

**The Life and Work
of Peter Buchan
1790-1854**

Ian Spring

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ABSTRACT

Peter Buchan was described almost contemptuously by Thomas Carlyle as "a lean-visaged, crane-necked, scraggy-bearded human figure, with an air of enthusiasm, simplicity, distraction and ill-luck". Yet today, with Carlyle hardly read outside Academia, it is the ballads collected by Buchan that have survived in the rich oral tradition of north-east Scotland to be 'discovered' again by the endeavours of Gavin Greig at the turn of the century and, more recently, by the collectors of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh. The importance and prominence of Buchan's ballad texts (they constitute a large percentage of the 'A' texts in Child) is due, I believe, to three important factors: his situation - the first collector to tap the oral tradition of the north-east, his social standing - less distanced from the roots of the folk tradition than the *literati*, and his work as a printer - familiar with the increasingly wider dissemination of song texts as broadsheets and chapbooks. In this study I have tried to trace Buchan's quixotic career and I have been fortunate in having the help of a wide range of letters and manuscripts in the possession of various institutions available only in part to the early biographers of Buchan - Walker and Fairley.

Secondly, I have tried to reassess Buchan's work in the context of our wider knowledge of the Scottish and English folk traditions. To this purpose, I have touched only briefly on the controversy concerning the source of Buchan's ballad manuscripts - as this matter has been well dealt with already by, among others, William Walker, Alexander Keith, Hamish Henderson and David Buchan - but instead concentrated on songs other than the classic ballads preserved in Buchan's manuscripts that have been little considered in the past - notably the songs in his long neglected manuscript collection *Secret Songs of Silence* - comparable in scope and purpose to Burns's *Merry Muses*. I have also tried to reassess Buchan's important contribution to the delineation of sources for songs collected or collated by Burns which has been either ignored or condemned by Burns editors to this day. Finally, I have collated and updated the bibliographies of Buchan's publications compiled by Cameron and Fairley.

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PART
ONE

EARLY YEARS

Peter Buchan was born in the northern fishing port of Peterhead on the 4th of August 1790. He was the only son of Peter Buchan, a pilot, residing in a cottage house in the Longate. Peterhead¹, at the time, was in the middle of a period of expansion and had doubled in population in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1816 it was described by Buchan in the following terms:

Peterhead is a clean and neat little town; - the streets are open, straight, and in general clean and dry, and give a free course to the fresh air. Nothing is allowed to remain on them that can contaminate the air, or offend any of the senses. The greater part of the houses stand in regular order, especially the

latest built; which are in general of the finest hewn granite, which is composed of quartz, shorl, and feldspar, neatly finished, and have a beautiful appearance when the sun shines. In the inside of the houses of people of every rank, if you do not find costly furniture, you will, for the most part, meet with cleanness and neatness. Upon the whole, it has a handsome aspect, the houses being covered with slate, and situated on a gentle ascent, all which give it an elegant appearance from the sea.²

It was renowned, apparently, not only for its fishing, but for its butter and its beer, which was exported to Edinburgh. Surprisingly, it was also famed as a spa. In 1816 Buchan noted that there were two tidal baths (the larger 90 feet by 30) cut out of the solid rock, and twelve warm baths close to the Athenaeum where Peterhead worthies could partake of the mineral waters or parade in the ballroom. The favourite sports were, it seems, cricket and golf, played on the links. During Buchan's boyhood, however, the main source of Peterhead's prosperity was its ever-growing whaling fleet - as a review of the whalers registered in the port during the early years of the nineteenth century reveals: 1802 Hope, 1804 Enterprise, 1810 Active, 1811 Perseverance, 1813 Resolution, Union, 1814 Dexterity, 1815 Superior, 1817 Alert, Gleaner, 1818 Alpheus, Jean. By 1818, in fact,

over 140 whales and 1200 tons of oil were harvested by the fleet. No doubt Peter Buchan senior was partly employed by this industry - Peterhead harbour was extremely busy and Buchan was later to write that "the pilots of Peterhead have long been characterised as the most adventurous of any on the coast; steady and expert in their duty, and civil and reasonable in their charges."³ - but he was also involved to some extent, it seems, in factoring properties in the counties of Sutherland and Ross and Cromarty for a London company and may have spent some time travelling in the highlands of Scotland. No record survives of Buchan's mother and it is not clear whether he had any sisters - in one of his later verses he refers to "the solitary tomb where four dear sisters' bodies lie", but this could be merely poetic licence. In fact, details of Buchan's early life are somewhat hard to come by. One reason for this is given by William Walker, author of the most detailed account of Buchan's life yet written: "The main outlines of his life have been given, time and again, in Encyclopaedias, Dictionaries of Biography, and *sic like*, but these are for the most part meagre, and what is worse, very frequently unreliable. This last characteristic may be partly due to Buchan himself, who, on more than one occasion, when dire necessity urged, supplied to writers in current periodicals, such information as was hoped would make a good

advertisement."⁴ Buchan's propensity to exaggerate or modify the circumstances of his own history as he thought fit, however, is only one reason for the scant information available. One other is that Buchan, unlike most of the other ballad collectors and litterateurs of the period, came from a comparatively poor background. Certainly Buchan's father seems to have had a reasonable salary but, within the remit of that particular age, they were barely of a respectable class. It was not usual for those of Buchan's parentage and background, especially from a small provincial outpost such as Peterhead, to enter literary life, and Buchan's family were clearly not of a mind to keep detailed records of their fairly ordinary lives. In later life Buchan, in his *Autobiography*, which runs to some twenty-eight pages and which he described as "a few desultory sentences", was to claim a fairly grand ancestry - "My father and grandfather, and his father, as well as my mother and her father and grandfather on the one side, are all of one stock and pedigree of a General Buchan, who had at one time large possessions and kept a good castle, modishly called a *house*, at Rattray, parish of Crimond. He was a scion of the Cumyns, Earls of Buchan, who had changed the name to that of their title. My grandmother on the mother's side, Margaret, or (as she was complimentarily called) *bonny Peggy Irvine*, was lineally descended, and nearly related to the ancient and renowned house of

Drum"⁵ - but, in the absence of any real evidence, it is possible that this is rather fanciful. Certainly Buchan is a common enough name in the north-east which probably allowed Buchan to exercise his imagination in this way. The one powerful controlling factor over all of Buchan's career was his desire to be accepted as a gentleman (and as a scholar), and his determination that his comparatively humble background should not encumber his ambitions can be clearly seen in every page of his *Autobiography*.

Details of Buchan's early life are scant, but it seems that his education was not particularly extensive - although he himself notes that he "made considerable and rapid progress in my learning, was accounted clever" - and, at a fairly early age, he was entered into apprenticeship. There is a holograph note in Fairley's manuscripts, collected from a Mr Brockett of Newcastle in which he states that, "at an early age (Buchan) entered most appropriately into a grocer's shop. Here he continued for a time, dispensing tea and sugar, and measuring off pig-tail tobacco for the sailors; and amusing himself in his hours of relaxation by making fiddles, drawing pictures, and even engraving them".⁶ However, there is no other evidence for this, but it does seem that at some point Buchan was apprenticed to a mill-wright, whose business unfortunately foundered in

Peterhead, forcing Buchan to complete his instruction in Aberdeen. The whole affair is reported, however, with a slightly different slant by Buchan:

Having, young as I was, a taste for mechanics, I occasionally visited a most ingenious young man, who was not only a machinery maker, but a round and square wright, brass founder, black, white, and copper smith... I continued for twelve months with this worthy man, for I was not bound apprentice, but one at will. I would have remained longer, but like too many honest souls, he found the cold frowns of fortune so chilling for his warm heart, in Peterhead, that his constitution could bear it up no longer, so at a tangent struck off. I followed him to the place of his retreat, continued with him another twelve months and was happy. By this time I had made myself *Master of Arts*, which I never intended to use.⁷

Buchan does seem to having developed some ingenuity at machine-making during this time, as his subsequent labours were to confirm. However, he seems to have determined after this period to go to sea - a reasonable enough occupation for a young man from a sea-faring town - but his parents clearly envisaged a better career for their son and put an end to it. Buchan explains it thus:

Having had a wish to try my fate at sea, I got a midshipman's commission in the navy; but on

the eve of my going away, my parents, who had never given their consent, would not sanction my proceedings, nor allow me a penny to purchase necessaries. I was therefore obliged to abandon my favourite scheme, and for a few years afterward, as the boatmen term it, 'Hung upon my oars'. During this cessation, I amused myself occasionally by making musical instruments, engraving copperplates, &c.; yes, and falling in love, too, the worst amusement of all.⁸

It was during this period of enforced idleness, on 20th June 1813, at the age of 22, that Buchan married Margaret Mathew, a dressmaker in Peterhead, who stayed with him despite all adversity and survived him by six years. It is likely that the marriage was thought necessary as an entry in the family records only six months later⁹ notes the birth of their first son, Patrick Buchan - called Peter after his father: "And God through his unbounded goodness was pleased to Grant them a son, who was Born between the hours of 5 and 6 o'clock in the Ev'ning of Monday the 13th of Dec 1813 and was baptised Patrick on the Sabbath following". Amazingly, Patrick and Charles Forbes, the third son of the marriage, were the only two of Buchan's ten children to survive their father, but Buchan was not lacking in optimism at the time. Several years later he noted in his *Autobiography*¹⁰: "I got married and was a father about the time other young men think of leaving the nest. The first fruits of our

connubial happiness has already attended three sessions at Marischal College, Aberdeen, and was only half-past eleven when he commenced his studies as a bursar and public student".

The headstrong Buchan, however, had never found favour with his father, and the rather sudden circumstances of his marriage and subsequent fatherhood can hardly have helped to heal the rift. In later years old Peter was publicly berated by his son for this: "although my father possessed some landed property, and was well able to assist me, I having married more to please myself than to please him, he determined not to give me a single sou, and to this day has kept his word as sacredly as any of the drab-coated generation."¹¹ It seems, however, that Buchan's relationship with his father was never quite as bad as Buchan preferred to paint it. Only one letter from his father has survived and from this it is clear that the reason for the lack of correspondence, in fact, was that old Peter was barely literate - a fact that Buchan would hardly have wanted to publicise, especially as he was rather sensitive about his own schooling. The letter reveals, however, that Buchan relied on his father to some extent to collect rents on his property when he was settled in Aberdeen. It is dated 21st April 1831 and addressed "Cand Street, Abi" (Canal Street, Aberdeen). The suggestion seems to be that a gentleman

(perhaps Amos Cox) had caused a rebellion among Buchan's tenants:

Dear son I take this oportunity of writing this few lines hoping they will find you in good health and your little children I am sory to writ you this But one man came and told me that my Proprty was not wirth opound another man told that imes keeks wint throw yours tandnts and told them not to pay you any rints for your houses But your old father loks upon all this as great layes But I hop this will give your self no trodel many lys have they told upon me and I tok them wot psions But time will try all things Pleas god I hop to sea yor self to geat your rints your self give my complments to your wife and children if you Bea well to come to Petrhad you may bring of your children along with you and Perhaps I will treat then with a lobster or partan remans yor old father.¹²

This rather touching little note reveals one thing quite clearly - that, despite Buchan's protestation of parental victimisation, his own way of conducting his affairs and the subsequent trials and tribulations must have themselves horrified old Peter Buchan, who seems to have been a simple man with few ideas above his station. There is some evidence, however, that after this time father and son were to the great extent reconciled. Old Peter Buchan died in 1838 and Buchan wrote to his

sister-in-law, Ann Scott, on 30th September 1838: "When I left P. last, I did not think it would be the last time on earth I was to look upon him who was the means of my existence. - He had his faults, it is true, as every one has, which made me often bear up with them when it was hard to do... He had virtues as well as faults if rightly managed, and his heart was kind."¹³

Buchan records that as a boy of twelve years old, he had spent some four months with his father in the north of the country where he was factor for some properties, and learned a little Gaelic - "among a poor but hospitable race of hardy strangers, I picked up a few words of their ancient language, as they fell from their tongues; but as the soil in which they were sown was of a barren kind, in a few years they withered".¹⁴ There is no further evidence of Buchan's interest in the Gaelic tongue, but it seems likely that his interest in folksong and folklore dates from this time (there is also a suggestion in his manuscripts that he may have collected some of his material from his grandparents or other relatives, but there is no direct evidence of this.) Certainly, however, as a comparatively young man, he developed an interest in what he called the "mania" of writing poetry. He seems to have spent some time at this pursuit as in 1814, at the age of twenty-three, a slim volume of poems by Buchan entitled *The Recreation of Leisure Hours: being*

original Songs and Verses, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect was published in Edinburgh by Oliver and Boyd on subscription. It is probable that it had taken some time to get this work to press as Buchan states in the foreword that "the Author exceeds not twenty years of age and most of the following little pieces are the effusions of juvenile years, from fourteen to the above date"¹⁵ The volume is well produced and illustrated with woodcuts by Bewick and prefaced by a poem, *Temple of Fame* - "Oh! grant an honest fame, or grant me none". The folk influence on Buchan's work is clear - as several of the songs employ popular folksong tunes - for example, *The Mill, Mill, O*, *Logie o' Buchan*, *Erin Go Bragh*, and *The Flowers of Edinburgh*. Many commentators have pointed to Buchan's lack of poetic talent, and credited him with the worst of chapbook doggerel that occasionally appears in his manuscripts. Walker also berates *Recreations* as "a very jejune affair", and mocks Buchan's literary intentions, his verse in "extremely bald and limping English", and the frequent pastoral and classical allusions. He also sees fit to precis what is probably the worst of Peter's essays, *The Effects of Love, a Pastoral, in three parts*: "Adonis, a shepherd, goes after a strayed lamb, which having found, he is on his way home when he hears the voice of song, and, peeping through a hedge, he espies his friend Daphnis sitting with his back to a rock, his flocks around him, his crook

decorated with a flowery garland, and singing his love for Julia, a shepherdess. The second part tells how Daphnis set out to visit his Julia, and finds her 'in a faint, apparent dead', surrounded by weeping friends. Daphnis' sobs swell the chorus of grief, and Julia revives a little. Alas! it is only the flicker of the candle before it goes out - she dies in his arms, and he is inconsolable. He wanders about aimlessly and neglects his work and everything else. In part the third he is advised wisely to pull himself together, and kill his grief by attending to his deserted flock. He sets out to follow this good advice, and meets Adonis, to whom he relates his woes, thus tearing open his wound afresh. It is too much for him; he dies in Adonis's arms, and the poem ends with Adonis's lament... We apologise for rehearsing this tragic tale in our own bald prose instead of Peter's pastoral lines, but really..." Walker also finds some individual lines particularly amusing - for example, "The once famed beauty of the Scottish lands,/ Romantic Pictish, built in Gothic form", and "The withered and the aged oaks/ And various stacks of corn".¹⁶ However, only a small percentage of Buchan's work is in this pretentious style. The truth is that the verse in *Recreation*, while various in quality and often unduly extravagant, is no better or worse than the produce of many amateur versifiers of the time. Typical of his more effective and simpler style is this verse

from *The Spring Returns*:

The Spring returns, see nature smiles,
And Ugie's banks are clad in green;
The angler, with his cunning wiles,
Draws forth the tenant from the stream.

It does seem, in fact, that Buchan himself could occasionally write tolerably well in the folk idiom. In a later collection *Gleanings*,¹⁷ published in 1825, Buchan contributed some of his own songs (signed with a "B") along with more traditional pieces. One example of his work is *Cheerfu' Nancy*:

But ne'er sinsyne I seek these shades,
They now are a' unheeded, O,
Yet even mair I'll bless these glades,
In love whare I succeeded, O.

Rosy war her blushes, O,
Rosy war her blushes, O,
How light my heart, yet wae to part,
When met amang the bushes, O.

Another is entitled *Maria*:

Still, I'll weave the silky garland;
Still, with roses fond entwine;
Still, with pearly drops bedew it;
Yet my Henry shall be mine.

It would seem that Buchan's literary talents, therefore, were average, but *Recreation* is a fairly innocuous work. It seems to have sold well enough, and several years later Buchan had to reply to John Robertson, the Edinburgh bookseller, that he couldn't get hold of a copy "for love or money". In his *Autobiography*, however, Buchan seems to suggest that it received a hostile reception: "...this publication, young as I was, and innocent as I thought it, brought upon me, in my townsmen, a myriad of foes, 'in various shapes of parsons, critics, beaux.' I was sadly taken to pieces, not one particle of soul nor body that could be anatomized but what was laid under the scalpel, or dissecting knife, of these enemies to innovation."¹⁸ It seems hard to believe that a small collection of romantic poetry penned by a young man could excite such a controversy, and it could be that this reaction from Buchan was simply the result of the sort of paranoia that was to dog him through his later life. However, in such a small provincial town as Peterhead, dedicated primarily to the essentially practical pursuits of fishing and whaling, an engagement in the literary arts may have seemed either out of place or self-indulgent. Whatever the truth of the matter may have been, however, the young Buchan was not to be distracted from his new cause (the introductory poem in *Recreation*, *To My Book*, contains the words "Hate resignation, and not fear,/ Tho' clouds of

Critics do appear"). Sometime during 1815, the year after the publication of *Recreation*, Buchan somehow arrived at the determination to launch Peterhead abruptly into a sea of literature. What he intended to do, without any real prior knowledge of the trade, was to set up the first printing press in Peterhead, and the most northerly such enterprise in the country - Aberdeen so far having boasted the most northerly imprint.

At this time, Buchan seems to have had several friends in Peterhead. One of them was Alexander Leslie, a young man some seven years older than Buchan, who attended the parish school and was apprenticed to his father as a fish-curer and cooper. Leslie's short career was in some ways as strange and unfortunate as Buchan's, and Buchan's effusive and extravagant eulogy to him suggests that he saw him very much as a fellow in fortune. In fact, Leslie's father died at an early age and the son, seeing his business failing, set off to London in hopes of attracting new business. He seems to have returned with a strong dose of religion and set about organising a Sabbath Evening School in Peterhead. According to Buchan, his slightly liberal and ecumenical views (although based on Calvinist principles) met strenuous opposition in the conservative burgh of Peterhead. It is likely that Buchan assisted him in this venture and among the first publications of Buchan's Auchmedden press were

tracts written by Leslie. Like Buchan, however, Leslie was something of an inventor. In 1817 he invented a new form of lifeboat, and took it to London to demonstrate, where it "gave evident proofs of its apparent utility to mariners when tried in London river, he and a Mr Bell being inside." Unfortunately, Leslie journeyed home on board the Forth, a steam packet, which struck a sand-bar near Montrose harbour and foundered - all on board perishing.¹⁹ Buchan's determination to set up the printing press, however, seems to have encouraged him to court new friends. He had had some small success in raising subscribers for *Recreation*. Now, through the auspices of a family friend, James Arbuthnot, postmaster, he obtained some patronage from David Stuart Erskine, the Earl of Buchan, and Charles Forbes of Auchmedden, MP, and set off for Edinburgh on the 15th of December 1815 with, as he put it, "a pocket full of flattering introductory letters, and an almost empty purse". He was sent on to Stirling, to learn the art of printing from Dr Daniel Wingate. He appears to have been a successful student. During this short period he was again afflicted again with the lyric muse and he recorded that he had written eight songs whilst in Stirling - *May Morning*, *Roseate May*, *Cheerfu' Nancy*, *Edwin*, *Maria*, *My May*, *Spotless Peggy* and *Beautiful Sue* - which he later published in *Gleanings*. He seems to have had a penchant for addressing various women - *Maria*, or *the Maniac's Song*

was about a girl who "appeared one day on the streets of Peterhead as if she had at that instant fallen from the clouds". She suffered from "melancholia", which Buchan took to be due to an unfortunate love affair (a favourite topic which he later developed in dramatic form). *Beautiful Sue* was "written out of respect to an amiable young woman in Edinburgh", and this was, in fact, the song that he chose to set in type to demonstrate his new-found skills within ten days of his apprenticeship. Astonishingly, for this work he received fifty pounds from an unnamed friend of the Earl, with which he purchased some type and other essential materials and returned to Peterhead to set up his press on the 24th of March, 1816. Dr Wingate was later to write to the Earl of Buchan:

Please to accept of my thanks for the opportunity you have afforded of making me acquainted with Mr Buchan, who certainly is a most meritorious young man. The few opportunities I have had of seeing him, have afforded me much satisfaction; and I hope the astonishing progress he has made here, will materially promote his future projects, which must every day expand more and more from the great diligence and modesty he inherits.²⁰

Buchan was certainly willing to pay court to his sponsors. Having visited the Earl of Buchan in Edinburgh

(in later years he was to visit him at his family seat, Dryburgh Abbey), he seems to have promised the Earl, who was an enthusiastic litterateur, to publish a second volume of his essays - the first having already been published as *The Anonymous and Fugitive Essays of the Earl of Buchan* in 1812 - as this letter from the Earl to James Arbuthnot, dated 7th of March, 1816, makes clear:

Sir, I had the pleasure to receive yours concerning Peter Buchan, in due course, and since, a packet from Buchan himself, by which I am glad to find he is likely to prosper. Tell him that I forwarded the contents of his letter to Mr Faichney (factor to his Lordship) at Dryburgh Abbey, who, when he returns to town, will be ready to treat for paper, with your stationer, when you have determined how many copies of the second volume of my *Essays and Literary Correspondence* you may be encouraged to print, which you cannot know for a considerable time to come... The advertisement relating to the book need not consist (but) of its title:- "Letters on various subjects of Literature to the Earl of Buchan, etc, collected from various Periodical Publications." Vol Second. Peterhead: Printed by P Buchan, Junr., Printer. With respect to a Prospectus, it seems unnecessary as the title of the book speaks for itself, and that all unnecessary expense ought to be avoided. I entertain little doubt of Peter Buchan finding sufficient encouragement at Peterhead and County of Aberdeen in the

General line of his business, and believe the booksellers at Edinr. and elsewhere will encourage the sale of the proposed volume on the ordinary terms.

