and out of town as though a woman of ill repute. Burns the artist, Burns the propagandist, is perhaps entitled to this depiction. But this is an interesting moment in Burns's career: the poet against the people, and a people in the form of the Kilmarnock weavers who were, certainly, theologically conservative but who were standing up for democracy of a sort and who also in this period - the 1780s into the 1790s - represented a demographic of Ayrshire, as well

6. For a fuller and more detailed iteration of this argument, see Carruthers (2012).

7. A proprietor or landholder in a parish

as the Presbyteries of Irvine and Kilmarnock that were in the forefront of outspoken Abolitionism.⁸ Burns the moderate Presbyterian (in favour of Patronage in the church) the Enlightenment and Freemasonic wit stands against the *hoi polloi*.⁹ Here is a moment in Burns's career where he is not the man of the people of democracy, but the man of upwardly mobile and - in a very different sense from that which is normally associated with the bard' - culturally progressive confraternities.

Another of Burns's great kirk satires from some months before 'The Ordination', "Holy Willie's Prayer" is a kind of poetic revenge on behalf of the Ayr middle class Enlightenment. The text celebrates the failure of religious conservatives to have Burns's patron, Gavin Hamilton, punished for lax kirk observance and perhaps other transgressions. Hamilton was de-fended before the kirk by another of the Ayr Enlightenment activists, Robert Aiken. Following on from the notoriety of "Holy Willie's Prayer", which circulated in manuscript, Burns's first book, Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (the 'Kilmarnock' edition) of 1786 was dedicated to a delighted Hamilton, and Hamilton and Aiken between them arranged over a third of the 612 subscriptions for the book among the Masonic shopkeepers, burgesses and teachers of Ayr. Here, again, as with his poetic correspondents John Lapraik *et al.*, Burns succeeds in galvanising a special group of friends through the power of his creative imagination.

The oppositional, *illuminati* associational tendency of Burns, established as far back as his founding of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club in 1780, found it utmost propulsion in masonry. This included - variously - Jacobite undertones, self-conscious (enlightened) intellectual superiority upwardly mobile social aspirations and a male-centred sociability that, at best, represented the sober ide of the many drinking clubs to which Burns had access, most especially in the Scottish capital. The celebrated demotic stylings of 'For a' that and a' that ['Is there for Honest Poverty"] emerge to some extent from this context of the select pretensions of the Masonic lodge:

The honest man, though e'er sae poor,

Is King o' men for a' that.

8. For the bringing into focus of conservative 'Auld Licht' Scottish Presbyterianism in Ayrshire at the forefront of the movement for the abolition of the slave trade in the late eighteenth century, see Whyte (2006, 77).

9. From Greek meaning "the many" or "the common people."

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
 Wha struts, and stares, and a' that,
 Though hundreds worship at his word,
 He's but a coof for a' that. (Kinsley 1968, 762-63, 15-20)

Indeed, secret male knowledge can be perceived in this song (originally, in its refrain most associated with Jacobitism such as is found in, to provide one example, the song "For a' that" in Joseph Ritson's *Scottish Songs* (1794)). The poor man, dispossessed, may be "the king [...] for a' that" or it may - equally - be Charles Edward Stuart, and the trope the "honest man" is one commonly associated both with Jacobitism and Freemasonry in the eighteenth century. This is not to argue that "A Man's a Man" is primarily a coded Jacobite text, but that this is one of the possible readings available (and generated by Burns himself), along with the freemasonic subtext ("That Man to Man the warld o'er, / Shall brothers be for a' that" (39-40)). And Burns is enjoying yoking these subtexts together, along, undoubtedly, with the most contemporary Jacobin resonances to create a pleasing, creative and even deniable play of associations. Indeed, with these overlapping associations, Burns is at his most extensive in

creating a confraternity (and, actually, linked confraternities) that appeal to him. The great hymn of Scottish democracy cradles within it other ranks of men, Jaco bites and Freemasons not today much noticed in the song's general reception.