The Earl's essays were never published by Buchan but Charles Forbes was to fare better. In the same year Buchan named his third son, Charles Forbes Buchan, after his patron, and his press, the Auchmedden Press, after Forbes's place of birth. In the next three years Buchan was largely to succeed in his aims, and he recounts this period in his *Annals of Peterhead*:

Printing was first established in Peterhead, as a regular business, on the 24th day of March 1816, by a young man, who had long witnessed with feeling regret, the inconvenience his native town laboured under, no printing-press, at that time, being nearer than Aberdeen. To remedy this defect, and with a view to surmount every obstacle, however difficult, he set out on a pilgrimage to Edinburgh, and thence to Stirling: he staid a few days in each place, where he acquired the rudiments of the *Faustical Art*, and at the end of ten day's hard study, produced specimens of his progress in it... Since his settlement in Peterhead, he has made a *PRINTING-PRESS* with no assistance from any other person, being wright and blacksmith alternately himself. The present work is wholly printed with this press. After having succeeded beyond his most sanguine

expectation, and that of his friends, in this laborious job, he was led to try the Type-founding, in which, the length that he went, he succeeded equally well, but the cutting of the punches, and preparing of the moulds were found to occupy too much of his time, as he was always under the necessity of making his own tools.²¹

Peter's self-made copper-plate press seems, in fact, to have been a remarkable machine. It was a very good example of what was called a jobbing platen, with a treadle action - "the press was constructed upon a new principle. It was wrought with the feet instead of the hands, and not confined to printing with types alone. It took impressions from stone, copper, and wood in a distinct and easy manner, and would have answered equally well for printing on cloth."²² Buchan also claimed that it had an index for the number of sheets printed. If this was the case then Buchan was responsible for an important early innovation in the history of printing. James Moran, in his history of printing notes that "an index to show the number of sheets printed did not become a practical proposition until the development of the cylinder printing machines",²³ which was around 1845. Buchan, however, never took out a patent on the machine and was to later claim that the idea had been stolen from him by a gentleman who took it to America and made a considerable fortune. Be this as it may, there is no

doubt that Buchan's achievements in this short period in the printing field were very substantial, and over the next few years the Auchmedden Press was to be extremely busy.

references

- 1 According to the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1795), Peterhead was supposedly named after Saint Peter or a highland chieftain named Peter or Patrick who lost his head on a plundering expedition to the parish. Buchan himself, wisely refuses to speculate on this. Local beauty spots include Mount Pleasant and the river Ugie - "The Ugie, with the purling stream, serpentine turns, and verdant banks.. forms one of the richest and most beautiful landscapes in Buchan" - both of which frequently feature in Buchan's verses.
- 2 Peter Buchan *Annals of Peterhead* (Peterhead, 1819), p. 10. Most of the following facts are culled from this work.
- 3 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 4 William Walker, *Peter Buchan and Other Papers* (Aberdeen, 1915), p. 18.
- 5 Peter Buchan, *Autobiography*, (Glasgow, 1839), p. 4. This work is addressed to his patron, the Earl of Buchan.
- 6 John A Fairley, *Scrapbook of Items Relating to Peter Buchan* (ND), the the National Library of Scotland
- 7 *Autobiography*, *ibid*, p. 5.
- 8 *Ibid*, p. 7.
- 9 Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/1.
- 10 *Autobiography*, *ibid*, pp 5-6.
- 11 See also *Autobiography*, *Ibid*, p. 7.
- 12 Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/8.
- 13 Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/4. As I intend to quote at length from letters to and from Buchan over a period of years I have not referenced each one individually in the course of this essay. All the sources I have discovered of letters to and from Buchan are listed in the bibliography.

- 14 *Autobiography*, *ibid*, p. 5.
- 15 Peter Buchan, *The Recreation of Leisure Hours* (Edinburgh, 1814), pp 10-11. He continues: "The Author of this little volume appears before the public, with all that anxiety and diffidence so natural to one in his situation. He will not trouble them with any account of the motives which led to its publication; for though he is aware that there are many faults, and much room for amendment, in the following pages, yet, he is at the same time sensible, that the Public are seldom very solicitous to enquire from what cause these faults have originated; whether from inexperience, incapacity, or indolence, on the part of the Author, or from peculiar circumstances in his own private situation and history... it may therefore be requisite to mention, the Author of the following pages has not had the advantage of a liberal education, - that most of his little pieces were written under circumstances peculiarly inpropitious - and that they have not been revised by any person who was qualified to comment or amend them."
- 16 William Walker, *The Bards of Bon Accord* (Aberdeen, 1887), pp 380-381.
- 17 Peter Buchan, *Gleanings Of Scotch, English, and Irish Scarce Old Ballads* (Peterhead, 1825).
- 18 *Autobiography*, *ibid*, p. 6.
- 19 The details of Leslie's life are given in *Annals of Peterhead*, *ibid*, pp 138-144. This was later reprinted as *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Character of Mr Alexander Leslie* (Peterhead, 1819). Buchan's publications relating to Leslie are *A Leslie, A Candid Statement of the Opinions Held by Calvinists and Arminians* (Peterhead, 1816) - this was the first work printed by Buchan at the Auchmedden Press - *Letter Addressed to A. Leslie, Peterhead* (Peterhead, 1816), *Letter Addressed to T. M. Author of a Letter Addressed to A. Leslie* (Peterhead, 1816), and *A Leslie, Review of Pamphlets (Occasioned by the Candid Statement* (Peterhead, 1817).
- 20 Quoted in *Autobiography*, *ibid*, p. 7.
- 21 *Annals of Peterhead*, *ibid*, pp 127-128.
- 22 From a note on Buchan in *Hogg's Instructor*, vol. IV (1850), New Series, pp 180-183.

23 James Moran, *Printing Presses: History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times* (London, 1973), p. 73. See also Roderick Cave, *The Private Press* (London, 1971), p. 112. The evidence for Buchan's innovations in printing mostly comes from his own statements in his *Autobiography* - "I invented a new printing press, which was wrought with the feet instead of the hands, and was not confined to the printing with types alone, but took impressions from stone, copper, wood, and types, in the most distinct and easy manner, all of which specimens I have past me, printed in the presence of several of the most respectable gentlemen in Peterhead, and have no doubt but it would answer equally well all the purposes of one for printing on cloth with rollers, on a small and cheap scale. Many advantages could be pointed out in this press superior to those in common use. The first, being much easier and quicker wrought by the feet. The second, that it answers all the purposes of a lithographic, a copperplate, and letter-press, at about the one-half of what the others would cost. the third is, that a person doing business on a small scale in a country place or little town, could combine all the three branches at little expense. The fourth is, that a saving of three-fourths of rent could be made by using this press in preference to all the others, as it would only occupy one-fourth of the space... I invented another most useful machine connected with printing. It was an index for keeping account of the number of sheets printed in any given time. I have kept one of them going on one pf my presses for these several years past, and never knew it, in any one instance, to give a false report; in fact it is impossible, owing to its nature and construction." Ibid, p. 11.

GREAT PLANS

Sometime between 1813 and 1816, Buchan had his portrait painted by a local artist, James Forbes. This painting, which now hangs in the Arbuthnot Museum, Peterhead, was engraved and appeared opposite the title page of both *Ancient Songs and Ballads* and *The Peterhead Smugglers*. It shows Buchan as a fairly handsome young man with angular features, a mop of tousled hair and long sideburns. He wears an overcoat with a wing collar and an open neck. His hand is held to his breast and he looks upwards with a faint smile and a wide-eyed appearance of innocence and optimism. Surprisingly, this portrait was to attract some comment

at a later date. Thomas Carlyle commented: "There is no doubt whatever that I once read Mr Buchan's former volume or volumes of Scotch Ballads but the impression they have left with me is to the last degree dim! Some reminiscence of innocent old doggrel, - which, alas, I have a suspicion, seemed to be eked out with new: this, in a faint vague, half-distracted condition, is all I can firk out of memory's depths on that subject. Clear only, or in some degree clear, is the portrait opposite the frontespiece: a lean-visaged, crane-necked, scraggy- bearded human figure, with an air of enthusiasm, simplicity, distraction and ill-luck, subscribed "Peter Buchan", - as if appealing to all benevolent mortals: "I Peter Buchan am actually extant heir; can any of you tell me why?" And at an even later date, some years after poor Peter's death, William Walker commented: "Fronting the title page of his crudest works, and looking out upon you with all the self-importance which the folded down Byronic shirt-collar and flowing mantle can add to the thin, dark phiz and commonplace head, may be seen the figure of Peter Buchan, a man of considerable genius..."¹

At this time, however, Buchan's air of optimism may have seemed well-placed - he certainly must have been satisfied with his fairly rapid elevation in the literary world. Sometime in 1817, after setting up

the Auchmedden Press, Buchan, along with Mr Wallace, a schoolmaster (who may, in fact, have taught Buchan in his youth) collected several songs and other material to send to James Hogg who was at that time engaged on the collection of Jacobite songs (mostly spurious products of the romantic revival) which he was to publish in his *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1819-21). On the 24th of June, 1818, Hogg replied, detailing his own project and giving his opinion of a song penned by Buchan sent to him for comment:

A thousand thanks for your kind attention to my interest. I cannot express how much I am gratified by the exertions of you and Mr Wallace who are (the latter in particular) so much strangers to me. I have been highly amused by the descriptions of your several rural excursions and have accompanied you in imagination every foot of the way, and in your humorous adventure with the old Jacobite have in idea made one of the number. Mr Wallace is a highly valuable correspondent. I wish I were nearer to him: but I fear you are both putting yourself to more trouble than what is necessary, for the hoard of Jacobite matters that I have procured now is immense, and I have got no fewer than ten copies of the same song in some instances. Of the two first you sent me I have seen no other copies, but I fear they are modern imitations; however, among such, they may do very well, for a part of such there must . All the rest I have save Skinner's poems which are a very valuable

curiosity. As I am only publishing Jacobite Songs I cannot publish them as such, but as notes, all or a part of them will be very curious. If you hear of a song, the first verse or chorus, is sufficient to send, till you know if I have not got it, or any thing that will lead me to know what it is. It being now impossible to distinguish what were really the original verses of each song, I have resolved for the honour of our country to take always the best edition of each that I can find, and even the best set of each verse that I can find... I have ventured, you see, to curtail the song one verse, and to make some trifling alterations, for which, I am sure, I will receive no thanks, having had some experience how thankless an employment it is to cut and carve the works of a young poet. Indeed the thing is impossible. Every two man's styles are so much unlike that they will not amalgamate without a thorough overhaul. With regard to your publishing, it is impossible for me to be uncandid with one who has been so much the reverse with me. I think you should not yet. Rhyme as much as you can. It is the most elegant and delightful of all amusements, and will infallibly and insensibly invigorate and refine your taste. Show your pieces to your friends, revise, select, and after your judgement is more mature, and your enthusiasm somewhat cooled, then publish... Any man of discernment may see that you have poetical fancy, but it is only such that will see it, for you have learned to think without at all having learned the necessary arts of expression and arrangement, and in truth have not yet rhymed a third enough to be a generally popular song writer... Publish the song in some northern paper or miscellany with your name or without it, and see

what the world says of it.²

The song referred was a short lyric piece in Buchan's now established style, entitled *My Peggy, O*. With Hogg's considered alterations it makes a fairly acceptable piece beginning:

The sunbeam dances thro' the trees,
Where ivy twines sae sweetly, O;
The gurgling rill an' gloamin' breeze
Sae kindly there invite me, O.
The closing flowers and birken bowers,
An' hawthorns blooming bonny, O;
O they might please a heart at ease
That trouble hasna ony, O.

Despite Hogg's exhortations, however, Buchan seems to have determined instead to publish everything he could during the first few years of the Auchmedden Press. Between 1816 and 1819, apart from the various pamphlets already mentioned relating to Alexander Leslie, he produced a booklet of rules and regulations for the Marischall Lodge of Gardeners in Peterhead, a curious biography of Adam Donald, prophet of Bethelnie, a local worthy, and collections of verse by local poets, Joseph Anderson and Charles Dawson. He also launched two literary magazines, *The Selector* and *The Caledonian*. The former continued for some five months and thirteen editions, but the latter folded after three issues.

Buchan's tour de force during this period, however, was the publication of *Annals of Peterhead* in 1819. In his *Autobiography* Buchan notes "In 1819 I made a new printing press, wood, iron, and brass, and with this press I printed the 'Annals of Peterhead', which were chiefly composed while I was standing at the cases, and never was in manuscript. The book was accompanied with half a dozen of copperplate engravings, all of which I engraved without ever having received a single lesson in the art. The work, by the curious, was soon bought up as a rare piece of ingenuity"³ The *Annals* was certainly rough and ready, and the engravings speak more of Buchan's versatility than of his artistic talent, but Buchan had, in truth, served his native town well by producing the first detailed account of its topography, its history, and its current status. An anonymous reviewer in *Blackwood's Magazine* had this to say about the production:

We believe Mr Buchan has here said no more than Peterhead deserves - and well may he exclaim, beholding its present splendour, "were a person now to rise from the dead, who had lived in Peterhead at the time Earl Marischal granted the original charter to but fourteen feuars, and that only 225 years ago, how would he stare upon first beholding it as it now stands, with its harbours, shipping,

trade?" The first thirty pages of the volume are dedicated entirely to the town of Peterhead and its concerns, which is described very graphically; and Mr Buchan exhibits a good deal of antiquarian lore. Among other information, he gives us a paper, shewing the progress of the whale-fishing since 1802; and a list of the manufacturers and trades of the town, from which it would really seem to be a very spirited and thriving place... Literature being in this flourishing condition in Peterhead, printing too is advancing under a press of sail - so is engraving. There are five embellishments to this volume, which, though somewhat rude, deserve commendation... We think that we have quoted enough of this entertaining little volume to interest the benevolent reader in its author. Do buy a copy, then, our good sir - and be assured that, if you have a library at all, there are many worse books in it than the "Annals of Peterhead".⁴

It seems that, on the whole, this was a fairly successful venture and no doubt inspired Buchan to undertake more substantial projects. This was probably an extremely busy time for the Auchmedden Press and as well as the major works, it is almost certain that the bulk of the broadsheet ballads still surviving from the press date from this time.⁵

After *The Annals of Peterhead* the next major project Buchan intended to embark upon was an extended history based upon the Keith family papers, which was later to be published as *An Historical Account of the Ancient and Noble Family of Keith, Earls Marischal of Scotland, with the attainted Noblemen, &c.* However, in an attempt, presumably, to extend his literary empire, he determined to spent some time in London courting prospective subscribers and mixing, if possible, with the nobility - a strange obsession of his throughout his career. He obtained the following letter from James Arbuthnot addressed to Sir George Hepburn in January 1819:

I did myself the honour of writing you a few lines during my residence at Pitfour. This will be handed to you by Mr Peter Buchan, Printer here, a young man of very extraordinary genius, considering his limited education. He has been much patronised by the Earl of Buchan and Mr Charles Forbes. He learned the art of printing in ten days, he engraves both upon wood and copper, he has made likewise a printing-press; he means to publish an account of the Keiths, Earls Marischal of Scotland, also, some Account of the Town and Parish of Peterhead, as far as it is connected with the family of Keith; this book he means to publish by subscription; but he wishes to have some gentlemen of respectability in the south to sanction the undertaking. He means to show you the manuscript

and will esteem your advice a very singular favour.

And, sometime during 1819, he set out for London. It seems, in fact, that he was to spend some time in London during the next five years and was to endure a period of ill health during this period. He states in his *Autobiography* that "the confinement of this mighty Babylon broke my health" and he wrote in the preface to *Brutes have Souls* that "during my residence in London - I was subject to very indifferent health which, to avoid, I frequented as much as possible all the public places in the vicinity of London, and other popular cities and towns of England". That this was possibly a fairly prolonged and serious condition is suggested by a letter of 28th November 1822, from his friend, Mr Allardyce of Cairnbulg: "I heard of your return to Buchan, and was every day expecting to hear from you, or perhaps see you here. I wish you could find it advantageous to stay in your own country, - at your time of life, it will be against your health to leave it; and the *short trial lately made, corroborates this opinion.*" Despite these difficulties, however, Buchan seems to have obtained some employment in London, he also states that he was for some time occupied a position earning £150 per annum, but it is probably that this was another example of Buchan's tendency to exaggerate. Certainly, the Auchmedden Press continued

to function during this time (even though Buchan must often have been absent - it is also known that he visited Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dumbarton and Greenock), and Buchan does not seem to have benefited in any lasting fashion from any other employment. What is known is that Buchan's collecting activities continued unabated during this period. Several of the songs preserved in his manuscripts are of southern origin and were probably collected during his time in London and the south-east. In fact, in *Secret Songs*, London is mentioned six times and several songs in that collection were also collected in England in the nineteenth century by other collectors. Buchan is almost unique among the early song collectors in collecting over such a large area - encompassing both the far north and the extreme south of the British Isles.

Whether it was due to his impression of the metropolis, or to his undefined illness, Buchan also seems to have developed a rather philosophical turn of mind when in London. And it was during this period that he wrote one of the strangest of his many works - *Scriptural & Philosophical Arguments; Or, Cogent Proofs From Reason & Revelation That Brutes Have Souls*. Buchan reported that this work was also set directly into type. Crudely bound, it sold for 2/6d and was adorned with

four woodcuts, of an ass, a pig, a horse, and a dog. The National Library catalogue suggests that these were Buchan's work, but the illustration featuring a horse, at least, is too well cut and it is more likely that these were stock blocks for printing broadsheets, etc. It is accompanied by a long dedication to his son, Charles Forbes Buchan, who was, at that time, studying in Aberdeen - "My dear son, your universal attention to the cause of truth, your indefatigable thirst after knowledge, and the great progress you have made in your education, with other good qualities you possess, induce me to select you from among your brothers, and from the world, as the most proper person to who I shall DEDICATE the following work on PHILANTHROPY" - which is very revealing. Buchan exhorts the young Charles to follow the path of virtue, justice and honour, to avoid flattery and flatterers (a lesson that, unfortunately, Buchan himself never learned), and to avoid the sins of sabbath-breaking, drinking and bad women. Buchan's prose is enlivened by little apocryphal stories supposedly from scripture or tradition. For example, he cites the case of the virtuous man who, offered the choice of three sins, to murder his father, debauch his sister, or get drunk, chooses the latter and then, in his cups, is enticed to commit the other two, and he describes the Christian martyr who, his hands and feet bound, bites off his

tongue to spit at his temptress. In fact, Buchan's fondness for the quaint, the unusual and the bizarre dominates this strange book, which, if nothing else, demonstrates his ability to thoroughly research a topic and write in a readable and entertaining style. This borne in mind, *Brutes Have Souls* is not altogether a bad book and it is a shame that Buchan's other major literary effort of this time seems to have been lost. This, in fact, was a extremely ambitious work indeed which he advertised in *Brutes Have Souls* thus:

intended for publication by the same author

EVIDENCE

of

the Creation of the World

the Fall of Man

Original Sin

&c.

from

Scripture and Heathen

Testimony

In the text he refers to *Man's Original Sin* - "this is a work which the author intended to have published along with the present; but, for various causes, it has been laid aside for a little time". Later on, Buchan was to refer to this work as *Man, Body, and Soul*, and as such, the manuscript appears in the catalogue for the sale of his library during his time in Aberdeen -

"Man, Body, and Soul, as he Was, as he Is, as he Will be, Including an Historical Account of the Creation of the World, and the Garden of Eden, &c... This work was written above a dozen of years ago, and submitted to several literary judges, amongst whom I may mention the late Dr. George Kerr, whose opinion I have in writing. There is a curious circumstance attends this MS. which will be explained satisfactorily at an after period. In the meantime, I may mention, that in sending it to Aberdeen (for I then sojourned in Peterhead,) the greater part of it was clandestinely copied, mangled, and afterwards published in a Fifteen Shillings volume, and notwithstanding its garbled state, went through two large impressions. For particular reasons I did not then expose the plagiarist, nor claim the merit of my own labours, but three months before *his* work, as he called it, appeared, I showed the ORIGINAL Manuscript to at least a dozen or twenty highly respectable gentlemen in Edinburgh, and in Aberdeen, who will have no hesitation in coming forward when called upon, in affirmation of the above. The work (first ed.) he published anonymously, and of course under a different title."⁶ Clearly, this would date the writing of this piece to around 1824, contemporary to *Brutes Have Souls*. Despite this reference, however, it is not at all clear who the plagiarist referred to was or under

what title the work was eventually published. The manuscript has never been found.

Eventually, however, Buchan and returned to Peterhead. Walker records a letter from his wife (which cannot be traced) urgently requesting him to come home - "several jobs have been lost, and several are waiting for you, which I am afraid you will also lose, if you protract your stay." It seems that the great metropolis had not proved as lucrative to a man with Buchan's fairly provincial background and, after all, with an ever expanding family (David Stuart Buchan - named after the Earl of Buchan - was born in 1820 and James Buchan in 1822) Buchan had to find some means of generating a steady income. Clearly, Peter had considered various alternative careers, including the possibility of attending university as a letter from Mr Faichney, dated 19th December 1819, indicates: "His Lordship, has desired me to request of you to know whether you would prefer Edinr. or Aberdeen College to study at. If you should choose the former, I am desired to make enquiry if there can any situation be got as secretary in any of the printing offices here, to assist you during the time of your study, which I shall most certainly do - in the meantime will be glad that you will explain your plans to me, who will not fail to inform his Lordship, who, I assure you, will take a particular interest in

your promotion in literature." This, like many of Peter's ambitious plans, was soon forgotten, but it is apparent that, even during the height of his publishing career, Buchan was keen to leave Peterhead. On the 24th September 1820 he states in a letter to his brother-in-law, "My house and office are in the foot of my father's yard, but I hope I will not enjoy them another year as there is nothing doing, and I long to be free - you know I never liked Peterh. and now less than ever." A large part of the reason, it seems, was Peter's old bugbear, financial problems, and he seems to have courted every opportunity to seek support. A letter from an old friend, Robert Anderson, in January 1821, details various attempts to find him a suitable position and also a request for direct aid from Peter's original sponsor, the Earl of Buchan: "In a visit to the Earl of Buchan, in the autumn, (of 1820), I took occasion to mention your embarrassed situation, - but I could not engage his attention to it, in the smallest degree." In fact, it seems that Buchan's original sponsor was to forsake him from this time (later, Buchan was to refer to him as "the very pink of parsimonious patrons"), and Walker notes that he even refused to subscribe to Buchan's *Ancient Ballads* when it was published.

Also about this time, Buchan seems to have corresponded, again in an attempt, it seems, to broaden his horizons, with several literary figures outside Peterhead. One of these was George Chalmers, the sixty-year old historian from Fochabers, biographer of Mary Queen of Scots and editor of Ramsay, who was to become the author of *Caledonia*, a successful and detailed account of the Scottish nation. He seems to have sent on some of his works, including *Recreation*, and Chalmers replied on the 9th of March, 1819 in an enthusiastic manner:

Sir, I have had the pleasure of receiving your letter of the 7th Feby., and your book of Poems. I give you a great many thanks for both. Your poems are very good considering your opportunities and obstructions. There is a whole class of poets in the annals of Scottish Poetry, the tradesmen and milkwomen, among whom you stand high, though Allan Ramsay and Burns stand higher.

But your turn of mind is not confined to Poetry alone, you can make a printing press, printing types, etc., etc. You are a Topographer as well as a Typographer, and you have written an account of Peterhead and of the House of Mareshall.

Buchan was so inspired by this praise, apparently, to send several more of his works for Chalmers's perusal. Some time in September 1819, Chalmers wrote stating "I wish I could be of more use to you - but I am so

occupied with business, and with studies, that I am quite unable to peruse the large collection of your various collections which you were so good as to send me some time ago; and which (including what you say about the Marischal family), I am ready to return if I knew how." This matter of Buchan's manuscripts, which he sent eagerly on several occasions to anyone who seems to have an interest (whether welcome or not) seems to have perturbed Chalmers who wrote back shortly afterwards:

I have received your "Annals of Peterhead" with your letter of 30 Septr., which I suppose came by ship. I thank you very much for both. The "Annals" perhaps contain more of useful facts than is generally to be found in such local works. The misfortune is that there is so few readers of such writings, and of course so little to be made by such publications.

I see you wish for the return of your large folio collection, containing your MS. of the history of the family of Keith; and that I would send it by the "Mary," Capn. Hendry. The truth is that I sent it some time ago, in a parcel which I was sending to Mr Kennedy, Advocate, in Aberdeen, with a request that he would send it by the Carrier to you at Peterhead. I cannot help thinking but he must have received it, and sent it forward to you, as I desired. You will do me a favour if you will on the receipt of this, inform me in a few words, whether your parcel had got safe to hand; as this will remove some of my anxieties.

It is probable that Chalmers, despite his generous praise of Buchan's talents, had little time to study the manuscripts in detail, and it is distinctly possible that he was put off by Buchan's pushy but rather paranoiac personality. In later years Buchan was to claim that he had contributed extensively to *Caledonia* which had some definite kudos, but it is now impossible to say to what extent Buchan actually advised Chalmers. One other result of their relationship, however, was that Chalmers put Buchan in touch with David Laing, the antiquarian and bibliophile who, until his death in 1878, was honorary president of the Bannatyne Club and librarian at the Signet Library, one of the progenitors of the National Library. The lengthy correspondence between Laing and Buchan, mostly preserved in the National Library, is both interesting and revealing. Some time in 1819, probably on Chalmers's suggestion, Buchan had sent Laing the Keith family manuscripts. Laing replied:

I duly received the old MS. but was somewhat disappointed with it, - The History of the Church being merely transcribed from a printed book which I already have. Nor is the MS. so old as you imagined. As to the leaves which contain the most important part of the volume, I find they, or at least another copy of them, had been used by Nisbet in the account which he gives (in his System of

Heraldry) of the Keith Family. If you are able to get a sight of the book which is in folio (I think it is in the 2nd vol.), it might furnish you with a few additional facts - but should you not - before I send back the MS. I shall compare the two together, and get what may be additional copied out. Yet I doubt not, provided you take sufficient time in order to secure accuracy (for much depends upon the old mode of spelling, etc., being faithfully adhered to), and use all necessary endeavours to collect existing information - that, though there may (not) appear much novelty in the information, thus collected, it will at least be respectable, - useful - and perhaps profitable.

Buchan had also tried to engage Laing's interest in promoting his works, including *Annals of Peterhead*, in the capital, but Laing's response was not particularly encouraging:

I shall do what I can for the *Annals* - but people here are but little accustomed to subscribe for books - particularly when it is so moderate a price and size as your Vol. is to be. There would be more chance of disposing of copies when it is finished - but I shall let you know, - and in the meantime get it mentioned in the different magazines of this place. Indeed when the interest is so local, as the *Annals of necessity* are, I would not have you to flatter yourself too much of success, beyond Peterhead and its neighbourhood.

I am glad you have obtained access to the Records, as this will give a decided stamp of authenticity to your work, and let me advise you to make ample

use of them (even should doing so increase the price of the volume a little), and to preserve their original appearance and orthography as much as possible.

With respect to the Family of Keith, I may say I have done nothing as yet - waiting for the Prospectus. When you get this printed I shall then do what I can. In the meantime I return you the old folio MS, you sent, except that I have kept out the leaves concerning the Keiths.

Inspired by Laing's knowledgeable and generally helpful advice, however, Buchan seems to have envisaged several more elaborate projects. *The Family of Keith* was safely at press towards the end of 1820 and this letter from Laing, dated 25th October, mentions several other proposals including the publications of a volume of ballads. It also demonstrates that Buchan, knowing Laing as an inveterate collector of books and literary antiquities in his role of keeper of the Signet Library, was keen to provide him with any material he could amass in the North-East:

I am sorry to hear your acquaintance won't part with Boece, and wish that you had sent me a look of it. In the first parcel there will be no harm in doing this as I shall return it safely. For perhaps if I find it contains any leaves that would suit mine, he might be prevailed on to part with these, though he would not with the entire volume. In particular I wish it had either the first title, or the last leaf, however bad might be their

preservation. I have a curious old copy of "Holinshead's Chronicle" (which in fact contains all Boece), with wooden cuts - and the condition of which may rival the one I refer to - I should willingly give in exchange for the leaves (supposing the copy to have them) which I want to get. I shall on second thoughts send you up the volume in the parcel, but you had as well say nothing with regard to the proposed exchange until I shall be able to state explicitly what may be required.

I should also like to have an inspection of the volume of Ballads, etc, printed before the year 1800. You mention in your letter having enclosed in the parcel Mr Skinner's MSS., but these I have not received. I suppose you may have kept them out when you sent the parcel by land. As to the Aberdeen Cantus, etc., I shall not stir, for if the proprietor cannot get it back, I certainly have little chance. Besides it is not the edition I am in quest of.

On the 20th of January, 1821, Laing replied that he had eventually received some manuscripts, including Buchan's collection of ballads. The ballad manuscripts, in fact, were to feature prominently in Buchan's future correspondence. Buchan had a more inflated notion of their value than most of his contemporaries (with which we, with the benefit of hindsight, would probably agree). Laing's letter reads:

I received, some time ago, the parcel with Boece and the Vol. of Ballads. They had got some damp I think on the way hither. I should have written immediately after, but waited partly for a frank, and partly to get a few lines for you from the Dr. (Anderson). Having succeeded in the one, I think I shall be able to get the letter sent free to Aberdeen, as I can't fall in with a member to get it franked all the way. Notwithstanding the extreme bad state of Boece, it contains so many leaves wanting in mine, as would go pretty far to render it complete. Now you would oblige me much, could you prevail on your friend to part with them, either for the Vol. of Holinshead or for something else. Has he Calderwood's History? He might have it also. The leaves wanting perhaps may be about twenty, and I should put what remains in such a state as would not reduce its value. These leaves are introductory, so would leave the History nearly complete. Try what you can do, as I wish much to have my copy as perfect as possible.

The Vol. of Ballads, I should like also to have a part of, if you would exchange them for others of a more recent date. When I hear from you in regard to these, I shall make up a small parcel for you, containing such books and papers as I have the loan of from you meantime.

Buchan's literary interests were still to the fore at this time, and he clearly intended using his connection with Laing to the full to obtain the services of his scholarship and the use of his collections. On the 7th February, 1821, Laing replied to a request from Buchan:

I intended sending you something about the Aberdeenshire Poets, but in consequence of your letter, have deferred them along with the MS. leaves of Skinner. An account of the earlier poets with a few occasional extracts, by way of Introduction, would be very suitable, but I would not advise you to do more (for reasons to be given afterwards), but, to lay the object of the publication mainly in those of last century, beginning with or after Meston. - If you have no other object in coming to Edinr. than merely to make extracts, I think I could save you that trouble, by sending you the loan of nearly all the books that would be requisite. I wish you could furnish me with a list of the names of such poets, since the time of Meston, as you know of, with any passing remark on the extent of their works, and I shall write you further on the subject. By the way, I sent your note about "Whirry Whigs awa'" to Hogg (who is presently in Ednr.) but it was too late for the Relics. In the parcel you will find "Scott on Witchcraft" which if you don't like, at any reasonable time can be returned.

It seems that in this case "the Aberdeenshire poets" refers not simply to the ballad manuscripts, but to a parallel literary project undertaken or projected by Buchan at this time. However, like many of the other publishing projects contemplated by Buchan during this period of intensive activity, little seems to have come of this idea and Laing seemed to have shelved the request by September of that year: "I have been expecting to hear from you for some time past, with

regard to the Aberdeen Poets, and what service I can be to you in the loan of Books, etc. When you tell me this, I shall make up a small parcel, and get it transmitted to Peterhead." In fact, we cannot be sure precisely what occupied Buchan's attention over the next couple of years as there is a substantial gap in the correspondence that has survived from this period. One thing we do know is that is between 1823 and 1826 he brought out three editions of a strange volume perhaps inspired by the volume mentioned above, Scott's *Discovery of Witchcraft*, entitled *Witchcraft Discovered*⁷, now a very scarce volume indeed. This is a strange mixture of fact, lore and superstition based on Buchan's own research that must have stretched the credulity of the time and seems to have been a popular edition to his catalogue.

It seems certain that his financial difficulties persisted and Walker suggests that this may have been due to a John Davidson (who may have been Buchan's assistant at one time) setting up business in opposition to the Auchmedden Press. However, Davidson removed his business to Aberdeen in due course and is never mentioned in Buchan's correspondence. What seems more likely is that the press's everyday business was somewhat neglected during this time as Buchan

enthusiastically set about the work of ballad collecting on which his reputation is justly founded.

As we know, Buchan had been particularly interested in lore and tradition from an early age. He also had an antiquarian's obsession for collecting. It seems that during his years in Peterhead he had conceived the notion of attempting to collect as much of the corpus of traditional song as was extant in the north-east. His rationale for this project was expressed thus in his Introduction to his magnum opus, *Ancient Songs and Ballads*:

In all ages, and by all nations of the world, even in a rude and a barbarous state, has the voice of song been cherished, and made to express the natural feelings of a grateful, a joyful, a brave and a generous heart... Till of late, there were itinerant Bards, or strolling Minstrels, who performed upon harps, and sung and recited heroic and other ballads. To these rural Minstrels, I am convinced, we are indebted for the preservation of many of our fine old ballads and songs; many of which will be found to enrich this Collection, culled with the greatest industry and care from among the sons and daughters of the North... It becomes us... to strain every nerve to preserve from the fast decaying hand of time, a remnant of those wild flowers which have garnished the antique halls of an ancient race of warriors, now long forgotten except in the sweet voice of magic song.

And, although much has been done, still much remains undone, in collecting those mutilated fragments of our early ancestors.⁸

Two things are clear: first of all, although Buchan's debt to the common folk of the north-east is readily acknowledged, it can be seen in both the content and style of the prose that he unquestioningly accepts the popular romantic misconception of the time - that the ballads are a form of heroic medieval poetry produced by stravaiging minstrels which has now degenerated through oral transmission. Secondly, he is, rightly, keenly aware of the great wealth of traditional song still to be collected in the north-east. However, Buchan is not reluctant to impress upon the reader, with a touch of his growing paranoid manner, his own efforts in recovering the ballads:

What patience, perseverance, and general knowledge are necessary for an editor of a Collection of Ancient Ballads; what mountains of difficulties he has to overcome; what hosts of enemies he has to encounter; and what myriads of little-minded quibblers he has to silence... The Ballads themselves are faithfully and honestly transcribed, and given as taken down from the mouths of the reciters: they have suffered no change since they fortunately were consigned to me their foster parent... I have spared neither money nor trouble, in procuring the most genuine and best authenticated of all the Ancient Ballads.⁹

The reference to money (which some of Buchan's contemporaries would probably have considered *infra dig*) is interesting. Buchan never made any secret of the fact that he paid his informants for the songs they collected for him. He wrote to his friend William Motherwell, the Glasgow ballad collector, that, "(the ballads) have cost me much, and I am sore afraid I will never realize what they have cost me. - For one instance, I sent for and brought an old blind man from a great distance, kept him in Peterhead for upwards of four weeks, and paid all expenses, besides his own charges, which were not inconsiderable. Such have been my love and enthusiasm for the preservation of the ballads, &c of my native country. - He was, however, worthy of his reward, great as it was, if I could have afforded it; for he was, without doubt, a second Homer. - He was possessed of the best memory I every knew, and had been travelling through the north of Scotland, as an itinerant singer and beggar for the last fifty years. - I got many pieces from him which I had never seen before, and many older sets of what I had seen. - I had got copies of nearly all the ballads contained in your "Minstrelsy;" and also of those in Sir Walter Scott's Border Ballads, although in most of them they differ in name &c." Later, Buchan's admission of payment was to be used as evidence for the



unreliability of his texts - an accusation without any substance. Gershon Legman rightly points out that he was one of the few of the ballad collectors with the decency to recompense their (often poor or itinerant) informants for the texts they supplied. We cannot be exactly sure from whence all of Buchan's ballad texts came, we do know that for some time he employed the old blind man referred to above, Jamie Rankin, a beggar, to collect ballads and tales for him. Rankin was born in Tarwarthy in 1770, and died sometime before July 1831 - when Buchan wrote to John Stevenson, "I am truly sorry to inform you that my old friend and collector, since I sent you, is dead, and gone with all his store of tuneful wealth, to the bed of his fathers", although in March of that year a letter to Motherwell suggested that Jamie's days were numbered: "Having lately had a few weeks of my old caterer for the last time, as he has since lost all his faculties, both mentally and bodily, I do myself the pleasure of sending you a look of his last remains. I mean the last lingering remains of our Ancient Scottish Song, in this part of the country at least. He has been faithful to his trust, but his sun is now set. In the MSS. now sent you, you will find the originals of many of Ramsay and Burns's best songs, which should be interesting to every lover of Scottish Song." Rankin probably began his collecting activities after 1824, when his father died

and he took to begging. This is the date suggested by Walker, who records some details of his life.¹⁰ What is absolutely certain is that Rankin himself possessed a vast store of traditional lore, and that many of the ballads in Buchan's manuscripts (and probably the majority of the songs in *Secret Songs of Silence*) came from him. The majority of the ballad texts in Buchan's manuscripts were probably collected and transcribed between 1825 and 1827. The complete collection, we now know, was at least twice as extensive as the 145 ballads finally printed in *Ancient Ballads*, and consisted of many of the classic narrative ballads (or 'muckle sangs') identified by Child at the turn of the century.

So, some time at the beginning of 1827, Buchan had completed the ballad manuscript, although the project may have been delayed for a month or two by a "long and protracted" fever which, apparently, afflicted most of his family at this time, and, intent upon its immediate publication - not by the Auchmedden press in this case but by a more prestigious Edinburgh publisher - he set about courting his literary acquaintances with the intention of seeking their assistance. By this time, these included Sir Walter Scott, and on the 23rd August 1827 Buchan had arranged to visit the great man at Abbotsford with his manuscript. This was an important

coup for Buchan, who continually referred to his visit on subsequent occasions. Scott's response, recorded in his journals, was less enthusiastic: "(I received) a whimsical party, consisting of John Stevenson, the bookseller, Peter Buchan from Peterhead, a quiz of a poetical creature, and a bookbinder, a friend of theirs. Their plan was to consult me about publishing a great quantity of ballads which this Mr. Buchan has collected. I glanced them over. He has been very successful, for they are obviously genuine, and many of them very curious. Others are various editions of well-known ballads. I could not make the man comprehend that these last were of little value; being generally worse readings of what was already published." Scott retained the manuscript to make fuller comment. His reply was encouraging but hardly enthusiastic (although Buchan was later to cull the last sentence for use in his advertisement for the collection): "My leisure only permits me to say a few words on the curious volume of Songs and Ballads, which you left in my possession yesterday. They are, most of them, unknown to me, and excepting two or three seem to have been faithfully recited and taken down, so that I have no doubt of being genuine. What degree of encouragement the public may be disposed to give these simple ditties, I really do not know... I sincerely hope your proposed work may fully compensate the time

and trouble you have bestowed in collecting so many very interesting Reliques of the olden time..." It seems strange, in retrospect, that Scott, a great ballad collector himself, should show so little interest when confronted with such a remarkable collection as Buchan's was to prove - although the main period of Scott's own ballad collecting was by this time over - however Scott also wrote to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe on the matter:

Many thanks my dear Charles, for your kind letter, which reached per favour of a hirsute poet of Peterhead, called Peter Buchan, or Beichan, as he rather terms it. His collection is very curious, and, two or three pieces excepted, in general genuine. Indeed, the man does not seem capable of supplying their want of authenticity by any tolerable degree of genius. I scarce know anything so easily discovered as the piecing and patching of an old ballad, the darns in a silk stocking are not more manifest.

Mr Buchan has been extremely active and successful in his researches. Some of the songs are, I suspect, originally Danish. I advised Mr. Buchan to leave out most, if not all, of these ballads, of which he has given barely various readings; it would be a great thing to say of them all *Never before printed*, which could not be said if he takes in worn editions of "Johnie Armstrong," "Young Musgrave," "Robin Hood," and the like, merely because they are different sets from those in common currency. He may easily attend to this, for

if he would really make a little money, he must not let his collection go beyond two volumes, or three at the very utmost.¹¹

Scott's suggestion that some of the ballads were translations from the Danish was to have some consequence in later days, as this was to form one of the main accusations of his detractors - although, in fact, it had no substance whatsoever. Meanwhile, however, the manuscript had been passed on to Sharpe and to David Laing for their perusal and the generally agreed plan, at that time, it seems, was that the work would be published with the assistance of John Stevenson, the Edinburgh bookseller, with the editorial employment of Sharpe and Laing. But Stevenson had also sent the manuscript to Robert Jamieson, the well-known song collector, for his opinion. Jamieson replied:

I have looked over Mr. Buchan's Collection of Ballads, as well as the Notes. The selection made by Mr. Sharpe is just such as I should have expected from his good taste, judgement and knowledge of the subject; and I am perfectly of his opinion as to the Notes. In the present state of the trade it will be highly advisable to cover the expense of publication by a subscription, which I think it will not be difficult to do: but many will subscribe for 2 volumes, who would not subscribe for three. The Ballads selected will fill *two*, and the Notes will require a *third*, which may afterwards be added, when called for. In the

meantime I hope Mr. Buchan will give discretionary powers to Mr. Sharpe *where such are wanted*, to prefix *brief notices* by which immediate satisfaction would be given, without anticipating such further illustrations as may be thought expedient.

Sharpe, it seems, had initially agreed to undertake this work but then had some second thoughts. He wrote to Buchan on 18th October 1827. It should be noted that it was often Buchan's habit to send small presents to his literary acquaintances - perhaps with the purpose of courting their favour or engendering a swift reply:

Dear Sir, I return you many thanks for the present you were so good as to send me - the little box I retain and value extremely - but as I already possess a pair of gloves similar to these, I cannot in conscience keep up to the cormorant character of a virtuoso, and accept of what I have already, - so with a proper sense of your friendship I restore them to you. I wish much that I could be of any use to you in your literary adventure - but I find strange *qualms* in people as to the *Notes*, which I am in no sort able to obviate. I am told that when at Paisley you had an offer of £50 for your MSS., and tho' I do think that sum much below their value, yet I know, from tiresome experience, so much of the hazard and plague of printing that, if this tale be true, I would strongly advise you to make the bargain, and endure not more *flash* in the affair. As to the "Traditionary Tales of

Scotland," altho' your undertaking is most laudable, yet I fear greatly that you will scarcely be rewarded for your trouble, - as the taste of this stupid age, and most dull and degenerate country we live in, runs entirely on Novels, Reviews, Obscene Poems, Religious Tracts, and voyages to the moon and the antipodes.

But Buchan was at this time in no way intent upon the sale of his manuscript (although it was to prove different in the future) and the proposed volume was not, in fact, published in his lifetime. Apparently, round about this time, Stevenson had quoted Buchan his terms for undertaking the work - terms which Peter found excessively ungenerous. His pique was clearly provoked by the delay and his thoughts are clearly expressed in a long letter sent to Sharpe on 24th December:

My kind and highly respected friend, With your favour of the 18th Oct: I was duly honoured, and beg you will accept of my best thanks from a grateful heart, for your kind attention and advice regarding my interests. What you hinted in your own house, when I had the pleasure of a personal interview, and what you have since suggested would come to pass regarding employing a Bookseller in the publication of my work, I have already experienced. Although four months have elapsed since I was in Edinr. still nothing has been done to facilitate the progress of the work, the MSS. of which I left for the purpose of being immediately

thereafter put to the press. On writing Mr Stevenson to know the cause of the delay, he sent me many apologies; among the rest, the Notes were too long and for that purpose he had applied to Mr Jamieson to write a long letter on the subject, which was sent to me, with hints from himself, saying that he had shown the MSS. to several literary gentlemen, and they were all of the same opinion as Mr Jamieson, etc. and proposed that I should employ Mr J. or some other person to abridge them, who would do it for *payment*.

In the first place it was both ungentlemanly and unfair, thus to exhibit the MSS. in such a public manner. In the second place, he had no authority from me for so doing, as I had left the whole power vested in your hands, to do with them what seemed best in your sight, and no one's else, as you were so very kind and agreeable to revise the proofs, etc. On receiving Mr. S's letter, I wrote to my very much valued friend, Mr. Motherwell, Paisley, asking his opinion and advice, when I was favoured with his answer per return of post. He therefore told me that he would not allow any one else to alter a single word or sentence of the *Notes*; as to the generality of readers, the notes become the most interesting part, however lengthy. I know that a few gentlemen who have seen them in Edinr. would prefer then without notes at all, but they are not in proportion to the others as one to twenty, and my object is, in the meantime, to realise a little from their sale, as I have laid out too much already. I then wrote to Mr Stevenson to send me the MSS. by return of coach, but instead of that, he kept them back nearly a month after. As they are now in my possession, I intend publishing them myself, and to run all risks and

hazards,- as from the terms Mr. S. sent me, they would be published by him upon, were such, that instead of me gaining anything from their publication, I would become his debtor sixty or seventy pounds.

Since I have been in Edinr. I have still persevered in collecting olden ditties, and am happy to say, have been extremely fortunate, for I have got as many as fill an ordinary Vol. of the very finest old songs to be met with anywhere. Most of them are called by the names of the Old Scottish Tunes. But before one of them is printed, I will submit them all to your good taste and superior judgement, and be advised accordingly.

I have already stated to you my intention of publishing them myself, which I am just now setting about, and intend to wait personally on the Noblemen and Gentlemen of Scotland, and solicit their patronage, as I am at present doing nothing; and you know, my worthy Sir, altho' much against my inclination, The daily calls of a wife and six helpless little ones are powerful advocates when they plead the cause of their own distress. As there is to be a musical concert in Aberdeen on the 14th of Jan where will be present a great assembly of respectable nobility and gentry, it is my intention of commencing my subscription there, but am at loss how to introduce the work, as without a recommendation of the Ballads and Songs, I would have little chance of success.

A few lines of recommendation from you, my good Sir, and from the worthy Bart. would be of the utmost consequence to me. - I know Sir Walter would not refuse you. But dare I hope for such an indulgence? - the letter Sir Walter sent me contains several expressions very favourable, but

being a private letter, not intended for publication, I dare not print it in my prospectus, which I would wish to do, and to show the originals, if such were called for at any time after. Your former kindness makes me hope you will procure this great favour for me...

Clearly, some members of the literati, such as William Motherwell, whose correspondence with Buchan shall be dealt with in more detail later, were more sympathetic to Buchan's cause than the calculating Stevenson. However, Buchan's intentions to, firstly, continue his collecting activities, and secondly, to seek subscribers to the ballads,¹² both seem to have been carried out. An advertisement for the collection was produced, containing three approbations gleaned from letters from Scott, Motherwell, and the Earl of Buchan - "There will be Published by Subscription, as speedily as possible, Beautifully Printed, on Fine Paper, in 2 vols. 8vo. Price 21s. The Ancient Unpublished National Ballads and Songs of Scotland... The Editor, in laying these beautiful specimens of the primitive BALLADS and SONGS of SCOTLAND, in their original purity, before the lovers of Ancient Minstrelsy, has to observe, that, the Manuscripts have already been submitted to Sir WALTER SCOTT, Baronet, CHARLES KIRKPATRICK SHARPE, Esq.; and several other gentlemen of the highest literary acquirements in Edinburgh; all of whom have expressed

themselves in terms highly flattering..." However, the debate about the exact alterations required to the manuscript, with the cognizance of Sharpe, Laing and Jamieson, seems to have continued. Sharpe wrote to Scott sometime in early 1828:

I have had two terrible literary flytes here lately, in which I often wished for you to back me, being almost certain of your invincible aid. The first was about Peter Buchan's ballads which Mr Secretary Laing hath got to edite. Peter desired the favour of me to look over the proofs; but when they came I found that Mr David set up for a poet, forsooth, and altered word and verse. The beauty of the alterations you may guess at, knowing the person.