Another crucial part of Burns's male associationism, or cronyism, occurs via his career as an Exciseman. Robert Burns simultaneously expressed doubts about his post in the government excise service, while also relishing the relative financial relief it brought to him and his family. As early as October 1786 he was projecting such a career, one of by then three potential sources of income alongside farming and his published poetry. However, in a letter to Robert Aiken in that month, he voiced doubts about service as a tax-man: "There are many things plead strongly against it; the uncertainty of getting soon into business, the consequences of my follies, which may make it impracticable for me to stay at home [....]" (Roy / Ferguson 1985, 58). Burns worries here that it might take too long to obtain such a career given the fairly elaborate network of patronage that needed to be negotiated, and also that his public reputation in Ayrshire as a church-attested 'fornicator' might necessitate an unsettling move away from his home country and perhaps even preclude him being commissioned in the service

altogether for his moral character. Around this time too, Burns had been contemplating emigration to the West Indies and from all this uncertainty what quite clearly emerges is Burns' anxious aspiration to make a decent living within the professional classes. Later, after more than a year of his sojourn in Edinburgh as a literary figure from late 1786, Burns determinedly applies to the excise and feels that potentially he has the proper patronage that will help him win his way to a post. Probably in January of 1788 he wrote from the Scottish capital to Robert Graham of Fintry, Commissioner of the Board of Excise whom he had recently met:

I had intended to have closed my late meteorous appearance on the stage of Life, in the country Farmer- but after discharging some filial .and fraternal claims I find I could only fight for existence in that miserable manner, which I have lived to see repeatedly throw a venerable Parent in the jaws of a Jail; where but for the Poor Man's last and often best friend, Death, he might have ended his days. I know, Sir, that to need your goodness is to have a claim on it: may I therefore beg your Patronage to forward me in this affair till I be appointed to a Division; where, by the help of rigid Economy, I shall try to support that independence so dear to my soul, but which has too often been so distant from my situation. (Roy / Ferguson 1985, 199)

Here Burns has reached the conclusion, clearly, that only one of his three possible career paths offers the potential stability and reward to win him his much reiterated ideal of 'independence'. Over the next year or so, the poet attempted to cultivate further patronage in his employment-goal through beseeching the influence of James Cunningham, 14th Earl of Glencairn, a man who warmly appreciated Burns's literary talents. Writing to Cunningham

towards the end of January 1788 in this manner, the poet also adopted an old trick in communing with the socially superior by including a manuscript-version of "Holy Willie's Prayer". This form of quid pro quo speaks of Burns placing himself yet again above the vulgar Auld Licht *hoi polloi* as he had done before in the likes of "The Ordination" though there is some irony in the general situation here as this was a text less than entirely respectful to the Glencairn family.

It was with some elation on 17th February 1788 that Burns wrote to Margaret Chalmers, a rather fine country lady who was a cut above most of the women with whom the poet consorted, that he had been successful in gaining a commission in the excise. There is notable bravura as he tells her:

You will condemn me for the next step I have taken. I have entered into the excise. I stay in the west about three weeks, and then return to Edinburgh for six weeks instructions; afterwards, for I get employ instantly, I go *ou plait a Dieu,-et mon Roi*. I have chosen this my dear friend, after mature deliberation. (Roy/ Ferguson 1985, 239)

This assertion is followed in the same letter by the less than truthful declaration, "I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitation", and he adds two further points of self-justification: "it is immediate bread and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence¹⁰, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life: besides, the commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends" (Roy/ Ferguson 1985, 240).

Burns here contemplates a relatively secure financial future and also a circle of friendship in crown employment that became his most important social network in the last nine years of his life. It is perhaps the case too that in spite of the poet apparently supposing her 'condemnation' Chalmers (who claimed after Burns's death that the poet had proposed to her) was being shown by Burns that he was upwardly mobile, reaching towards a status worthy of her.