I entered my protest, declaring I would have nothing to do with the matter if such abominations went on, so after a world of debate that matter was carried on the side of common sense and propriety.

The various disagreements and machinations regarding the publication of the ballads, however, seem to have come to very little in the end - probably due both to the assistance of Buchan's friend Motherwell and the reluctance of the various parties to undertake any substantial editing job. Buchan's *Ancient Songs and Ballads* was eventually published sometime in 1828 with the ballads in the manuscript intact. Sharpe records the matter in another letter to Scott: "Peter Buchan

hath put forth his ballads. Mr Secretary corrupted the first seventeen pages, but the rest is faithfully printed; and, since the 'Minstrelsy,' I think I have seen nothing so curious. If I knew the Duke of Buccleugh (which I shall never do *well*, for some of my mortal enemies are his greatest friends), I would beg of him to make the poor man a small present for his silly dedication; but I am powerless there." The two volumes are indeed dedicated to "His Grace, the Duke of Buccleuch, or Queensferry" (Buchan notes "following the example of Pinkerton and Scott"). The dedication continues - "I have gleaned, with pious care, every fragment that could tend to illustrate the History and Antiquities of Scotland; and the Manners, Modes of Living, Religions, and Superstitions of its Inhabitants, as well as their Feelings and Customs, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries." Strangely, despite Sharpe's misgivings, there is no evidence that Laing¹³, or anyone else, has seriously corrupted the ballads from the manuscripts - although the notes have been edited. Buchan must have been fairly delighted - or relieved - to see his great collection finally in print. This was to prove, however, merely the beginning of his troubles as his collecting activities were, in fact, to spark a controversy that was to plague Buchan all his life - and the important consequences of this will be dealt

with in detail in a later chapter. Also, in December 1827, William Drummond Hay, the Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland had written to Buchan - "I had the pleasure of putting you in nomination as Candidate to become a Corresponding Member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland... those Members of Council, who signed your nomination together with myself, will do all that is in their power to further the Election of one so heartily zealous in the pursuit of Scottish literature". In early 1828 he was duly elected and was to employ his new title extensively in the future. This was, in fact, really the zenith of Buchan's career. Yet, the publication of the ballads was not to bring Buchan the recognition he must have felt he justly deserved. He must have been sorely disappointed at the lukewarm reception accorded the collection. A review by Robert Buchanan, editor of *The New Scots Magazine*, is fairly typical of the way in which Peter's work was dismissed by the Scottish literati: "Within the last twelve months, the humble Peter Buchan, and the indefatigable Robert Chambers, have favoured the public with their several collections... We ought to be and we are very grateful for such exertions; but we are afraid that some of the later collectors and annotators are carrying this sort of work too far, and are conducting their researches and publications upon very

exceptionable principles... Mr Buchan's labours are very creditable to his industry and zeal; but many of the ballads which he has given are not properly vouched, besides being very sad stuff, of no value whatever, in any point of view. It is to Mr Chambers, therefore, chiefly, that we shall confine our attention..."¹⁴ Several other reviews followed the same general line. In January 1829, Buchan wrote to Motherwell - "I have seen at least a dozen; some Scotch and some English, all very favourable, but in general trifling. Your good friend Mr Bennet of the Glasgow "Free Press;" and a writer in the "Abdn. Journal", are the only two that I have seen that are worthy of being read. Instead of giving a fair and impartial criticism of the Ballads, several of the Editors have prided themselves in giving an account of my life and character, &c. And the fact is, they have given nothing but a fabrication of the grossest falsehoods, not one of the whole... knows any more of my life, &c. than they know of the man's in the moon". It is difficult in retrospect to fully understand the criticisms levelled at him - however, there is no doubt that many of his contemporaries from the south who had laboured hard to collect ballads from more polite urban society were a little jealous of the surfeit of riches Buchan had gathered, seemingly effortlessly, in the north-east (very few of his contemporaries acknowledged

the geographic advantage he had, with the exception of Motherwell - "I sincerely rejoice in your good luck in being so fortunate as every other day to meet with venerable sybils who can & are willing to impart to your thirsting soul the metrical riches of 'the days of other years' I wish I were at your elbow to assist in the task of transcription I cannot boast the like good fortune. This part of the country if it ever did abound in this Song of the People is now to all intents utterly ruined by every 3 miles of it either having some large town or public work or manufactory within its bounds which absorbs the rustic population and attracts strangers - corrupts ancient manners - and introduces habits of thinking and of living together hostile to the preservation and cultivation of traditional song.") There is also a likelihood that Buchan's provincial and lower middle-class origin were, tacitly, despised by the more gentlemanly literati.

However, there is little doubt the publication of the ballads had taken a lot out of Buchan. In the same year as the ballads were published in Edinburgh, the Auchmedden Press also brought out two titles - Peter's own *Secret History of Macbeth* and a version of the Reverend Patrick Torry's sermons. The very last publication from the press was to follow the next year, a report of a trial involving the Dundee Union Whale

Fishing Company. The 1820's had been a period of intense activity for Buchan and, with the majority of his publications behind him, he had scarcely achieved the fame or the fortune his vanity craved. Buchan does not seem, however, to have been particularly despondent at this time and still had his mind set on further projects. One idea he seems to have been set on was to trace and secure any details of his supposed ancestors. In 1827 he wrote to the Reverend William Cook in Rathen, a parish of some two thousand souls in the 1820's, on the coast between Peterhead and Fraserburgh, asking if he knew of any manuscripts belonging to Colonel Buchan who had once resided there. One song contained within Buchan's *Secret Songs* manuscript, *Gibbie Brown*, mentions this area:

One Tuesday evening we rambled,
Frae Strichen to Rathen, came down,
We call'd at a victualling, a-tippling,
The innkeeper's name, Gibbie Brown.
Sing - O rare Gibbie, rare Gibbie,
O the brave rare Gibbie Brown.

When the first salutation was over,
We then for his welfare did spier,
We called for a mug of October,
A mug of October brown beer.

We sat and we chanted together,
The liquor was mellow and fine,

Till Venus did darken bright Phoebus,
And Luna began for to shine...

Specifics mentioned in the song such as Saint Crispin (the patron saint of cobblers), the deities Venus and Luna, and place names such as Strichen and Rathen suggest an individual authorship and it does, indeed, seem possible that the eponymous Gibbie Brown did exist. In fact, this song, of all the various pieces in the *Secret Songs* collection, seems to bear the hallmark of Buchan's own style and it seems not unlikely that it was penned by Peter himself. So perhaps here we have a glimpse of a more innocent and youthful Buchan - although Peter, with his opposition to strong drink is hardly likely to have been the soul of conviviality - before the full force of his bitterness and paranoia set in. However, Buchan at this time cannot have regarded his endeavours of the past decade as a total failure. His name was now known, at least, to the Scottish literati, and he had a track record as both a publisher and a collector of ballads, with his various books in fairly popular demand as a letter of 23rd April 1827 to John Stevenson, before the issue of the publication of the ballads had come between them, makes clear:

Sir, I was duly favoured with yours of the 22
March last, and would have answered it sooner,

agreeable to you with, as for as in my power, had there been an earlier opportunity, "I am, however, sorry it is not in my power to send you all the different books you have mentioned as several of them are now entirely out of print, and cannot be had for love nor money, such as the Annals of Peterhead, Recreation of Leisure Hours, Scarce Ancient Ballads, Don : a poem, Scottish Poems in two parts, &c, &c. As the others are nearly done also, I have sent you a few of what I have on hand, viz:-

"100 copies Gleanings Old Ballads, sheets
"100 do Witchcraft Detected, do
"50 do Essay on the Souls of Brutes, bds
"50 do Bookbinders' Assistant, do"

I have not stated any price, but leave the sale entirely to yourself, and will take saleable books from you in return for them

He had been planning to move from premises in Peterhead for some years and his experience in Edinburgh arranging the publication of his ballads had been formative. In his *Autobiography* he was to note: "O Edinburgh, Edinburgh! how happy may thy sons and daughters be who dwell in thy sanctuary, where may be hourly obtained the enlivening light and heat of the learned converse and and friendly patronage of noble and generous minds, compared to those frigid mortals who are lone dwellers on the icy and barren rock of cold disdain, and where nought but the chilling frown

of envy and detraction reigns".¹⁵ Some time in 1830, Buchan was to leave provincial Peterhead for good and set out to seek his fortune in the south. It was not, however, to Scotland's capital he was to journey, but only a little remove from his home, ton Aberdeen, where he had encouraged his sons to attend college. Buchan's experiences in Aberdeen, however, were to prove very chequered indeed.

references

- 1 William Walker, *The Bards of Bon Accord* (Aberdeen, 1887), pp 375-76.
- 2 This letter is printed, under the title of "The Ettrick Shepherd's Advice to a Young Poet", in *Grass of Parnassus From the Bents o' Buchan*, published by David Scott (Peterhead, 1887). There is little record of subsequent correspondence with Hogg, but an extant undated letter seems to suggest that Buchan may have sought his advice on a subsequent occasion: "Thank you for the kind prospect of your poems. I have looked over them and think they display a good deal of poetical fancy which is often but indifferently expressed. I leave Edin. to-morrow and shall be happy to look over your Ms on my return and give my opinion of it but as to the correcting of another man's works I have tried it too often not to know that it is impossible."
- 3 Peter Buchan, *Autobiography* (Glasgow, 1839), p. 8.
- 4 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 6, no. xxxiv (January, 1820).
- 5 There are some 34 broadsheets and chapbooks recorded from the Auchmedden Press, although there were probably many more produced. These include some of the classic ballads such as *Gil Morice*, *Young Grigor* and *Andrew Lammie*.
- 6 *Catalogue of the Private Library of Peter Buchan* (Aberdeen, 1837), p. 3.
- 7 A letter from Laing dated 13th May 1823, refers to this volume: "With regard to your *Witchcraft dissected* you must be aware that such a book is more likely to sell in country towns than either here or in London. And as we are so much out of the way of publishing, and, in fact, could not do justice to it, we would rather you should keep our names out of the title, but shall take a few copies - say a dozen - to be some little encouragement. If you wish it, I can speak to some other booksellers in this place, and see if they are inclined to undertake the charge of selling it here for you, - but for this it would be necessary to have a copy of the whole, or some part of the volume, to let them know the nature of

- the work. As for Stationers' Hall, I know of no other plan than by sending them up 11 copies for the different public libraries entitled to the privilege of receiving them."
- 8 Peter Buchan, *Ancient Songs and Ballads* (Edinburgh, 1828), vii-xi.
 - 9 *Ibid*, xii-xiii.
 - 10 See William Walker, *Peter Buchan and Other Papers* (Aberdeen, 1915), pp 59-60. Walker notes: "James Rankin was the eldest son of Alexander Rankin in Tarwarthy, Parish of Tyrie, Aberdeenshire. He was born blind... His father was appointed session officer, gravedigger, and bellman, 30th July, 1781. This office he held until his death in 1824. From his being bellman, he was popularly known as 'Aul' Tow'."
 - 11 The name Beichan, of course, also features in the ballads - notably in Child 53, *Young Beichan*. Tradition records that there were up to eighteen different spellings and that the name, perhaps derived from the French, probably originally meant "a payer of tribute of oxen and sheep". Buchan often referred to the antiquity of his name. Buchan is still a very common name in the north-east.
 - 12 For this purpose he secured a letter of commendation from Drummond Hay addressed to David Morrison, Secretary to the Antiquarian Society of Perth. Also, a letter from his friend Hugh Irvine (one of the few genuine friends of Buchan credited in his *Autobiography* - along with William Gordon, William Kennedy, and Professor Gordon of Marischal College - - "whose talents and good taste need only be known to be duly appreciated") dated 4th March 1828 suggests that Buchan was keen to recruit, or encourage friends to recruit, subscribers for quite some time: "I received the MSS. quite safe, accompanied by your letter. If you have time to make a copy of the "Verses on the Death of Mussle-Mou'd Charlie," I shall be very glad to have them, and shall be here till the 11th, and in Aberdeen till 15th, on which day I proceed south. I hope to get a few more subscribers to your work before I return in summer. It is one that can be recommended in perfect sincerity, and which will form a valuable addition to the stock of legendary poetry for which Scotland is so remarkable." Mussle-Mou'd Charlie was another important ballad informant of the time, best known for his contributions to Sharpe's collections. He

reputedly lived to the age of 105. A couple of verses by way of a eulogy are preserved in Buchan's manuscripts: "Dolefu' rings the bell o' Rain/ Bonny laddie, highland laddie/ Charlie ne'er will sing again./ Death has closed his mussle mou/ To be a warning bell to you." Rain is a village in Aberdeenshire.

- 13 Laing clearly had a reputation as something of a prude, even in those sensitive days. Earlier he had written to Buchan: "...I therefore return the verses on *May*, which you formerly sent me, as I think you may be able, if not, to furnish me with something better, at least to improve them. The truth is, if you will excuse me for saying so, that they are written in bad taste, and as a caution to avoid the use of such words, as you will see are scored under with a pencil, let me request you, at some time or other, to write them over again, in a more simple and natural style. Look at Burns, you will never find him making use of such terms, let them be local, or the language of the common people, if you choose, but not pedantick. Whether this advice be good or not, ask your friend Mr Cunningham, and show him the lines at the same time."
- 14 Robert Buchanan in *The New Scots Magazine* IX (July 31st, 1829), vol II, no. IX, 1-6, p. 2. Buchanan published the magazine from 26 George Street, Edinburgh.
- 15 *Autobiography*, *ibid*, p. 12.

FAMOUS FRIENDS

Throughout his life, Buchan endeavoured on every possible occasion to court the most noted members of the Scottish literati. Of especial interest is his friendship and long correspondence with William Motherwell, the noted poet and ballad collector whose *Minstrelsy*, a collection of ballads collected mostly in the south of Scotland, is notable as it is probably the first example of the meticulous and careful transcription of texts verbatim from recorded sources. His manuscripts, now in Glasgow University Library¹ consist of one notebook with over 250 ballad

texts, several smaller notebooks and holograph letters to, among others, Buchan and Scott. Child noted that "of hitherto unused materials, the most important is the large collection of ballads made by Motherwell." Motherwell was born in 1797 in Glasgow and eventually became sheriff-clerk depute of Renfrewshire. He was also known as a poet and editor of the *Paisley Advertiser* and the *Glasgow Courier*. He had rather reactionary opinions (as had Buchan) but his correspondence demonstrates none of the airs and graces associated with some of the more elevated members of the literati. His friendship with Buchan is important because, despite the respect accorded such figures as Scott, Sharpe and Chambers (notably all associated with Edinburgh) Motherwell and Buchan were almost certainly the two most important song collectors of their generation in terms of the scope and quality of the texts they collected. It is only within the last few years, in fact, that the complete correspondence, divided between two continents for more than a century, has been put together.²

Unusually, it was Motherwell who was the first

to contact Buchan. He wrote to him after receiving a copy of *Gleanings* from Laing on 4th January 1826:

Sir, It was but the other day that I received from my friend Mr David Laing of Edinburgh your curious collection of ballads entitled "Gleanings of Scotch English and Irish scarce old Ballads chiefly Tragical and Historical" the perusal of which has afforded me no inconsiderable degree of pleasure. As I am very fond of the remains of our traditional song I take the liberty though an entire stranger to you of requesting to have a little more information regarding some of the pieces contained in your volume in addition to what the notes supply... From your mentioning at the close of your Preface that you have still some hundreds of ancient ballads in your possession unpublished my curiosity is much excited to know what they consist of and if it would not be taxing your politeness too much I would feel deeply obliged by receiving any notice concerning them which you may choose to give... I pray you to pardon me for thus intruding upon your time but being a collector yourself of these auld warld things I am satisfied that you will readily find an apology in your own mind for a brother of the same craft pushing you a little in these

matters.

Buchan was obviously pleased with the nature of this request and replied at some length on 17th January: "You seem to think it troublesome for me to give you any information upon these subjects, but I tell you I glory in such..." There follows notes on several ballads of interest to Motherwell, including a fairly full version of *The Minister's Daughter of New York*, and some references to *Mill o' Tiftie's Annie* which are of interest ("...it was composed and acted by a few young men at Fyvie as a tragical play, and a warning to others. - The old way, as above, having been composed at the time of Annie's death (1631)"). He also notes some songs he has collected from James Nicol and some details of his collecting activities:

It was the same Mr Nicol who also gave the copies to me of the above. In addition to them I have lately received a packet from him containing upwards of twenty sheets of foolscap, closely written with old Ballads, but have not as yet got time to examine them - However, I expect a rich treat as soon as I have leisure for a perusal. As to the other old Ballads in my possession, it would be entirely impossible to give you any

information, as I suppose half-a-dozen of sheets of paper would not contain all their names, many of them collected by myself of the stall, and from Ballad singers in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow & c. I have also travelled much in Aberdeenshire for the purpose of procuring old Ballads, or any information regarding them, and have been middling successful, altho' with the loss of my time and a good deal of money. - Still, I am so much wedded to these fooleries, that I cannot, even yet, give it up. There are yet a few old women in this part of the country that I intend to wait upon, as I am informed they possess some rare and curious old ones.

The correspondence was to continue and Buchan sent Motherwell some books and a loan of Nicol's manuscript. Later in the same year Motherwell wrote requesting the chance to view Buchan's ballad manuscripts and included a gift for Margaret Buchan (a thoughtful touch?):

From Mr Laing I have obtained all his collections & I can draw ad libitum on the other collections of such things in Edinburgh. You mention that your printed ballads are all in confusion but that signifies nothing. A mere sight of them would satisfy me if they could prove of use; and as it is easier for me to pay

their carriage to & from Peterhead than to pay them a visit in person I hope if convenient that you will bundle them up & let me have my curiosity satisfied.

I shall be extremely glad to be favoured with any remarks with the perusal of the printed sheets now sent suggest to you or indeed with any observations your knowledge leads you to make on the subject of old ballads in general.

In packing the shawl I have desired every pains to be taken and I hope it will arrive safe & sound into your possession. It cost a little more than your books produced but you will permit me to present my portion of it to Mrs Buchan or to whomsoever you destined it for.

Unfortunately, at this time Buchan was to suffer the loss in infancy of his daughter Janet and this is recorded in his reply of 31st July 1826. However, Buchan takes some pains to detail several comparisons between his and Motherwell's respective collections:

I was duly honoured with the parcel you were so kind as send me, containing your friendly letter of the 5th of June, also 10 numbers of your esteemed publication; a Shawl for Mrs B and part of Nicol's MSS. - For the members of your work which you have so kindly sent me, and for the shawl to my wife, please accept of our

most sincere thanks, conjunctly and severally. The parcel was at least a month on its way here, which caused it to come in rather an unwelcome time - I mean by this, it just reached us the moment we were hanging o'er the cradle of an only, an innocent, and beautiful dying daughter, whose soul fled to the Paradise above on to-morrow after, leaving us the only consolation of her being in the arms of her Saviour. Since, Mrs B. has never loosed the bands that wrapped the shawl, and I cannot say that I have done that justice to your work as I would have wished - however, I am satisfied it is, and must be valuable, for you have been at much pains in its compilation... I have been traversing the country of late in search of all the old Syrens in "hill and holt, and moor and fenne," and have found several, from whose decayed and time worn memories, by means of a bribe or fair promise, I have been enabled to extract several sweet morsels. One old woman of eighty got so much into the spirit of the olden time, that, on my approach, altho' lying on a bed by the fire, and whose decayed body and limbs could not carry her to the door, sat up and repeated many fragments which I had never heard before.

There are also, once again, several pages of observations on specific ballads, and a request that Motherwell consider whether Buchan's own

attempts at balladry in *Gleanings* be worthy of a place in his collection. Buchan also sent on his ballad manuscripts for Motherwell's perusal, and that seems to have satisfied both men's curiosity for some time, as their correspondence over the next couple of years, while still extremely friendly, is somewhat more curtailed and mostly concerns their collecting activities. Buchan had given Motherwell details of his dealings with Jamie Rankin and Motherwell attempted to follow his example ("I equipped a kind of an enthusiast with a pack & bade him wander too through Ayrshire Galloway and Dumfries. Hitherto I have heard no tidings of his success.") Both men were intent upon publishing their collections - Motherwell's *Minstrelsy* was to appear one year before Buchan's *Ancient Ballads* - and both bemoan the difficulty of attracting proper funding for their activities, as well as swopping notes on important ballads - such as *Gil Morice* and *The Wife of Usher's Well*. Buchan also seems to have sent on a considerable collection of broadsheet ballads, possibly including some of his own, as a letter of April 1827 reveals: "It is now sent you, a collection of about two hundred half-penny ballads, the gleanings of all the

Bookshops in Aberdeen and Peterhead, as all of them have been searched painfully, by my son and self. - I have not printed any of this description, (a few for Mr Keith, Abdn expected,) these ten years, and there are none printed now in Abdn unless on broadsides, or single leafs, for the street singers."

Buchan also wrote from Edinburgh on the 17th August 1827 regarding his visit to Abbotsford to see Scott:

I have at length arrived in this place with my stock of legendary lore, and have had the good fortune to be introduced to several of the best judges of this kind of literature to whom I have shown the collection, and all agree it is remarkably curious and valuable. - Among those who have got a glance of it are Mr Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Mr Jamieson, author of the Popular Ballads, & Mr Kinloch, Mr Maidmont, Mr Pitcairn, and some few others. Mr Stevenson and I go to Abbotsford to-morrow to consult Sir Walter Scott, to whom I have got a very friendly recommendation by Mr Kirkpatrick Sharpe. I will then, on my return here, shortly after do myself the honour of waiting upon you, at your house in Paisley, so that I would wish you at home if possible - but I cannot appoint the

day, as it will depend greatly on my
detainment by Sir Walter when at
Abbotsford.

And later he noted the supposed success of his
expedition: "Sir Walter Scott was very attentive
to me, and on his returning the MSS which I left
for his longer perusal, he accompanied them with
a very flattering letter, and expressing his
high opinion of the ballads in very strong
terms." This, as we know, is another example
of Buchan's tendency to exaggerate. However, he
also communicated to Motherwell the various
problems he was encountering in the publication
of his ballads and Motherwell, unlike Buchan's
other advisers, was very much on Buchan's side,
as a letter of 23rd November 1827 demonstrates:

I feel myself quite unable to advise you
what should be done regarding Stevenson's
proposition. I think he and the criticks
who lounge in his shop have too queasy
stomachs. Were the case my own I would
see them all d--d ere a line which I had
written were expunged unless a good cause
shown. The power which st[evenso]n.
wants of curtailing and arbitrarily
altering the form of your notes is really
asking you to yield up a deal. How you
should act in this exigency must be
regulated I think very much by the

conditions entered into betwixt you & Stn regarding the publication. Should you be obliged to give in so far to his views as allow some of your notes to be altered and abridged you must insist on seeing the proposed emendations before you admit of their adoption.

I wish sincerely you had gotten you[r] MSS disposed of at once for some handsome remuneration instead of being badgered as you seem to have been one way & another. It is truly afflicting to think that a collection of so much value as yours cannot be got published so as to ensure the editor against great and positive loss. I would that I were rich & could afford to purchase your MSS; but my exchequer like that of other wights who unfortunately have contracted a taste for literature is at present very low. Will Mr Sharpe not buy them. He surely can afford to do so and there is no hand in which I would like better to see them fall than into his. Ever since you left this I have been wondering how you had arranged with Stevenson. It is really too bad in him to hawk your notes about & solicit the opinions of his learned customers upon them... I feel quite at a loss rightly to advise you what to do. I sympathise exceedingly in the disappointments you have met with and on the little encouragement you meritorious labours have received. A thought has this moment struck me -- which as a last resource may be of some use. Could you

not yet get yourself employed as a regular contributor to some magazine and communicate to it perennially in a series of papers the contents of your collection. This would pay far better than the mode you at present contemplate publishing by and you could affix your name to the articles and thus secure the merit of your authorship. In your bargain you could easily reserve the right of publishing them afterwards in a collected form. Let me know what you think of this.

In response to Motherwell's advice, Buchan had, apparently written to Stevenson "under the heat of mental feeling" (as he was often wont to do). And Motherwell became more fully involved in the negotiations, writing to Sharpe and visiting Stevenson round about the 2nd January 1828. Motherwell, on this occasion and always, proved a genuine and disinterested champion of Buchan's cause despite the attendant costs of Buchan's sometimes pushy friendship, especially in later years when his health was failing. Motherwell also decided to engage the help of a friend, Robert Smith, in promoting Buchan's cause, and wrote to him on 29th May 1828:

My Dear Smith, This will be handed to you by my friend Mr Peter Buchan the Annalist

of Peterhead and one who has done more than any one I know to collect the amount of traditional ballads of Scotland. Mr Buchan is curious to be acquainted with you of whom your fame he had heard of in the North. and you I daresay will feel as much pleasure in forming acquaintance with one whom I recommend to your attention.

Mr Buchan is at present in Edin regarding the publication of a Volume of Ancient ballads which I can assure you you will find a most important and interesting addition to our literature of that description. If you can in any shape assist Mr Buchan's views you oblige me - and having seen his collection and knowing something of the subject I assure you that any way in which it can be spoken of must be much to the credit of the patriotism and industry of the indefatigable collector.

Smith replied on the 12th June recording his meeting with Buchan:

I embrace the opportunity of sending you a page of the London Harmonicon of next month wherein you will find some notice of the Minstrelsy As I cannot easily procure another copy, you can return it at any future period - I had a visit from Peter Buchan, and had a long crack with him - I did all I could to prevail with him to publish his work with his own

notes, unaltered - Mr D Laing, I understand, wishes to Polish and Condense. This Polishing, in my peer opinion, would quite destroy their originality, and reduce them as commonplace as ten thousand other publications of the kind - Honest Peter is evidently of the same mind himself, but he appears to be afraid of disoblising Mr Laing.

Motherwell, in fact, was to intercede on Buchan's behalf whenever possible and certainly had some influence with Stevenson and Sharpe, whether directly or indirectly which helped to further the publication of Buchan's ballads. Their friendship was to continue for several more years and their correspondence would be worth quoting more fully if space would permit. It deals to some extent with Buchan's attempts to publish a collection of folktales (which were, in fact, not published until after his death when they were discovered to have been rather spoiled by Buchan's precious use of language in transcription) and with Buchan's attempts to publish more of, or alternatively sell, his manuscripts. It is true that their friendship perhaps paled a little towards the end as Buchan's financial difficulties urged him

to press Motherwell for some assistance which Motherwell, not a wealthy man himself, could not give. Motherwell's health was also failing as a letter dated 19th December 1829 indicates: "For these some weeks I have been troubled with a weakness of sight truly distressing to me I scarce see the lines I now scrawl and I hope you will excuse the shortness of my present epistle. Indeed I am next to being blind." Towards the end of 1831, Buchan had petitioned Motherwell to recommend him for a position of librarian to Glasgow Public Libraries that had recently been advertised. Motherwell was not empowered to do so and, although he replied as politely as he could, did not even nominate Peter for the post. There is no record of any correspondence between them after this time. Motherwell died in 1835, a couple of years before Buchan did, eventually, move to Glasgow.

As we know, in 1830 Buchan had gone to reside in Aberdeen, firstly at 49 Broad Street, later at Charles Court, Upperkirkgate, and finally, at Canal Street. Although he was to rail against his father's supposedly unjust treatment of him on many occasions, his occasional trips to Peterhead after this time were probably to visit

old Peter. His reservations about his father did not, however, prevent him from securing a valuation of his father's property a couple of years later when his financial problems were escalating. Walker³ records that the "sundry feu-tenements" in the Longate where Peter was born were valued at 585 by Robert Cowie, a Peterhead builder, in 1832. On his father's death, in fact, Buchan was to inherit this property and it was the proceeds from the sale of these that allowed Buchan, in his later life, to purchase a property in Stirlingshire.

Undoubtedly, financial dealings and the problems of bringing up a large family were uppermost in Buchan's mind at this time. A poignant indication of the very real practical difficulties involved in following his literary career comes in the following letter. At some point in 1829, Buchan had visited Edinburgh to do some business with Stevenson. This is how he recounts the journey to Sharpe:

The night previous to my leaving Edinburgh, I received from Mr D Laing, the sum of twenty shillings to carry me to Aberdeen. Out of these I paid my landlady five, and from the remaining

fifteen I paid twelve for an outside conveyance to Aberdeen; 2s11d went for my passage across the two ferries, so that when I reached Dundee my twenty shillings had dwindled into a solitary penny. With this penny I purchased two half-penny biscuits, which was the only meat or drink I tasted from the time I left Edinburgh till I reached Aberdeen at a late hour. The cold and want of refreshment on the way affected me so much that I was unable to proceed Northward, so had to send the books to the care of Booksellers, and to be by them delivered to the subscribers. I need not explain what disappointments I have met with thereby - they have been great. But in such a case as I have stated, what could I do?⁴

However, he was also intent on publishing more of his vast manuscript collection of ballads. As we now know, the ballads printed in *Ancient Songs and Ballads* constituted only a proportion of Buchan's total collection. Apart from the "prose tales" already mentioned, details of which would occupy too much space to justify here, one other manuscript collection was to remain unpublished - the holograph manuscript collection of sexual songs and bawdry now in the possession of the Houghton Library entitled *Secret Songs of Silence*.⁵

This collection of 76 songs over 181 holograph pages is fully entitled *Secret Songs of Silence; Chiefly Scottish, Ancient and Unpublished, From The recitation of very old people, By Sir Oliver Orpheus, Bart. of Eldridge Hall.* The pseudonym is a typical Buchan fantasy and the title page is accompanied by a couplet - "To be nice about trifles is trifling and folly, The right end of life is to live and be jolly" - which hardly seems in the Buchan mould. It is accompanied by a rather florid dedication to his friend William Gordon - "To My Worthy and Ever Esteemed Friend and Benefactor, William Gordon, Esq. of Fyvie and Marycultre, &c. This Unique Manuscript Collection of the Ancient Amatory Ballads & Songs of Caledonia... as a Grateful and lasting testimony of the highest respect for his affability of manner - His warm-heartedness as a Friend - and His noble-mindedness as a Gentleman, by one who has already reaped the fruits of a generous Friendship, and who will ever remain with profound and sincere regard, His very Grateful and very obliged Friend and Servant, The Collector". In fact, the *Peterhead Smugglers* is also dedicated to Gordon and, in the play, he praises the Gordon family, and also

does so, at every opportunity, in his *Autobiography*⁶ and elsewhere. Buchan, of course, was potentially a very generous friend, but, with regard to his changeable nature, one wonders, on occasions, actually what his obligation to the Gordon family may have been.

These songs are of very varied quality and type and seem to have been collected by Buchan over a period of some years (several seem to have come from his travels to London and the south-east), but the first reference to the collection comes in a letter to Motherwell dated 23rd March 1829:

Among a great many curious old Dutch German and French books I have lately purchased at the sale of a Dutch minister's library, who brought them from Holland, I have found Seven Dutch old Songs, which I intend to send to my friend, Mr Robert Jamieson, for translation, as I wish to give them a place in my forthcoming work, but when it will make its appearance I know not, for I have been sadly harassed of late - My old minstrel has just returned from a voyage of discovery laden with honey, but such, I am afraid, will not suit our present hypocrites - they are too high kilted. He says he has now scoured the country clean; and altho' he is off

again, it is without hopes.

He appears to have sent the collection to Laing who responded in a letter dated 26th December 1829:

My Dear Sir, Having at length put my hands on your letter containing the Dutch Songs, I avail myself of an opportunity which offers to return you the precious originals. On looking at the letter, I see I omitted to answer one part of it, in reply to "your high-kilted muse." My advice to you would be to put her effusions into the fire, only I know you won't follow my advice, altho' as the father of six representatives of Father Adam, you ought to have some regard to the morals of those who come after you, to keep you from meddling with such things. But if you will publish them, why then your best work might be to open a correspondence with your dear friend Jock Stevenson, and get him to print what he would call "an unpublished" volume, to sell to such of his customers who are not over fastidious in having a high-seasoned dish set before them.

Laing can hardly have been expected to approve of the *Secret Songs*, however, and Buchan seems to have followed his advice to contact Stevenson, although apparently the bookseller

could hold out no hope of a purchaser. Unfortunately, Stevenson died shortly afterwards (his business, however, was continued by his son, Thomas) and on the 19th March 1831 Buchan wrote to Sharpe:

I am extremely sorry on this occasion to have to allude to the death of my friend Mr. John Stevenson, who requested me, with your advice, to make a select collection of rare and curious pieces in the amatory way. This having been done, and some months spent in collecting and copying them for the press, they are now almost altogether useless to me, unless some private collector will buy them and allow me a trifle... are there any of your acquaintances who would take the MS. of the Amatory Poetry, on very reasonable terms? I know not its value, but would leave the price of it entirely to your management. I would also sell the large volume of MSS. on moderate terms.

Sharpe replied on the 16th September:

I have tried what I could do as to the sale of your MSS but all in vain - it is urged that the best ballads which belonged to the larger vol. are printed already, and that three, like their predecessors would fail in publication... for the small vol: one cannot easily

expose it to many bidders - but still, if you would like a low price, I think I could get them off to a Highland gentleman who is fond of savoury things, and a sort of an antiquary. He shall take the sour with the sweet - that is, what he doesn't care for with what he does - if you approve of this, let me know, and then you need not be troubled to transcribe the 3rd MS: as it will suit him as well in its present state.

Buchan seems to have considered this a reasonable offer and replied sometime later:

My Very Highly Esteemed Sir, I had the honour and very great pleasure of receiving you long-looked for letter of the 16 Sept. and beg to offer my grateful thanks for your very great attention! - On receipt of it, I stopped for you, as a small testimony of my gratitude, two very large sea-base ivory tusks from Davis' Straits... As for the "Savoury" MS. I will be obliged if you would do me the kindness and dispose of it to the Highland Gentleman, at any price you think fit, be assured I will be pleased, and the sooner it is done the better. - The large MS. and the uncopied one may be sent me by coach, care of Mr Lewis Smith, Bookseller, Aberdeen.

It is interesting here that he records sending

Sharpe two walrus tusks (remember the Buchan family's involvement with the whaling industry.) These specimens are almost certainly the same as were brought back by Patrick Buchan from a whaling expedition and first offered to William Gordon who suggested depositing them in Aberdeen University. On another occasion he records sending him a rose table. Obviously the exact circumstances of these gifts are lost in the past, but it has to be said that it remains altogether unclear to the casual reader of the Buchan/ Sharpe correspondence what real benefit Buchan ever derived from this friendship - unlike, for example, Motherwell's vigorous campaigning on his behalf. However, Buchan seems to have received no direct response and wrote again on the 13th November 1831:

My Worthy and Good Sir, I am loath, very loath indeed, to trouble you at this time, but as I did myself the pleasure of writing you from Peterhead some time ago, requesting you to send me per coach the MSS. of the Ballads last sent you -ie, those which were not regularly copied, but taken down as spoken. Again, I would feel particularly obliged by your sending them as early as possible, as at present I am doing nothing, and I think that by printing 100 or 150 copies, they would

sell among the curious, as I would give an authentic life and portrait along with them of *Mussel-mou'd Charlie*. The life I got from my late lamented and good friend, Hugh Irvine, Esq of Drum - the portrait would be copied from an original painting in Fyvie Castle. I would also give a portrait of my late collector, James Rankin, which I caused to be painted a little before his death, with a sketch of his life, etc. I hope you have been able to dispose of, ere this time, - to the Highland gentleman of whom you spoke some time ago, - the MS. of the indelicate songs, etc. If so, please let me know, and also if you have any view of any other gentleman who would purchase the largest MS. If none of these are disposed of, I would feel obliged particularly by your sending them together per coach as early as possible. For I hate to be idle, and I must try and turn them to some account myself as soon as possible, for I cannot starve, if anything better can be obtained...

However, nothing seems to have come of the mysterious highland gentleman referred to by Sharpe and the next we hear of the *Secret Songs* comes in 1833. It seems that Thomas Stevenson had suggested that they could be employed in some way and Buchan had recalled the manuscript from the possession of William Gordon (to whom,

after all, it was seemingly gifted) to send to Edinburgh, as detailed in a letter from Gordon dated 15th July 1833: "In a letter which I received from your son last January, he mentioned that, in consequence of a conversation with Mr Stevenson the Bookseller, you were anxious to publish a small volume of Curious Songs and Ballads, and that you thought there were some in your last manuscript now in my possession that would be proper for that work: being then at Fyvie Castle, I could only express my regret that I had left the manuscript here, but that I was preparing to set off to London immediately, and that I would take the first opportunity of sending it... You know my opinion upon the consequences of your publishing and putting your name to that work too well to render it necessary for me to say more on the subject:- it certainly differs widely from Mr Stevenson's, and that of others of very great authority, and has only this to recommend it, that it is influenced by a sincere wish for your prosperity. I hope your wife and family are all well, and have been so since I left home." Again, however, nothing seems to have come of this as a later letter from Buchan to Stevenson testifies: "I am sorry you did not print a few

copies of the Ballads after having sent so far for a loan of the MS. - In fact I do not know what to say to Mr Gordon when I return it - I look so oddly, first to ask it from him, and then return it without using it. I could not meddle with it myself here, - Aberdeen is not Edinburgh - not a copy would sell!"

Both this manuscript and the larger ballad manuscript were, in fact, to remain in Buchan's possession unpublished (although he later sent them both to Charles Mackay of the *London Illustrated News*, and various other possibly interested parties)⁷ until the end of his life. Both were passed on to his nephew Alexander Scott and eventually purchased by Francis James Child for the Houghton Library, Harvard University, where they now reside.

Although Buchan's first few years in Aberdeen, since the demise of the Auchmedden Press, had not seen the frenetic literary activity of the previous decade, Buchan's own writing career was far from finished. In 1833, in an obvious attempt to repeat the comparative success of *Annals of Peterhead*, he brought out a similar survey of Aberdeen, primarily based on John

Forbes edition of 1685, and, in some editions, contained an engraving of the town by Buchan. Despite this, however, the full title of the work, considering the travails of his residence there and the opinions he was later to express, seems unfortunately sycophantic - *A Succinct Survey Of The Famous City Of Aberdeen, With Its Situation, Description, Antiquity, Fidelity, And Loyalty To Their Sovereignes; As Also The Gracious Rewards Conferred Thereon, And The Signall Evidences Of Honour Put Upon Many Chief Magistrats Thereon.* This is not altogether a bad piece of work, but, again, its reception seems to have been a disappointment to Buchan. The following year, however, he decided to turn his attention once more to verse and published both an epic poem, *The Orphan Sailor*, and a play, *The Peterhead Smugglers*, described as "an Original Melodrama, in three acts". Buchan seems to have been fairly pleased with the latter, as he sent it to several friends for their opinion, including Stevenson, Sharpe and Motherwell - "I beg your acceptance of the accompanying little volume, my first attempt at Dramatic writing. When you have read it, I should be happy to hear your opinion of it. The few would-be-critics we have here are not to be

depended upon - their opinions are literally worth nothing" - and Irvine - "Will you oblige me by... your candid opinion of my late performance, The Peterhead Smugglers". Motherwell's reply was candid but diplomatic - "I saw your Melodrama. It may do well for the quarter in which it is cast but for general representation I have my fears it will not succeed". Apparently, this play was solicited by a theatre company in Peterhead and performed there on the 15th June 1831 (Fairley draws attention to the fact that it seems to be available for performance some time before its official publication). In fact, Buchan wrote to Motherwell that it "performed to overflowing houses repeatedly", although this may have been his fancy. He also claimed to have written the whole thing in four days and this is more likely - "it was my first attempt in that line; and in all probability, it will be my last." The nature of Buchan's dramatic prose is clear from this short extract. William and Annie are unfortunate star-crossed lovers:

Enter ANNIE

Ann. What! my William,
flying from me!

Will. O my Annie, thou hast loiter'd long; what has been the cause of your tarrying at this critical juncture? I am now in haste. It is already half-past eight, and my business calls me hence. It demands an early attendance.

Ann. Cruel William, will you thus go and leave me?

Will. I must, obedient to the imperative mandate of an indulgent father. (*Hiding his face.*)

Ann. You seem to falter and shake, my William; every limb seems to quiver like the leaves on yon aspen tree. Are you well?

Will. I am.

Ann. Then do not, O do not, do not, my love, my William, deceive me. Make me your confidant, or I die of despair; my life is in your hands, and never, never shall I leave you till I become a partner of your sorrow.

The rest is more of the same dreadful stuff, demonstrating Buchan's total inability to comprehend the nature of dramatic discourse. Surprisingly, Buchan seems to be very satisfied with this work, as his letters to

various friends demonstrate, as well as requesting Stevenson to get it reviewed (thankfully, perhaps, he did not do so). *The Orphan Sailor*, unfortunately, is just about as bad in every respect, although it did go to a second edition, and a letter from Buchan to Stevenson the bookseller mentions his hopes for it: "I embrace the present private opportunity of sending you hot from the press, fifty copies of the second edition of my new work, "The Orphan Sailor", etc. The first edition having been all sold in a few days".

Buchan was to continue with his literary activities during the years 1834-1837, but there is no doubt that, as Walker notes, these were years of great stress and trouble. This was undoubtedly due to his declining financial fortunes, with the difficulty of educating his eldest sons as he saw fit no doubt contributing. There seem to have been incumbent legal difficulties also, giving Buchan more occasion to rail against the "pettifogging lawyers" he so detested.

Aberdeen had not dealt kindly with Buchan, but perhaps the low point of his career was to come

on 13th April, 1837, when he removed his books, consisting of some 2000 volumes, his manuscripts, and a few prints and painting, including a oil painting of horses and dogs by Morland, a few hundred yards to William Smith and Co's sale-room at 2 Broad Street for the purpose of a roup that was to extend over twelve nights. A letter to Sharpe sent as early as 1831 suggests that he already contemplated and partly embraced this last measure ("I am at present hard pressed, and of late have been writing a catalogue of my private library, which I mean also to sell, if such be possible. A few months ago I was under the very disagreeable necessity of selling, by public roup, a good part of my books - they were literally thrown away, but I could not prevent it. Such has been my fate in this world. It is indeed with reluctance that my books and I part for a moment let alone for ever.") and another letter reveals that the catalogue for this sale had existed in manuscript form at least since 1834.⁸

Basically, however, through all the hard times, Buchan had baulked at the sale of his extensive library. But now he could avoid it no longer. The *Catalogue of the Private Library of Peter*

Buchan, published in Aberdeen in 1837, is, in fact, an exceedingly interesting volume. It demonstrates the extent and breadth of Buchan's reading and the exhaustive nature of his collecting activities. As well as volumes by writers as diverse as Sterne, Johnson, Pope, Homer, Gay, Ovid, Beattie, Horace, Ramsay, Shakespeare and Raleigh, it contains hundreds of works on history and antiquities and just about every volume published on songs and ballads. Some of Buchan's other personal interests are represented - for example, witchcraft, and, perhaps not surprisingly, penal law, including a *Discourse on Removing Tenants!* There is little by way of an introduction in the catalogue, although a note is appended stating: "several interested friends have been very anxious to know the cause of such our separation. I beg therefore to state that, at a more convenient season, I will gratify them in this modest request. In the meantime I would wish their attending of the place of sale." Later, however, in *The Eglinton Tournament*, he was to fantasise an address "To the Purchasers of my Books":⁹

Once on a day my books were my principal

pride, and my greatest pleasure. They were to me dear as the apple of my eye. In short, they were my chief consolation in a trying hour, my only solace under affliction, and my best though silent friends in the days of mental anguish... But now we must part! And, at the end of this address, you will see for what laudable purpose. I have been basely and innocently plundered of my property by base and unprincipled miscreants, and not by debauchery or riotous living... I may state without offence that, when poor Robin Bloomfield got a wife, he was shortly after necessitated to sell his *fiddle*; and the Harper of Mull, to comfort a false fair one, burned his harp... I will not burn my fiddle, my harp, nor my books. My books for a small recompense I will dispense to another; my harp I will hang on the willows; and my fiddle shall once more, when my books are parted from me... cheer my drooping spirits with its enlivening tones.

In a similar vein, he was to write in a particularly revealing way to his old friend Alexander Laing a few weeks after the sale:

My pen is unable to do justice to my feelings, in describing what I then never experienced before - it was tearing the tenderest ties of nature asunder - My soul was in my Books - They were my early

companions, and my greatest solace in a trying hour, many, too many, of which I have felt since I had the misfortune to become a citizen of this accursed place. They were collected when my spirits were light, and had become as my household gods, but now they are scattered far and wide - they are far from me. I stood beside the Auctioneer while he was lightly trifling with a favourite volume my heart was like to break - He reminded me of the hardened hoary-headed sexton who, regardless of the feeling of the departed, rejoices in having to perform such an agreeable task, as to separate beloved companions, merely because such office puts a few pence into his hand. Oh! what a world we live in! Think now, my Dear Sir, for a moment, and say if I could otherwise have been but in a sighing and melancholy mood for these months past - How could I sing, but hing my harp on the willow. I have been bereaved of my most innocent friends, which at all hours, and at all seasons, gave me delight, and I shall never look upon their like again - the time is fast approaching, when I shall not require their aid... I wish to descend into the grave with the same honours as my ancestors, except in greatness, which for wise and good purposes I have not been permitted to possess. You will see the Books have been sold by myself, i.e. to say, with my own free will and consent for the purpose. For all my misfortunes,

and they have not been few or far between, and all I have suffered, I have not asked the most trifling favour from any one, so that I now stand indebted to none for friendship or favour in a pecuniary way... but have always acted the part of an honourable man.