Burns was sent for the minimum six week training course in the excise, essentially a form of private tuition under a trained exciseman, James Findlay at Tarbolton, from April to May 1788. The poet, at this point, is beginning to enter into a profession that promised - and in time

delivered - a strong masculine support group; writing to Graham of Fintry on 25th March 1788, Burns wrote of Findlay bringing to his forthcoming training "the warmth of a friend" (Roy / Ferguson 1985, 267). In June 1788, Burn; took lease of his new farm at Ellisland where, in February 1789, the poet felt his prospects were looking up, although it was not until the autumn that he was finally to be employed in the service. On 3rd February 1789, Burns wrote to the Catholic Bishop John Geddes:

There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an Excise-Officer, but I do not intend to borrow honour from any profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to anything that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect. (Roy/ Ferguson 1985, 367)

10 Referring to his lionization in Edinburgh.

Writing, suitably enough, to the prelate in confessional mode, Burns also assures Geddes that he is now very much a family man and that he will continue to pursue his literary art, particularly by way of the "study [on man and Nature, in that view, incessantly; and to try if the ripening corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving." (Roy / Ferguson 1985, 366-67) The echo from the Bible here of the idea of the disrespectful trade of tax-gatherer and the defiant simultaneous distancing of himself from this, "I do not intend to borrow honour from any profession", (367) as well as seeing his Excise-career as the platform for improving his prospects, makes for a typically Burnsian performance in puffing sensibility. Mock humility and the moral high-ground compete for mastery, albeit in an uneven context in this letter. Here in the comfort of the virtual confessional with a strong patriarchal, indeed episcopal, presence, Burns, in fact, asserts (yet again) his manliness.

For all his sometime seeming sheepishness about it, the patronage of Glencairn and Fintry brought Burns into an ambit of similarly inclined crown-employed men of his own professional class. Men like John Syme and Alexander Findlater in the customs branch of His Majesty's service again provide the poet with perhaps his most solid cultural grouping in his lifetime. Often liberal in political principle, this is a grouping within which he can try out his writing and direct some of this towards the also very convivial occasions afforded to his profession. Again, we find bawdry surfacing, such as the song, "O saw ye Maggie" which, in manuscript version (which was owned by Walter Scott), has a mock testament and bequeathing of the lines to Findlater. Politics are present too, such as in the epigrams recited by Burns and taken down in the hand of Syme in private session during 1794 (Kinsley 1968, 756-58).

In early 1795, we have the notorious episode of Burns (along with Syme and Burns's excise colleague, John Lewars) under threat of invasion from France, Joining the militia, the Royal Dumfries Volunteers. The minute-book of the volunteers was for many years missing, but on being rediscovered in the early twentieth century showed that Burns might read as a rather enthusiastic militia man (Will 1919). Its evidence silently attests the poet diligently observing the discipline without the recording of any censures for minor infringements, in contrast to numerous of his

comrades who had such bestowed upon them in the minutes. Implicitly, Burns may be seen, perhaps, enjoying the uniform, playing the comradely-soldier, which would be of a piece with his confraternal activities previously in his life. Burns, then, was not simply protesting his loyalty too loudly to disguise more radical politics (another long-standing claim within Burns lore). Part of Burns' controversial heritage within the volunteers is the song he wrote for his corps, "The Dumfries Volunteers". The song is sometimes over-read in the opposite direction to Burns's undoubted reform-minded politics as showing a reactionary, loyalist mentality (a recantation, even, of his previous political views). Rather, however, its belligerent opening line, "Does haughty Gaul invasion threat" (3) and its hymning of "wooden walls upon our seas" (3) (the Royal Navy) might simply be read as the defiant, part-frightened response to the prospect (always uncertain for any inhabitant whatever their politics might be) of a foreign power taking over control of the nation (Kinsley 1968, 764-66). The last stanza before the final chorus ends, "But while we sing, God save the King, I We'll ne'er forget the people" (31-32). Here again, as in "Is there for Honest Poverty" (which was written in the same period of weeks as "The Dumfries Volunteers"), we find Robert Burns juggling the language of the ordinary man and the regal one. Manhood was for the poet a complex business that gave him much food for thought and sustenance for a successful creative career.

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Previously published in:

Inspiring Views from "a' the airts" on Scottish Literatures, Art & Cinema:

The First World Congress of Scottish Literatures in Glasgow 2014.