Whether, in fact, it was Buchan's pride that prevented him seeking financial relief from any of his friends, or whether, as on some other occasions when he had depended too greatly on the ties of friendship, they had been unwilling or unable to come to his aid, is a moot point. Buchan actually goes on to suggest to Laing that an unnamed gentlemen had offered to circumvent the sale but it had been too late, and he also reveals that Laing himself had, after the sale, proffered him some financial help. Whatever financial gain the sale and other assistance may have provided, however, seems to have relieved his circumstances temporarily at least and, despite the sale of his books, his manuscripts, for the most part, had, felicitously, as it turned out, not been purchased (the larger ballad manuscript was to be loaned to William Gordon and returned to Buchan in the March of 1838). He had also revealed to Laing that, along with his son, Charles Forbes, he intended

a journey to Glasgow and the west. In fact, Buchan had determined to move from Aberdeen altogether, and, on the 25th September 1838, wrote to Sharpe: "I have left the North altogether, and am now settled with my family in Glasgow, about two months ago, all of them are in respectable situations, and I expect soon to be in one myself." His move to Glasgow (rather than Edinburgh which may have seemed more likely) was perhaps prompted by his friendship with Motherwell who had died three years previously, but it is more likely that Glasgow, a growing centre of commerce with important trade links with the New World, seemed to offer more possibilities of employment for Buchan's growing family. In fact, his sons' employment in commercial activities was, to a certain extent, to relieve the family circumstances for the next few years which seem to have been fairly settled. Buchan first of all resided at 155 Stockwell Street, a thoroughfare linking the prosperous Merchant City with the Clyde. Glasgow seemed to prove to Buchan a friendlier city, in his own terms, than Aberdeen and several friends are mentioned in his *Autobiography* - Charles Hutcheson, James McHardy, a Sheriff Clerk, John Smith, Archibald

McLellan, William Middleton, David Robertson, the bookseller, James Clark, a clothier.

One of the first steps Buchan took upon arrival in Glasgow was to arrange publication of his *Autobiography* in the form of a pamphlet. This interesting piece, which is quite valuable for tracing Buchan's early life, is a rather grotesque explosion of Peter's worse excesses of vanity and paranoia. Fairley, for example, notes that "it is a piece of as silly writing as ever left the pen of man, full of apparent conceit; and ought to have been burned by Motherwell." Motherwell, in fact, had already published the piece in the *Paisley Magazine* for December 1828. Even Motherwell, however, normally sympathetic to the cause, cannot suppress his true feelings in a letter to Sharpe: "With this you have the concluding numbers of the 'Paisley Magazine,' one of which, containing an original letter of the redoubted Peter, merits your especial regard. Indeed, there cannot be a more unique piece of autobiography, and the Mag. would have been an unleavened mass were it not for this vanity. You got this famous preface smothered, but, lo, the Phoenix has sprung from its ashes!"

Strangely, despite the recent death of his father, Buchan did not attempt to eradicate some outspoken and unfortunate criticism in the text, despite the efforts of Laing to persuade him to do so - " Mr David thinks I have spoken too freely of my father's ungenerous treatment, and also of some of my townsmen; but had he had encountered the half of what I have done, his cheeks wou'd never dry - hearing of and feeling of a thing are quite different" - and this sort of outspoken rashness is a trait that, notably, did nothing throughout his career to endear Buchan to the literati.

Over his years in Glasgow, firstly in Stockwell Street and later at 30 Renfrew Street, Buchan was still active in the literary field. Fairley suggests that he may have edited a sort of Shipping Gazette, and he published a guide to Glasgow Necropolis, as well as an edition of a manuscript he had had for time concerning the wanderings of Prince Charlie, written by Alexander Macdonald, one of his attendants. Buchan's interest in the Stuarts had obviously been sparked by his knowledge of the Old Pretender's landing at Peterhead and for some time Buchan had in his possession a relic

identified as Prince Charlie's ring which he had tried to sell. Before his removal he had also written two works with much the same substance, *The Parallel* and *Advice to the Electors*, containing basically, Buchan's own views on politics - which were, like Motherwell's, rather reactionary (strangely, the more gentrified members of the literati proffered more radical opinions). For example, he is totally opposed to Thomas Paine - "that archfiend and base corrupter of the morals and the peace of Europe... I leave his book to the contempt which it merits from every good man... if anyone thinks to accomplish a revolution in this happy country, he labours with a gross and fatal mistake" - and to universal suffrage - "suppose for a moment that the right of electing members of Parliament should be lodged in the heads of families universally, throughout the whole of Britain... one most obvious consequence would be, that... every man who voted contrary to the will of his master would be turned out of employment". Buchan had high hopes for this work, and sent copies to, among others, Lord Ramsay, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. His other major undertaking of this period, however is an

even more extensive and ambitious work (he sent a copy, this time, to the King of France). Entitled *Who is a Gentleman* in its original form, it was published twice in 1840, firstly titled *The Eglinton Tournament* and secondly *Britain's Boast* (it is likely that the original title was not extravagant enough for a work of this nature). The Eglinton Tournament was, in fact, an elaborate attempt to mimic the medieval tournament which achieved some publicity at the time (there was a popular revival of interest in the age of chivalry at the beginning of the nineteenth century). *The Eglinton Tournament*, as it may be called, is nothing less than an attempt, in Buchan's own terms, to describe the entire workings of the country's political, legal, social and ethical systems and institutions. In the advertisement for the book (which was dedicated to the late George IV; the published volume was dedicated, perhaps more prudently, to the Earl of Eglinton) Buchan states, "I intend to print the most wonderful book which the world ever read - a book in which every incident shall be incredible, yet strictly true." The extent of the work can be seen in even a small selection of the topics listed under contents: The Nature, Rights, Duties, and

Powers of Kings; Dissertation on Education; The real character of a Gentleman Defined; Dissertation on the Advantages of Law; Of Soldiers and Sailors; etc... The text is a strange mix of erudition, odd anecdotes, elevated rhetoric, and, most revealing of all, only barely veiled references to Buchan's own situation and disappointments. In retrospect, the whole work seems pompous, over-ambitious and a little ridiculous, but no doubt Buchan saw it as an important achievement, a culmination of many of his ideas and opinions. It was, perhaps, a fitting conclusion to the most substantial portion of Buchan's career. The next phase, as he entered his fifties, was to prove, incredibly, more trying yet.

references

- 1 MS Robertson 9/1-79. These were gifted to the library by the publisher David Robertson.
- 2 In putting together this record of the Buchan/ Motherwell correspondence I am grateful to the staff of the Houghton and Glasgow University libraries. However, I am especially indebted to Dr Emily Lyle whose persevering scholarship discovered some missing links in the correspondence and whose transcription of the letters I have used extensively.
- 3 William Walker, *Peter Buchan and Other Papers* (Aberdeen, 1915), p. 84.
- 4 The letter continues as follows: "...I know that it is to you that I am indebted; and to you and the justly esteemed Baronet, do I beg to offer the overflowings of a grateful heart. Mr Stevenson also hinted that Sir Walter was to have the great goodness to speak of me to His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch, and that I might soon expect to hear from His Grace with an *enclosure*. This was exceedingly kind of Sir Walter but I have never as yet had the honour of the smallest communication from his Grace not that I have any anxious greed, or covet my neighbour's money, but I must allow that something from His Grace would have been highly acceptable to one in my present circumstances. Such a personage as the Duke of Buccleuch could do something for me, without being anything the worse himself, but with those who could plead my cause, I have too little interest, so must give up the hope. I expected to have had an acknowledgement of the receipt of the copy of the Ballads that I sent to His Grace, bound in silk, and gilt in the most handsome manner by H & Bisset. Can it be possible that a Scottish nobleman, such as His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch, has so little taste for the ancient literature of his native country, as to undervalue the production of its highly-gifted bards? I cannot for a moment think it. Surely he has never seen their finest feelings told in the artless guise, in the two volumes which I sent him, or he would have taken notice of them... Since the publication of the two vols. of Ballads, I have got several hints of old people who are

possessed of more of this legendary lore, but as they live at a great distance from this place, I cannot afford to visit them at present, and a few years may put it out of my power forever; for though my zeal in the cause is strong, my purse is weak, - having neither post nor pension, nor anyone to assist me. Nothing would be a greater pleasure to me than to be able to recover and preserve the venerable reliques of our forefathers, but, alas! I cannot do all. I cannot hold the plough and drive. Such must fall to the lot of some wealthier wight. I would that I had but a small portion of this world's gear to enable me to be more useful; but I must submit, and bear the burden of a wish without a power." Buchan, in fact, received little in the way of genuine support from Scott, and despite his dedication, nothing at all from the Duke of Buccleuch. Motherwell later commented on this - "It is heartbreaking to hear the fuss made by some about preserving our antiquities and how little they do when their purse has to be drawn upon for that purpose. Has Buccleugh ever acknowledged substantially the honour you did him by your dedication? If he has not I must tell him he has not the soul of a Turnip." On another occasion Motherwell wrote to Sharpe with the intention of promoting some practical remedy: "Jesting apart, can you not either personally or thro' some other medium, get the Duke of Buccleuch to acknowledge Peter's labours? The Historian of Peterhead is in deadly ire that his Grace has not even honoured him with a billet - common civility entitled Peter to this, for even the Premier has, it seems, administered the unction of praise to him on receipt of a copy of his ballads - much more should the Duke of Buccleuch, to whom Peter has inscribed his book. Again in Buchan's circumstances, I am positively certain that a pecuniary acknowledgt., were it anywise handsome, would be right acceptable. Peter is *hard up*, and quite in as deep financial embarrassment as ever this happy land is or can well hope to be ..." He reported this to Buchan as follows: "I also gave him a hint of the manner in which the Duke (Buccleugh) had behaved towards you, and my own notion, that he only required to be told what to do. I spoke very plainly on the subject, and I may add, warmly. What may come of it, I know

not: but I hope for the best." As far as we know, nothing came of these efforts.

- 5 Houghton Library MSS(C) 25241.
- 6 "William Gordon... a gentleman, not better known for his princely fortune, than for his amiable and fascinating manners", *Autobiography*, p. 13.
- 7 There is no space here to detail the various attempts Peter made to make use of his larger manuscript collection in full. However, in 1830, Buchan sent various manuscripts to John Bell, the ballad collector from Gateshead who had founded the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle-on-Tyne. Bell was the author of *Rhymes of the Northern Bards*. His own ballad book has recently been edited by Dave Harker and published by the Percy Society. On 29th January 1831, Bell wrote to Buchan: "During the last month I had the pleasure of receiving a package from you, containing a copy of your Ancient Ballads, The Secret History of Macbeth, your work on Witchcraft, etc., etc., which I presented to our Antiquarian Society, as you intended. Along with this I enclose you the official return of thanks, which you would have had sooner, and your obliging letter should have been acknowledged on receipt, but my professional engagements were such as prevented me doing as I would wish. I looked through your Ancient Ballads, with most sincere pleasure, and found a number of them to complete what I had fragments of. I was much pleased with the notes, but would have liked if they had been to greater extent, and also, I should have liked "foot-notes." You must, if you have not already done so, interleave a copy, and in the blank page insert the different readings of various lines, which will do away with the idea most completely of your having altered any of them, for altho' you make your protest in the preface, there is still some suspicion in the minds of some to whom I have shown them... I have given and sent copies of your prospectus of "Who is the Gentleman?" to the different printers, and in a week or two, shall, I trust have more time, and will send others to the neighbouring gentry. I had intended to have noticed another part of your letter - but I am shortened for time..." Clearly, Buchan felt that he could do some

business in the north of England, but as a letter from Bell dated 8th April 1831 indicates, he could expect very little real help in that direction: " I waited upon Mr Charnley, the principal bookseller in Newcastle, to show him that part of yours wherein you mention the present number of "Ancient Ballads and Songs." He was in town, but his man of business, to whom I read part of your letter, said you must make them an offer, and they would reply. There never was a day of gloom but it was followed by a day of sunshine. It had been a most gloomy day when you wrote yours: I should advise you, on a sunny day when there is a clear sky, to write an offer, keeping in mind, that to be poor and look poor, is the devil all over. You will have to come low if you deal with Mr Charnley's man of business, but I would keep off telling him that you are touched with more than the everyday poverty of "times are hard." For you know that a man out of debt can wear what dress he likes, and nearly do as he likes, for no one minds him, - but he who is in debt must wear a better coat than he can afford, for if he has a shabby dress, those to whom he is indebted will say, "that man is poor, I can make something of him with money," - or, "that man owes me some money, and looks very poor, I must see after my own," - which verifies my former line, of to be poor and look poor, is the devil in all. This I leave to your better judgement, to do as you think best." Once again, nothing positive seems to have come out of this arrangement and Bell's main interest, as he indicates, seems to have been in "stall ballads", penny histories, and autographs. Much later, in 1842, he sent his manuscripts to S C Hall, who was editing a book of British ballads for the publishers How and Parsons. Hall's reply, on the 14th April, was not, however, in any way encouraging: "You will perceive by the enclosed rough proof that I contemplate forming a popular work, - and do not design to go very deeply into the old ballads, - reprinting indeed chiefly those that are already familiar to the general reader, and not attempting to throw much new light on the subject, or to add materially to the existing information." However, this contact was to introduce him to the Percy Society and another protracted debate in later days. More positively, for

the moment, was his involvement with Robert Chambers who, in 1841, bought a couple of stories from Buchan for his *Popular Rhymes*: "I have ultimately resolved to restrict myself in the meantime to copying from your two manuscripts the following articles:- The story of the Red Etin, The song called the twelve Apostles, The song called the Yule Days. These are all that it appears to me proper to take for my volume of the *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*; but, on some future occasion, I shall be happy to make much more extensive use of the collection of songs, and if possible, to purchase the entire property of it from you. Meanwhile, I would hope you will be satisfied with a couple of pounds for the above story and two songs, as I have incurred other expenses to a considerable amount, for this little book, which after all is only one to please my own fancy, and not in the least likely to be profitable." Once again, for Buchan, fortune failed to beckon. These various dealings are recorded in detail by William Walker. See Walker, *Ibid*, pp 111-119.

- 8 "...In the Introductory Dedication, you will see I have been roughly handled by the scorpion of the law, all to serve their own purpose. I need not enlarge upon it, suffice it to say, I have a strong desire to dispose of all my books and MSS. and hope some of them might be found worthy of a place in the Advocate's Library. The MSS. themselves are not particularly old, as regards paper and writing, but the subjects to which they refer, are particularly so. One of them a huge MS. of ancient unpublished Ballads and Songs was intended by me for publication, but since I have been involved in the manner already described in the vol. sent you, I find the impossibility of giving it to the public, and I have no one to assist me now. - My late worthy friend Sir Walter Scott, read it with great attention; and, had he been alive ere this time, it would have been published as he was to assist me in writing the Notes, etc. necessary for its publication. I wish now to dispose of it, and think it would be a great acquisition to the store of Scottish Literature already accumulated in the library just mentioned. - Its existence has cost me much time, expense, and toil. I have also a collection of

Jacobite MSS. chiefly Songs, all taken down from the recitation of old people. If you think one or all of these MSS. would suit you, I would, on receipt of your letter, forward them to you, where they might be examined and, if agreeable, an offer made for them. - In the largest MS. there are upwards of 140 pieces of poetry, Ballads and Songs, few of which have ever appeared in print. In the prospectus which follows the Introduction, you will see some account of them. I will also, if you wish it, send you a look of the MS. catalogue of my library."

- 9 Peter Buchan, *The Eglinton Tournament* (Edinburgh, 1840), pp 216-17.

DARK DAYS

From 1840 - a year in which Buchan was as industrious as ever through his speckled career - onwards, comparatively little is known about the details of Buchan's life - either because of what he may have seen as a justifiable retirement from the world of letters or, more likely, a period of ill health or infirmity or simply resignation after decades of struggle and generally rejection by the literary world. Ballad-collecting contemporaries and good friends of Buchan - Hogg, Scott, Motherwell - had been laid to rest (Buchan had the misfortune to detail the construction of the monument to William Motherwell in his book on the Glasgow Necropolis) and Scottish literature was to enter a fairly barren period, stifled by Victorian sentimentality, until the advent of

Stevenson and the new generation of song collectors towards the turn of the century.

What we do know is that in or around 1845, Buchan moved with his family to a small estate which he named Buchanstown, near Dennyloanhead in Stirlingshire. Walker describes it as a plot of eighteen acres with a two-storey house and some other buildings upon it. The exact date of his removal is uncertain - Fairley notes that "the Dedication in the London edition of *The Parallel* is dated '30 Renfrew Street, Glasgow, 1844', while the inscription on the writer's copy of *Britain's Boast* is dated 'Buchanstown, 1846.'¹ It is clear, however, that Buchan was to spend some considerable time in Glasgow, probably on various business or to visit his son David, after the move to Buchanstown, and it possibly also took some time to acquire the property. How Buchan did manage to buy this property is somewhat of a mystery. He refers to it in a letter as his "inheritance" and his "patrimony", but it was almost certainly purchased from the results of business transactions during his years in Glasgow. (Walker suggests that money was raised from the sale of property in Aberdeen, his father's property in Peterhead, and his sons' business enterprises, but there is no direct evidence for this) It is likely that Buchanstown itself was not as substantial or well-maintained as its grandiose title suggests. It is

not recorded on the valuation rolls for either 1831 or 1855, Buchan is not named in any document in the county archives, and its exact whereabouts is hard to trace although it was near Parkfoot, south-west of Denny. That it was not to prove a particularly profitable investment was demonstrated by later events.

In fact, Buchan's ambitions to become a member of the landed gentry were to go disastrously wrong. As Walker puts it: "During all this time of gradual displenishing (1848-1851), slowly but surely final disaster was closing in upon him... 'Hungry Ruin had him in the wind'."² During this time he had become acquainted with the antiquarian Alexander Grosart, best known to us for his edition of the poems of Robert Fergusson and his subsequent critical biography of Fergusson.³ Grosart bought some of Buchan's manuscripts and expressed an interest in various items. Walker notes that his letters "leave an impression of 'soft sawder' and business which we don't much like"⁴, but there is no doubt that to some extent Buchan found in the much younger man a kindred spirit, whose enthusiasm for literary matters was equally tainted with his own bemoaning of his sad circumstances. Grosart wrote to Buchan on the 29th of May, 1847, concerning some potential purchases and Buchan's financial problems:

I am very anxious to know how you got on the day after I had the pleasure of seeing you. I do hope the ravenous Harpies of the Law did not put their threats into execution. Let me hear from you anent this at your first convenience. God knows I would, if I could, assist you with my whole heart, but as I mentioned before, all my spare cash is absorbed in 'The Thistle' and recent purchases of Books and MSS. Since my return to Glasgow, I consulted two commercial gentlemen, *soi disant* friends of my own (in the way of business), but they shrugged up their shoulders, and 'money scarce' - 'interest high' - 'so much ready money required' - etc., etc., till in perfect disgust I left them. Had I been able, I should cheerfully have contributed my mite to relieve you, - meantime, if you will tell me (that is, oblige me with a list), what Books and MSS. you intended to have sent to Messrs. Tait & Nisbet of Edinburgh, I will do all I can to find purchasers - a *much better* way surely than by a *public sale*. I wrote to Mr Charles James Hamilton of London, my bookseller, the day you last called at the Bank, and mentioned that I knew of a Sale of rare MSS. and Books which would likely take place soon. I yesterday received his answer, and he says - 'I thank you for writing me about the sale of a private collection of Books and MSS., and hope you will be able to favour me with an early Catalogue, when I shall certainly select, or if in Scotland (which I may be), I shall attend myself.' Please to let me know the very lowest figure you will take for the MS.

Tales and copyright of course, - for the MS Sermons and 'Last Words of the old Covenanters.' ... I may add that as I am collecting everything possible for my editions of Ramsay and Fergusson, I would be glad to treat with you for the portrait of Patie Birnie the Piper. ... Some of the tracts I have a reading of, I should buy from you - if at reasonable prices - meantime allow me to ask if you will let me have 'Dougal Graham's History of the Rebellion' - and the Tracts and Songs printed at Falkirk - dear to me on that account - further 'Old Mother Grim's Tales,' and 'Select Scots Poems,' with Brash and Reid's little penny things - that I may pick out those to complete my set. Allow me also to repeat that if you do think of selling the Renfrewshire Harp, by Motherwell, I will be the purchaser, if at all moderate ...

It is clear, then, that almost from the period of his removal to Buchanstown, Buchan's financial problems were, no doubt, multifold, but it seems that his eventual ruin was, in fact, precipitated by a stroke of seemingly good fortune. Buchan discovered that a vein of coal existed on his property and decided to appeal for the mineral rights. A long dispute was entered into which Buchan seemed to enter into with some enthusiasm.⁵ Towards the end of the dispute, on 22nd April 1852, he wrote to Stevenson the bookseller (probably the son of his old friend John Stevenson) enquiring after some legal

guidance:

Dear Sir, Yours of yesterday, I have just recd., and feel disappointed at you not taking a few of the books I mentioned in exchange - However, as I am anxious to see the pamphlet on the "Court of Session" as I formerly mentioned, but not knowing the carriage by post, I send you 18/- stamps, if, however, you can make it less in price in carriage, please return me as many of the stamps as possibly you can. I will expect the pamphlet by return of post - You will not mistake the one I mean - page 9 - "Court of Session", stitched/- Reprint 1829.

Buchan's decision to take the case to the Court of Session was, in fact, to prove disastrous. However, in the intervening years at Buchanstown, his main energies seem to have been directed towards trying to dispose of his so-far unpublished ballad manuscripts. In 1844, Buchan had received ten pounds for a selection from his ballad manuscripts to be published by the Percy Society. This volume, edited by J H Dixon, was issued in 1845, entitled *Scottish Traditionary Versions of Ancient Ballads*.⁶ Unfortunately, Dixon did not do his homework, nor did he consult Buchan, and the result was that many of the ballads he selected had already been published in *Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland*. His manuscript had been returned by Dixon to William Jerdan,

editor of the *Literary Gazette*. Buchan, for whatever reason, had some difficulty in retrieving the manuscript from Jerdan and a long correspondence ensued, resulting in Buchan threatening legal action. On their safe return, however, Buchan endeavoured once more to secure their publication. In the early months of 1851, he learned that Charles Mackay⁷ of the *Illustrated London News* had plans to edit a series of publications that was to include a volume on Scottish ballads and songs and contacted him with a view to purchasing the manuscripts. On the 25th of March 1851, Mackay wrote to Buchan asking that the manuscripts be sent on for his perusal:

In reply to your letter of the 21st addressed to Mr Little, in reference to the *National Illustrated Library*, I have to request that you would state to me more particularly, the number, extent, and general character of the Songs in your MS. collection - and what portion of them has not appeared in print. I intended before the receipt of your letter to devote a volume of the proposed series to the Songs of Scotland - a subject with which I am tolerably well acquainted, - and for which there exists very ample materials, and should therefore be well disposed to recommend the proprietors of the *National Illustrated Library* to purchase your Collection. It will be necessary, however, that you should not only name the price you would accept, but that you should enable me to understand by

description or inspection the character of the collection you have made. I am no stranger to your book of Ancient Ballads and Songs in 2 vols. published in 1828, - a copy of which I possess, or to the services thereby rendered to Scottish literature, - and should be glad to make your present collection available to your purpose and to that of the Illustrated Library.

With regard to the other subjects mentioned in your letter, I should prefer to say nothing of them in the meantime, except this, - I shall be quite willing to hear further particulars as soon as you can find it convenient. I am more immediately interested in the songs. If you would allow me to inspect the volume it would facilitate the negotiation. Of course every care would be taken of it.

The manuscripts were duly dispatched the following day. On the 7th of April 1851, Mackay replied with his impressions:

I have read the MSS. of the Songs and Ballads with very great delight. They form a very interesting and valuable collection - but I fear that except to poetical antiquaries, - and to a few choice spirits, who are not shocked at the plain speaking of our ancestors, - they would appear - at least a great number of them - somewhat too free in their phraseology for the squeamish ears of these prudish moderns. I also fear that out

of Scotland they would not have the same interest and value that they would have in it. At the same time they please and interest me so much that I am loath to relinquish the hope, that if not the whole, they might in part, be made available for the *National Illustrated Library*. As notes to my proposed volume of Scottish Songs - including those of Burns - some of them would be highly attractive.

I feel utterly at a loss to make you any offer for the copyright of them; but if you will state to me, in confidence, your own views and expectations on the subject - both as regards the whole or part of them - I shall be most happy to use whatever influence I may possess with the proprietors of the proposed series to induce them to enter into an arrangement with you.

However, Buchan, who had so often in the past been gulled with regard to financial recuperation for his good works, refused to commit himself to a specific sum. On the 11th of April 1851, Mackay again tried to strike a bargain:

Can you not state what you would take for the copyright of the two published volumes (many of which I think I said in a previous letter are too indelicate for modern taste - and from which a selection only could be made), together with the 2 MS. volumes, and any other

songs which you may have? I see that many in the MS. volumes are included in the published volumes. I am so loath to appear even to undervalue your labours - labours which so far from undervaluing, I highly esteem and admire, - that I dread to make even a suggestion as to the price you should ask.

However, on the 21st of April, in the face of Buchan's intransigence, Mackay felt moved to make an offer: "As regards the volumes of Songs, your two volumes of MSS. would only be valuable for a few variorum readings, - and at most two or three songs, - so that the offer they make resolves itself into this, - permission for the sum of 30, to reprint as much as would suit their purpose". Apparently, however, Buchan was concerned that the situation would develop into a similar situation as had before transpired with Jerrard. He agreed to the sale of the copyright but insisted on the return of the manuscripts. On the 26th of April Mackay replied: "If you require the return of the two MS. volumes, - and, as many, if not most of the Ballads in them, have been printed in your "Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland" - and are at best but duplicates of that work, it will be more satisfactory if you assign the whole copyright without stipulating for the return of the volumes, - more especially as a considerable time may elapse before any use can be made of them." However, Buchan was determined to stick to this agreement.

Mackay eventually agreed to send him the two halves of a 30 banknote, the second half upon receipt of a form of agreement. On the 3rd of May 1851, Buchan acknowledged receipt of this comparatively small sum. He was still determined to make use of his manuscripts, including the *Secret Songs* in a more substantial way, but it was not to be. Upon his death Buchan's manuscripts were passed on to his brother-in-law Alexander Scott and were eventually discovered in the possession of Buchan's nephew, David Scott, by Francis James Child who purchased them for the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

However, the latter years of the fifth decade of the nineteenth century were to prove for Buchan very dark days indeed, and not only because of the legal and financial difficulties that followed his removal to Buchanstown. In September, 1845, his son James, at the age of 23, set out on the SS Medway for the West Indies in hopes of carrying out some trade. Part of his correspondence with his father over the next two years from the island of Antigua and other locations in the West Indies is preserved.⁸ In it James discusses some financial matters (money was not so easy to come by despite his good intentions), bemoans his own changeable health, and enquires after his brothers and sisters, especially his sisters, Margaret Irvine Buchan and Gordon, who, it appears, was continually frail and in ill

health, probably from consumption. One letter from James to his father, dated 26th February 1845, was sent, perhaps because Buchan was shifting between Buchanstown and lodgings in Queen Street, Glasgow, not directly to his father but to the care of his brother David, who was at that time domiciled at 8 Ashley Place, Glasgow. On the 5th June 1846, James wrote to his father with the news that his brother John, a naval surgeon, had arrived in Antigua. He hopes that he hasn't offended his brother David and asks that he write. David Buchan, however, was never to write again, for after a sudden illness he died in July 1846 at the age of 26. Ironically, only a year or so previously he had, like his elder brothers Patrick and Charles, contributed a couple of verses to the *Whistlebinkie* collection. One was called *My Auld Lucky Dad*, although it could hardly have been based on Peter:

My auld lucky dad was a queer couthie carl,
He lo'ed a droll story, and cog o' guid yill;
O' siller he gather'd a won'erfu' harl,
By the eident clack o' his merry-gaun mill...

And when hoary age crowns my pow, still contented,
I'll lead the same life that my forbear had led,
That, when laid in the yard, I may lang be lamented
By kind-hearted oys, as a guid lucky dad.⁹

James, who had moved around between Antigua, Montserrat, Barbados and Tobago in search of business was distraught at the news, but things for him were to get worse still. James caught a fever in Saint Thomas and, probably because of this, he wrote to his father on 18th February, 1847 that his business was failing. This was the last letter that James was to write to his father. Only a couple of months later his brother John had to report to Buchan that James had succumbed and was buried in Tobago in April of the same year. Tragically, less than two weeks later, he was followed by one of the sisters after whom he had so anxiously enquired, Margaret, who passed away at her father's house less than a month short of her twentieth birthday. In the space of seven months, Buchan had the misfortune to lose three of his children, all in the prime of their short lives.

And yet worse was to follow. Less than three years later, John Buchan, Peter's second son who had tied up James's business interests in the West Indies, passed away in Montrose. Shortly afterwards, on the 10th September, 1850, Gordon Buchan wrote to her father in Glasgow noting that she was in better health but with a worrying reference to Buchan's financial problems - "they want money within 14 days, or Buchanstown for sale?" Only five days later, however, Gordon herself passed away at Buchanstown. She was the oldest survivor of Buchan's

three daughters, only a few months into her twentieth year. Twenty-five years earlier, Buchan's first daughter, Janet, born after five sons, had died in infancy at less than one year. Buchan had written the epitaph on her gravestone:¹⁰

This world is all a tinsel show,
'Tis full of dread despair and death;
The curse appears on all below,
And pains of sin come with our breath.

The death of Gordon must have been the bitterest blow of all. Janet, like two other children of Peter and Margaret Buchan, Alexander Forbes and William Gordon, had died in infancy, Margaret, like Gordon, had never married or left the family home. Peter must have had high hopes for Gordon who, like her unfortunate elder brother, was named after his good friend William Gordon of Fyvie, to whom the *Secret Songs* are dedicated. Gordon himself had, in fact, died only a couple of years earlier as a letter from Buchan to John Crombie dated 1st February 1847 notes: "... particulars of the death of our much respected friend, Mr Gordon, which I only saw noticed in an Edin. newspaper a few days ago, which struck me very much, as I had never heard of his illness... I esteemed him when alive, and will revere his memory now." In earlier years, Buchan had written an inscription for the tombstone of his three children who had died in

infancy:¹¹

Ye little children, hither come,
Prepare for death's dark gloom;
We, once like you, life's joys possess'd,
Now moulder in the tomb
etc.

In the last few days of 1850, Buchan planned to erect a monument at Buchanstown for the rest of his lost children. The details are recorded in the family memorabilia preserved by William Walker:¹²

In memory of five of his Sons and Daughters:
viz;

David Stewart Buchan, late merchant in Glasgow. Born February 29 1820 and died at Underwood, July 24th 1846.

James B. West India merchant, born March 9th 1822, and died at the Island of Tobago April 28th 1847; and lies there.-

Margaret Irvine B., born 22 May 1827, and died at Buchanstown, May 8 1847.-

John Buchan, Surgeon, born July 22 1816 and died at Montrose April 3 1850; and lies there.-

Gordon B. born May 7 1830, and died at Buchanstown September 15th 1850.

All born at Peterhead

Epitaph

Tho' Death divides your mortal clay,
Your souls aloft are borne,
And you shall meet on that dread day,-
The everlasting thorn;-

When God shall raise his saints from rest,
To meet their final doom;
Then you shall rise amongst the blest,
Triumphant o'er the tomb!

Rest then, my Sons, my Daughter dear,
Your battle's fought and won;-
Your fate is sealed - Salvation near,
Thro' the merits of his Son.

Any optimism pervading this piece, however, was ill spent. A cryptic note appended to the draft evaluates the first part of the inscription as 433 letters. It was unlikely that anyone in such dire financial straits as Buchan could afford to have this message inscribed by a stonemason. It is unlikely that this monument was ever erected.

There is evidence that, during this period, Buchan sank more and more into his paranoia and obsession with his own misfortune. He wrote at some length detailing his misfortunes to such dignitaries as the Lord Advocate, The Home Secretary, Sir James Clark and Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton. On the 13th of November, 1852, Buchan wrote to

the Solicitor General for Scotland, Charles Neaves, later to be Lord Neaves,¹³ in an attempt to gain a pension from the Government. Part of this long plea details some of his chequered life history:

I now come to speak a few words of myself, and beg a few minutes of your attention. - As you have known something of my character, conduct, and situation in life during the last twenty years; and how, after the long period of half a century, I have been a most industrious Labourer in the field of Literature, as well as in various branches of Art and Science, as my works can testify; I again presume to solicit your friendly aid in bringing my Case before Her Majesty's Ministers - You are aware that, the produce of my incessant and midnight toils, although husbanded with all the care and economy, as a provision for sickness or old age, have been wrested from me, but the *falsehood*, FORGERY, and *covetousness* of the most unprincipled of men, and the *unjust, unrighteous, and unprecedented Decision* of a man, unworthy of the trust reposed in him as a Judge - I have been literally *robbed* of MY ALL! - *My last shilling!* - Driven from my own just and lawful *Inheritance*, - *my home*, and *my Country*; and obliged, with an aged and Infirm partner, the sharer of my lot during the last forty years, to seek that asylum and shelter, or resting place and retreat, as a stranger in a strange land, which have been denied me in my own. - Yes, from that land where my forefathers lived, and in whose

service they bled, and died with princely honours, I have been forced to retreat, having been refused a home, nay, my daily bread, from my own just and lawful inheritance, which has been so illegally; and unjustly wrested from me, by the falsehood and forgery of men, merely because they have *might* - (*Money*) but not *right* to support them. - Such have been the administrations of the laws of Scotland, in my case - Not a penny has been left me, not a morsel of meat, nor a house where I could shelter myself from the inclemency of the weather - I have literally been *robbed of all*, which, I can clearly prove, would have yielded me at least 2,000, say, *Two Thousand Pounds a year...* if I am not a worthy object of the regard of the present Ministry, I know not who is - *Can it be denied* that my *Discovery of Cylinder, Engraved Roller Cloth*, instead of the *Wooden black, hand Printing*, has not brought Millions of pounds into Britain? - Can it also be denied, that it has employed millions of men, women, and children, and will continue to do so to the great benefit of Britain and Ireland, as well as the Making of thousands of poor mechanics as rich as Indian Nabobs, & c. And, had it not been for the late accursed Patent Laws my youth and poverty, and the barren and desolate place of my birth (Peterhead), at the time I made the *Discovery*, to-day, I would not have been necessitated to apply for a Government Pension, *my Invention* would have yielded me a princely fortune - More so than that of Arkwright's etc. I have also, during the last half hundred years, rendered considerable

Services to my Country, if *Literature*, of various subjects be considered serviceable, which, from the late pensions granted to several *Literary men*, seems to be. I have written and published works of *History, Poetry, Plays, Metaphysics, Biography-Politics, Arts and Science, &c.* all of which I am proud to say, have been received most favourably by the public. I have Edited, and contributed to several highly respected publications - I rendered considerable assistance to *George Chalmers* in his great and national work, *Caledonia* - I assisted *Thomas Moor*, and furnished him with much of the information of the early part of the *Life of Bryon*, I was selected by a respectable publisher to assist. *Jas. Hogg*, the *Etterick Shepherd*, and *Wm Motherwell*, in Editing a complete edition of *Burns' Works*, for which, as a proof of the satisfaction I gave he made me a present of 10 over our stipulated agreement - These I merely mention, that, the same be laid before the Ministry, for their information and guidance, if they are to be so generous as to reward my past labours with their *bounty*.

Walker suggests that Buchan's mind was failing at this time: "the experiences he had lately gone through, alike in the calamities of family life, and the disasters of his business transactions, had unhinged his mind, never remarkable for stamina, grasp or resource. The panegyrics he now wrote... point distinctly to that

mental weakness which hugs its delusions. Such letters were never written by a normally sane man".¹⁴ Certainly, Buchan's typical incessant paranoia and his possibly justifiable pique at the drastic loss of the law suit re Buchanstown clearly come through in his letter to Neaves and probably did nothing to aid his case. It is also true, however, that he very ably details his very considerable achievements, the variety of his interests, and the versatility of his talents. His later letters are certainly scrawled and poorly structured - but it is possible that this was the result as much of physical infirmity or weariness as mental breakdown. It is also notable that he refers in this letter to his wife Margaret - "an aged and Infirm partner, the sharer of my lot during the last forty years" - with whom he had spent the greater part of his life, who had assisted him in all his endeavours, and with whom he had fathered ten children. Amongst all of Buchan's manuscript, letters and various papers preserved to this day not one word remains from Margaret Buchan, the faithful wife who had knitted socks for Sir Walter Scott. This petition, like so many other of Buchan's attempts to gain a little recognition, seems to have been unsuccessful.

On the 7th of April 1852, after the failure of Buchan's recourse to the Court of Session, Buchanstown was sold by public auction at the Royal Exchange Salerooms in

Glasgow. On the 28th he wrote to Alexander Scott: "I am just preparing as fast as possible to go to my long home, where I trust all my troubles will come to an end. Buchanstown! my favourite spot, on which I so much doated and spent my all, has also gone the way of the rest". It was a terrible come-down. Peter and Margaret Buchan had no choice but to find lodgings in Glasgow until a ship could take them to Drunkerrin, County Leitrim, the home of their son Charles Forbes Buchan. Buchan was yet to receive a second small grant from the Royal Literary Fund, but the last two years of his life were to be spent in comparative poverty and isolation far from his native home.

During the year of 1840, resident in Glasgow, the normally prolific Buchan had produced five separate volumes. Since then, dogged by the usual financial problems and possibly declining physical and mental health, his pen had lain idle (although *The Parallel* was reprinted in London in 1844).¹⁵

His literary career was not quite concluded, however. On the 24th of May 1853, in Leitrim, Ireland, he wrote an *Address to the Workmen, &c., Engaged At The Creevelea Iron and Coal Works*, on the occasion of what seems to have been a procession of trades guilds. This was actually published in Carrick-on-Shannon in 1853. At

the end of the volume there is appended a note - "the preceding ADDRESS was written in a few hours, on the very day of the procession, which will account for its imperfections". Apparently, the whole thing was actually read out to the unfortunate workmen of Carrick. It is long, wordy and tedious, full of platitudes and dreadful puns on industrial terms such as "steam", "fuel" and "hot-blast" - a sort of rambling and hardly coherent hotchpotch of Buchan's worst obsessions and paranoia. True to the spirit of his earlier work, however, Buchan concluded the piece with a rendering of *Tullochgorum*.

This was to be Peter Buchan's final farewell to the world of literature. A year later he visited London, apparently with the purpose of finding a publisher for either a further edition of *Ancient Songs and Ballads* or an additional volume of ballads, possibly based on some of the previously unpublished songs from his manuscript which is now preserved in the British Library, and an extended autobiography (Mackay had suggested the names of some publishers for this). Walker speculates that he may have had dealings with Ingram and Co., publishers of the *Illustrated London News*. While lodging in Waterloo Road (the death certificate has 25 Waterloo Road, but Walker suggests "Cranmer Road, Waterloo Road") he contracted cholera and expired on the 19th September, 1854. Apparently his son Patrick was visiting at the

time, as, in a letter to Buchan's sister-in-law, Ann Scott, he notes: "I parted with him the night before in health , and the next day he fell asleep in my arms and I hope and believe in the Arms of Him who is his Father and his God."¹⁶ The certificate of his death gives his age mistakenly as 60 - he was actually 64 years of age. The certificate is witnessed by the mark of Christiana Greenaway of Lambeth who was also present at his death. His occupation is given as Gentleman. He was buried in an unmarked plot by the boundary wall in the South Metropolitan Cemetery, Lower Norwood, in the south-east of London. Margaret Mathew Buchan, his wife for over forty years, survived him by six years.

Patrick (Peter) Buchan and Charles Forbes Buchan were the only members of Buchan's family to survive to take an interest in literary and antiquarian matters. Buchan recorded in his *Autobiography* that Patrick, his eldest son, had an "itch for rhyming" and suggests that he had had some verses published around 1835. Certainly he contributed to the well-known collection of Victorian sentimental poetry, *Whistlebinkie*, and two of his poems - *Legends of the North: The Guidman o' Inglismill* and *The Fairy Bride* - were published anonymously in 1873. He also, apparently, wrote the completion of Robert Tannahill's *Thou cauld, gloomy Feberwar* which was mistaken accredited to his father and which is praised in

The Bards of Bon-Accord.¹⁷ His manuscripts are preserved in Aberdeen University Library and contain both notes on Scottish songs - with several references to Cunningham - and notes on a voyage to Greenland (like his brother John, who was a ship's surgeon, Patrick accompanied the whaling fleets to the Greenland Whale Fishery - his father had written an account of whaling and engraved a sketch of the Peterhead whaling fleet in *Annals of Peterhead*). Patrick's career is detailed in *The Bards of Bon Accord*.¹⁸ He graduated from Marischal College, with an MA and MD, and obtained a Ph.D from Jena, entered the medical profession and practised for a while in a country district. He moved to Glasgow and, like his brother James, but more successfully, entered trade as a West Indies merchant. During Peter's last years, he resided with Patrick in Leitrim, Ireland. On retirement he moved to Orchardhill, Stonehaven, and died there on 25th May 1881.

The Reverend Charles Forbes Buchan, Peter's third son, also wrote poems under the pseudonym Presbuteros (the original Greek from which Presbyterian is evolved). Like Patrick, he is represented in the *Whistlebinkie* collection. Aberdeen University Library possess manuscript copies of several of his poems written between 1831 and 1834 which mostly consist of sentimental lyrics such as "The Mavis Lilted on the Thorn", "The Sailor

Boy's Dream" and "O weel ken I my ain sweet lass". If these dates are correct it would appear that his first words were penned at the age of seventeen. One year later, when Charles was eighteen, his brother Alexander Forbes Buchan died at the age of only three months (Peter's tenth and last child, William Gordon, also died in infancy two later) and Charles wrote two verses - "On the death of my youngest brother, Alexander" and "To a mother on the death of her infant".¹⁹ In many ways, Charles's career was not typical of the fortunes of the Buchan clan. He pursued a steady and unremarkable career in the ministry at Paisley Abbey and in the parish of Fordoun, Kincardine. Several of his sermons were published in later life, he was involved in a minor controversy concerning Zionism, and he wrote two suitably pious collections of religious sentiments - *Abba, Father: being prayers and hymns for young persons* and *The Gem of the Week*²⁰ (Edin, 1855 and ND). Charles Forbes Buchan died in 1883.

references

- 1 John A Fairley, "Bibliography of the Works of Peter Buchan", *Transactions of the Buchan Field Club*, vol. VII (1905), 123-149, p. 139.
- 2 William Walker, *Peter Buchan and Other Papers* (Aberdeen, 1915), p. 110.
- 3 Alexander B Grosart (ed.), *The Works of Robert Fergusson* (London, 1879). Alexander B Grosart, *Robert Fergusson* (London, 1898), one of the "Famous Scots" series published by Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier.
- 4 Walker, *ibid*, p. 107.
- 5 Buchan attempted various ploys in this matter including writing to Lord Brougham. A reply dated 10th February 1851, states that his Lordship has no power to interfere and continues, "But although Ld. B. is extremely sorry for the loss which Mr. B. has sustained upon his purchase, it is quite impossible for him to give an opinion as to the process at law upon reading the statement of Mr. B. alone; and indeed as this is a matter which might possibly come before him on appeal to the House of Lords, he is bound to hold no communication with either party. He had read through a great part of Mr. B's statement before he was aware of the ground of his complaint, else he must, however unwillingly, have declined reading it at all. If there be anything wrong in the Scotch Law, or the practice of the Scotch Courts, of course it is open to any member of the House of Lords to consider complaints against such parts of the system, with a view to future legislation. But it is wholly impossible for them to consider individual cases, which if wrongly dealt with in these courts, are the subjects of Appeal, and when Appeal is excluded (as in some instances it is), no person can afford any redress to the individual parties."
- 6 J H Dixon (ed.), entitled *Scottish Traditional Versions of Ancient Ballads* (London, 1845).
- 7 Charles Mackay (1814-1889) was born in Perth, the son of a naval officer but he removed to London at the age of eight and there became a noted editor, journalist, poet and popular songwriter. One of his few visits to Scotland was in 1939 to attend the Eglinton Tournament which, of course, was also attended by Buchan. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XXXV, p. 120.
- 8 Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/4/3-26.

- 9 *Whistle-Binkie, or, The Piper of the Party* (Glasgow, 1878), p. 385. There were various editions of this collection, in different forms, from 1832 onwards.
- 10 Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/1.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 Charles Neaves (1800-1876) was born in Edinburgh and called to the bar in 1822. He was an authority on criminal law, a humorist and contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XL, p. 152.
- 14 Walker, *ibid*, p. 120.
- 15 Anderson, in *The Scottish Nation* states that a lost essay of Buchan's, *Man, Body, and Soul* was published in 1849, but there is no evidence for this.
- 16 Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/3.
- 17 "(the song)... which Dr. Charles Rogers, in that very popular work, "The Scottish Minstrel", credits Buchan with writing. It is certainly a gem, and bears on the face of it the impress of real poetical genius", William Walker, *The Bards of Bon Accord* (Aberdeen, 1887), p. 386. The manuscript of this song and three other songs - *The buikin o' Robin and Mirren, Down the Water,* and *Auld John Nicol* - are preserved in Glasgow University Library - MSS 1218/5-8.
- 18 *ibid*, p. 637.
- 19 These are preserved in the Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/7.
- 20 Charles Forbes Buchan, *Abba, Father: being prayers and hymns for young persons* (Edinburgh, 1855), and Charles Forbes Buchan, *The Gem of the Week* (Edinburgh, ND).

REPUTATION

In *The Eglinton Tournament*, Buchan gives his opinion on dedications and their misuse: "such fulsome and unmerited adulation I ever loathed - sycophancy not being one of my besetting sins". In view of Buchan's own excesses in this area this may seem a strangely blinkered view. In fact, there is no doubt that Buchan's main failing was a total lack of comprehension of both his own virtues and limitations. Add to this a propensity for indiscretion exemplified in many of his letters and also in his *Autobiography* which, as Fairley points out, can hardly be excused on the basis that it was a

personal epistle - since Buchan himself insisted on having it reprinted and circulated. William Walker, whose own endeavours largely enable Buchan's career to be pieced together, put it in this way: "His optimism was great, his vanity greater still, but his susceptibility to flattery and his infirmness of purpose, or rather fickleness, were as great as either of these. He had no sense of humour, and so could never truly estimate his own powers, and was totally blind to those foibles, which, indulged in time and again, brought him to grief. He took himself far too seriously to see his own limitations".¹

If, indeed, Walker is correct, then a letter from his friend Joseph Robertson is a gross example of the sort of flattery that he would find pleasing:

On going over Ritson's list of supposed lost ballads, I was astonished to observe the immense number which you have succeeded in recovering. Surely some Fairy has guided you in your researches, - or has the Genius of Scotland (so gloriously described by Allan Ramsay in his "Vision" beginning "Bedoun the bents of Banquo Brae") hovered over you, and guided your footsteps to the remote corners where the last remnants of Scottish Song lingered on the verge of oblivion?

It is notable, however, that this is not in any way typical of the type of letter, or the type of review, that Buchan was used to receiving. Buchan was never prey to flatterers. In fact, he was generally subject to a fair degree of abuse or at least only a grudging acceptance from the literary world. His evident paranoia, developing through his career, was prompted, therefore, both by his own inflated opinion of himself and his own work, and also, as we see in retrospect by a rather unsympathetic and unjust response to his various endeavours. This was essentially encouraged by his own tendency to pique and his sometimes excessive conceit. An example of his continual attempts to ingratiate himself with the great and the good can be seen in this short but fairly typical letter to Sir Walter Scott:²

My Worthy Sir Walter,

Upwards of two months ago, I sent a parcel to you, containing a few pairs of home-knitted Stockings, and hope they reached you safe, and were found agreeable. Having an opportunity, I again use the liberty of sending you a prospectus of the work which I submitted to you, last when I had the honour of visiting you at your friendly and hospitable mansion of Abbotsford. I have the honour to be,

Worthy Sir Walter

Your Most Grateful

and obliged humble Servant,

Peter Buchan

In effect, however, Buchan was often too insistent, and, despite the continual sending of personal gifts (Motherwell was probably the only one of his literary friends who reciprocated) his continual requests for personal favours - whether they involved a testimonial or an intervention in some situation involving employment or a business deal - were probably rather irksome, and even his most sympathetic correspondents, such as Motherwell, must have occasionally found their patience tried.

There is another face to it, however. For the reluctance of the literati to take Buchan seriously was undoubtedly not only due to any personal defects he may have had, but also to a deep-rooted aversion to Peter's provincial background and to his class. To some extent Buchan, as the saying goes, had ideas above his station, and he was tacitly punished for this.

Something can be said also in respect of Buchan's virtues. Despite occasional lapses in discretion, it seems that he was largely genuine, and generous. He was also devoted to his work, although persevering rather than perspicacious. The extent of his

endeavours becomes quite clear if we review the various materials that have gone to constitute the previous short biography. His ballad manuscripts contain versions of over 400 different ballads and songs, many of them never before recorded, and many of which deserve (and have occasionally provoked) major studies in their own right. During his career he published, edited, compiled or wrote over 60 works - his own creations totalling some 750,000 words on as wide a variety of topics as could be thought possible. As well as this there are over 400 extant letters to and from Buchan which comprise, it would seem, only a fraction of his total correspondence with a variety of important and less important figures in Scottish literary circles. In the midst of all this activity he found time to promote his own printing business (set up from nothing) and raise a family of ten. Basically, despite his faults, he proved himself an industrious and caring family man, and a generous friend to those he trusted.

However, despite, or perhaps because of, his good intentions and efforts to please, controversy dogged Buchan throughout his life and did not abate after his death, when there developed what has been called "the Buchan Controversy". Basically, Buchan's opponents accused him of fabricating the ballads he

claimed to have collected. They charged him on four main counts: Firstly, remember, Scott had suggested that some of Buchan's texts were originally Danish in origin, and Buchan himself had suggested translating some Danish originals. Later, in 1860, the publication of R C A Prior's Ancient Danish Ballads³ demonstrated that many of Peter's ballads were very similar to ballads translated from the Danish (he notes 25 parallel Scottish ballads, at least 12 specifically from Buchan). Prior and others accused Buchan of forging these ballads using the Danish originals. This accusation is patently absurd. Buchan knew no Danish and in any case we are now aware that many northern European ballads come from a common stock. Alexander Keith, in his introduction to Gavin Greig's ballad collection⁴, repudiates this charge in no mean fashion, demonstrating the similarity of Prior's texts to a variety of ballad texts published by several different editors.

Secondly, Buchan printed a fake ballad penned and sent to him by his compatriot Hill Burton, *Chil Ether*. This was a simple and not uncommon lapse. Scott, among others, had forged ballads palmed onto him - by his friend Surtees - but in Buchan's case it was developed out of all proportion by his opponents to suggest that none of his ballads were

trustworthy. That this was, in fact, a single incident, that has little relevance to Buchan's trustworthiness in general, has been amply demonstrated by the research into the case by Keith and, more recently, David Buchan.⁵

Thirdly, Buchan was accused of being duped by his primary informant, James Rankin (Blind Jamie). Buchan paid Jamie for the ballads he collected (he was one of the few collectors with the decency to pay any of his informants) and this led to the suggestion that Rankin fabricated ballads. As George Kittredge, the editor of Child's ballads, put it: "Buchan's blind beggar... is too notorious a personage to dismiss without more formality. There is a good deal of his work in Mr Child's collection... the work of Rankin, who seems to have been paid by the yard, and who found his honest patron an easy man to cajole"⁶ There is, in fact, no evidence that Rankin was paid piecemeal by the song collected, rather, he seems to have had a keeping from Buchan and, obviously, with the wealth of traditional song in the north-east, Blind Jamie had no need to fabricate ballads to earn his keep. Contemporary reports suggest that James Rankin, in fact, was perhaps the epitome of the epic ballad singer, orally recreating his ballad texts at each performance - for example, this account by Bell

Robertson, Greig's principal ballad informant:

Jamie had a great stock of old ballads and songs. His memory was remarkable and it was said that he could pick up a song if he heard it once. But he was a man of low intelligence. What he heard he picked up, but lacking intelligence, he often picked it up wrong. Further, he would often muddle things up, to the great amusement of the young fellows, who would 'keep him at it'... The idea of Jamie making up anything himself is absurd... The best proof that he did not compose them was that they were well known in the district before he began.⁷

Jamie no doubt did contribute his own particular style and language to the texts transcribed from his memory, but that, inevitably, would be the case with any informant.

Fourthly, it was suggested that Buchan was not only duped but was actually complicit, through his excessive ambition, of fabricating partial or whole ballads to complete his collection. As we know, Buchan contributed his own work to *Gleanings* marked with a B. He was generally very proud of his own attempts at verse, and made no attempt to disguise them. There is no evidence that Buchan was truly guilty of deceit at any point in his career. In any

case, the most perfunctory perusal of his own literary works would suggest that, although he was not totally incapable of producing reasonable verse, he had a very limited understanding of the *idiom* of various literary discourses including that of the traditional ballad.

Yet, despite the fact that most of the criticisms of Buchan can be seen to be absolutely ludicrous, it has not been until this century that he was truly rehabilitated through the work of, originally, William Walker, and Alexander Keith, and, later, Bertrand Bronson, Hamish Henderson and David Buchan.⁸ The true importance of Buchan's ballad collections can be gauged by the predominance of Buchan's ballad texts in Francis James Child's monumental collection of the classic ballads. Keith notes that of the A texts of the 267 Scottish ballads in Child, 91 come from Aberdeenshire and 37 from Buchan's collection - the largest number from any one source. With the evidence of the vast collection put together in Aberdeenshire by Gavin Greig and the Reverend James Duncan at the end of last century (the largest song collection ever amassed in this country), Keith could, by 1925, totally vindicate Buchan's activities:

Of the Aberdeenshire ballad-collectors, Peter Buchan is the most voluminous. Of all ballad-collectors that ever were, he has been the most violently traduced. The examination of a collection such as ours, made in the same district as his, and composed largely of versions of ballads that he retrieved, inevitably instigates some consideration of his impugned reliability. The ballads he gathered are in a category by themselves among those recorded in his time. They approximate in character to versions recovered traditionally by later collectors; and for the most part they are distinctly lacking in those touches of art which have won just applause for the ballads of Percy and Scott.⁹

David Buchan's work, some fifty years later, not only serves to reinforce Keith's message, but also puts the corpus of the Buchan/ Rankin into a contemporary context, suggesting that the very nature of the texts is a reflection of the time in which they were collected: "...it is only when his ballads are recognised as products of a particular tradition, subject to the mutabilities of regional social change, that the basic trustworthiness of his texts becomes fully apparent... When they are placed firmly in the context of the local tradition their peculiarities and incongruities are seen as the inevitable outcome of social change... What Child calls 'the silliness and fulsome vulgarity' of

Buchan's texts is actually a strong indication that the ballads are genuine, for these characteristics reflect the effects of the revolutionary upheavals on the peasantry and on their balladry. The folk had changed, and their ballads had changed."¹⁰

It should be said that, as recorded by Keith, one of the rather contrived reasons given for the suspicions of later critics was that some of the ballads present in Buchan's 1828 volume could not be found in Buchan's ballad manuscript in the British Museum. The simple reason for this is that, unknown to earlier scholars, this manuscript differs considerably from a second ballad manuscript (the manuscript that Buchan attempted so strenuously to sell during his lifetime). In fact, Buchan's original ballad manuscript was completed by 1827, and in 1828 he copied several items to form another manuscript - which eventually found its way to the British Museum. The original manuscript passed into the possession of Buchan's nephew, Alexander Scott, after his death, and was eventually purchased by Francis James Child for the Houghton Library, Harvard University, when he was amassing his seminal collection. The details of Child's bargaining with Scott, under the auspices of William Walker, for this manuscript and the shorter *Secret Songs* manuscript, is meticulously detailed in

a volume published in 1930 - *Letters on Scottish Ballads from Professor Francis James Child to WW, Aberdeen.*¹¹ That Child was initially totally unaware that this was anything other than a general copy of the British Museum manuscript is clear from a letter to Walker dated November 1891: "I have never written to Mr Buchan... possessor of the original manuscript... The interesting thing is to know how much Buchan's *B. of the North of Scotland* differs from the MS. C K Sharpe says that by the advice of somebody (Mr Laing, I think) Buchan had begun improvements which, however, did not extend beyond some sixteen pages... I do not suppose that it contains anything that is not in the 2 vols. of Buchan in the Brit. Museum."¹² By December 1895, Child had still not obtained the manuscript and was still unaware of its importance: "I shall always feel uncomfortable if I do not have a sight of the Scott-Buchan things. If I thought them of more considerable importance, I should feel authorized in urging our library to give the full amount which Mr Scott had fixed. But I do not feel at liberty to do this, considering the probability of my getting so little which the Brit. Museum copy does not furnish"¹³ Fortunately, however, Child did eventually purchase the two manuscripts (for the sum of £30 rather than the £50 asked by Scott) and the

true extent of the ballad collection upon which Buchan's revised reputation rests came more fully to light. The *Secret Songs* manuscript, however, whilst in no way as substantial a contribution to traditional song, has remained comparatively neglected until now.¹⁴ The second part of this study attempts to discuss and analyse some of these neglected texts.

To conclude this review of Buchan's life perhaps it should be said that it was a combination of circumstance and endeavour that ensured Buchan's place in the canon of the great collectors. He was fortunate to be the first to tap the rich vein of song in the north-east of Scotland. He was a printer at the start of the great period of broadsheet literature. Lastly, despite his pretensions, he was not too proud to seek the tradition at its heart, amongst the farm workers, the itinerants, the common folk. He was an arch-conservative, constantly praising the system that so often dinged him down and sycophantic in his praise of those who despised him, yet his career was in every way extraordinary and his songs still constitute a rich and important heritage.

references

- 1 William Walker, *Peter Buchan and Other Papers* (Aberdeen, 1915), pp 17-18.
- 2 Buchan does not seem to have gained much, other than a rather terse testimonial from his acquaintance with Scott. However, he does seem to have been genuinely concerned when Scott's misfortunes necessitated the loss of Abbotsford and wrote to Sharpe: "I am very sorry at the removal of my Worthy and fine friend Sir Walter Scott but go when and where he will I trust the Lord will protect and keep him from evil".
- 3 R A C Prior, *Ancient Danish Ballads* (London, 1860).
- 4 Gavin Greig, *Last Leaves of Traditional Ballads and Ballad Airs*, ed. Alexander Keith (Aberdeen, 1925).
- 5 See David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London, 1972). Buchan infers that it was this claim that influenced Prior in his attack on Buchan. Another attack, by H O Nygard, on one of Buchan's texts, *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight*, is also repudiated by Buchan. See David Buchan, "Lady Isabel and the Whipping Boy", *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, xxxiv (1970).
- 6 Francis James Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge (London, 1904), xxx.
- 7 Greig, *ibid*, pp 279-80.
- 8 Some of the old stigma was to remain, however. Even Bronson, generally solid on the Buchan case, notes: "In the end it has to be acknowledged that the changes were introduced, both consciously and unwittingly, both in singing and for print, by individuals named and unnamed, and that the only standard of judgement which can be consistently applied is the largely subjective one of the degree of success achieved in the kind attempted. At one end of the scale of taste and ability is Scott, and at the other end, say, James Rankin of Tarwathie, or Peter Buchan himself." Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Ballad as Song* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 77.
- 9 *Ibid*, xix.

- 10 Buchan, *ibid*, pp 205-222.
- 11 *Letters on Scottish Ballads from Professor Francis James Child to W.W.*, Aberdeen (Aberdeen, 1930).
- 12 *Ibid*, pp 7-10.
- 13 *Ibid*, p. 29.
- 14 Child did not make any use of this manuscript, although he noted at the time: "Anent the high-kilted pieces, I should be obliged to print genuine popular ballads of some age, if I came upon them... but I should print none such except on compulsion." *Ibid*, p. 31.

PART
TWO

THE BALLAD MANUSCRIPTS

As we have seen, the majority of the ballads collected by Buchan and preserved in his two major manuscripts collection have been well documented and researched. Some of the songs which didn't, due to their form or genre, make it into the major collections can, however, benefit from comparative analysis in the light of recent folksong research also. In this chapter I intend to examine some of the texts preserved in Buchan's British Museum manuscript (and also, in some cases, in *Secret Songs*) and demonstrate their relevance to a continuing folksong tradition. I will start, tangentially, by looking at a well-known text collected from a twentieth-century source singer - Jimmy MacBeath.

Jimmy MacBeath was born in Portsoy in 1894 and died in Tor-na-Dee Hospital, Milltimber, Aberdeen in 1972. He was a performer of folksongs - notably bothy ballads recollected from his days as a farm servant in Banffshire before the first World War - acclaimed as both a source singer and a popular folk club artiste. The song *Grat for Gruel* was a favourite rendition universally associated with Jimmy that remains extremely popular to this day. This version was recorded from Jimmy by Hamish Henderson in 1960:¹

There was a weaver o' the North
And oh but he was cruel
Oh, the very first nicht that he got wed
He sat and he grat for gruel.
 He widna wint his gruel,
 He widna wint his gruel,
 Oh the very first nicht that he got wed
 He sat and he grat for gruel.

"There's nae a pot in a' the hoose
That I can mak' your gruel";
"Oh, the washin' pot it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel.
 For I maun hae ma gruel,
 I canna wint ma gruel;
 Oh the washin' pot it'll dae wi' me
 For I maun hae ma gruel".

"There's nae a spoon in a' the hoose
That you can sup yer gruel";
"Oh the gairden spade it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel.

For I maun hae ma gruel,
I canna wint ma gruel;
Oh the gairden spade it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel".

She gaed ben the hoose for cakes an' wine,
And brocht them on a too'el.

"Oh gy'wa wi' your fal-de-rals
For I maun hae ma gruel.

For I maun hae ma gruel,
I canna wint ma gruel;
Oh gy'wa wi' your fal-de-rals
For I maun hae ma gruel".

Come all young lassies take my advice
And never mairry a weaver,
The very first nicht that he got wed
He sat an' grat for gruel.

He widna wint his gruel,
Oh he widna wint his gruel;
Oh the very first nicht that he got wed
He sat an grat for gruel.

Although this song seems to be associated with the strong tradition of bothy ballads and 'cornkisters' sung by itinerant farm workers and mostly collected around the turn of the century, an earlier version does exist and can be found in Sharpe's *Ballad Book* under the title of *The Bridegroom*:²

There lived a man into the west,
And O! but he was cruel;
Upon his waddin' nicht at e'en,
He sat up an grat for gruel.

They brought to him a good sheep's head,
A napkin, and a towel, -
"Gae tak' your whim-whams a' frae me,
And bring me fast my gruel."

the BRIDE speaks

"There is nae meal in the hous,
What shall I do, my jewel?"
"Gae to the pock and shake a lock,
For I canna want my gruel."

There is nae milk in the hous,
What shall I do, my jewel?"
"Gae to the midden and milk the soo,
For I wanna want my gruel."

With regard to this piece, Sharpe notes a similarity to a few lines of a song on a similar theme: "This song, from some original words of the air to which Auld Robin Gray was latterly adapted, appears to have been composed on a similar melancholy event. "The bridegroom grat when the sun gaed down (*Repeat*)/ And 'Och', quo' he, It's come o'er soon'", &c." In fact, these line relate both the songs already quoted to a wider body of texts concerning the 'greeting' bridegroom, and if it not abundantly

clear why the gentleman concerned should turn so lachrymose at the thought of the impending dusk or a night without a bowl of porridge, then perhaps a perusal of these texts might afford a clue.

The connection between the Sharpe version and an older text is, fortunately, made clearer by Allan Cunningham who, in his *Scottish Songs*, includes a version almost identical to Sharpe's collected from the recitation of Sir Walter Scott (although he adds a sentimental and inappropriate last verse) and notes: "I remember the remains of an old song which, bequeathing its name to a popular air,³ still survives as a specimen of the humour of ancient days. It may still be remembered under the name of "The Bridegroom greets when the sun gangs down". He then includes a few lines -

It's lang till day, quo the silly bridegroom,
I'll sit a wee langer and clout my shoon;
I'll gie any man a hundred marks and three
This night that wad bed wi' a bride for me.

Come in to your bed, thou silly bridegroom,
The lily white sheets they are weel spread down!

- and notes: "I dare not quote any more of this lively lyric: the invitation of the bridesmaid and the answer of the bridegroom might please a less scrupulous generation, but they would make

ours blush."⁴ Clearly, the main impetus of this fragmentary older text seems to derive from a very different matter - the bridegroom's distress has nothing to do with mere dietary peccadillos but seems to centre around his inability to consummate the marriage with his virgin bride; a task for which he seeks a willing substitute! However, before we consider this alternative theme, we must look at the other texts for this song that have survived. Buchan, in fact, records this song in his manuscripts no fewer than three times. In his manuscript collection of ballads in the British Library, this version is noted under the title *The Bridegroom Grat When the Sun Went Down*:⁵

A young man came to my bower door,
And sair grat he, and sair grat he,
A young man came to my bower door,
And sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye be in, young man, said I?
Fou fain quoth he, fou fain quoth he,
Wou'd ye be in, young man, said I?
Fou fain, said I, I trow.

I drew the latch, an' he wan in,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I drew the latch, an' he wan in,
And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna sitten a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,

He hadna sitten a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye hae meat, young man, said I?
Fou fain quoth he, fou fain quoth he,
Wou'd ye hae meat, young man, said I?
Fou fain quoth he, I trow.

I put on a kettle and boil'd a nettle,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I put on a kettle and boil'd a nettle,
And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna eaten a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,
He hadna eaten a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye hae a bed, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, fou fain, quoth he,
Wou'd ye hae a bed, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, I trow.

I stript him then, and laid him down,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I stript him then, and laid him down,
And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna lien a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, till sir grat he,
He hadna lien a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye hae a neipour, young man, said I?

Fou fain, quoth he, fou fain, quoth he,
Wou'd ye hae a neipour, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, I trow.

I stript me then, and laid me down,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I stript me then, and laid me down,
And blythe was he, I trow.

However, this appears to end too abruptly, and this is because Buchan has chosen to omit, presumably for roughly the same reasons as Cunningham, five verses of the song as he knew it. This additional material can be found in the song as it appears in *Secret Songs*, and concludes the piece thus:⁶

Wou'd ye be on, young man, said I?
Fou fain, said he, fou fain, said he,
Wou'd ye be on, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, I trow.

I turn'd me roun', and he wan on,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I turn'd me roun', and he wan on,
And blythe was he, quoth he, I trow.

He hadna been on a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,
He hadna been on a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye be aff, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, fou fain, quoth he,

Wou'd ye be aff, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, I trow.

Diel be aff gin e'er ye win,
Though sair grat he, though sair grat he,
Diel be aff gin e'er ye win,
Though sair greet ye, I trow.

To further complicate the issue, Buchan preserved another version of the song in his British Library manuscript under the title *The Bridegroom Greet, etc.*⁷ This is shorter and quite different from the other and seems to add the extra dimension suggested by Cunningham's text:

The bridegroom greets when the sun gaes down,
The bridegroom greets when the sun gaes down;
But by comes the bride wi' a blythe blinking e'e,
Says - What aileth my dearest to mourn for me?
The bridegroom greets, but it's nae for me,
The bridegroom greets, but it's nae for me;
It is about something we'll never agree,
That fears the bridegroom to lie wi' me.

Johnny Gray spake up, a blythe man was he,
Johnny Gray spake up, a blythe man was he;
O bridegroom what will ye gie to me,
To lie wi' the bonny bride for thee?
O bonny John Gray will ye fee wi' me?
O bonny John Gray will ye fee wi' me?
Eleven marks it shall be your fee,
Gin ye'll lie wi' the bride this night for me.

However, what I have not yet revealed is that Buchan did actually publish a version of this song, but it is not similar to any of the manuscript versions we have considered. It is entitled *The Wee Bridalie*:⁸

There was a little wee bridal,
A bridal in Auchendown;
And there was but a little gude meat,
And as few folk did come.
A black sheep's head in the pot,
A sheep's head wanting the tongue;
And O, said the silly bridegroom,
Our meat will soon be done.

A wee ale in an anker,
A wee sup ale in a tun;
And O, said the silly bridegroom,
I pray you leave me some.

When they had eaten and drunken,
The pipes began to bum;
And O, said the silly bridegroom,
There's nane see me ly down;
There's nane see me ly down;
Amo' the sheets sae sma';
The bride she's ly at the bed stock,
And I'll ly niest the wa'.

Now this text is extremely puzzling because it is basically different from the other songs in the Bridegroom canon in several ways. Firstly, the form is different, there is no progressive

dialogue, no insistent refrain. In fact, in some ways the text resembles a pastiche of other types of folksong - assembled from stock phrases (although with great skill to give it a definite coherence). Secondly, the bride, who features actively in other versions, is here prominent by her *absence*. She appears merely as a threatening and inert physical presence in the second last line - symbolically conjoined with the bed to illustrate her passive function in relation to the duty required of the silly bridegroom. In this case, in fact, the dialogue may be seen as between the bridegroom and the reader who, in a voyeuristic fashion, is complicit in his self-conscious shame thus denying the message repeated as the central pivot of the last verse. Thirdly, the metamorphic function of the bridal feast to suggest - through the 'sheep's head' and the 'wee ale' - the bridegroom's incapacity, which is, perhaps, a more sophisticated form than found in other versions. These are distinctions which suggest that this specific text.s may be of pivotal importance to the Bridegroom canon.

One other fairly complete text begs consideration. It is preserved in Andrew Crawford's songbook, recently edited by Emily Lyle, under the title *The Wooer Came to the Widow's Door* with a side note stating that "John Smith got it at Galloway at Stranraer in his infancy."⁹ It is clearly related to Buchan's longer text:

The wooer cam.e to the widow's dore
And fain was he was he
The wooer came to the widow's dore
And fain was he I's warran

Wooer, wooer, would ye be in
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
She opened and let him in
And fain was he I's warran

So wooer wooer wad ye hae a seat
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
She gied him a seat and he sat down
And fain was he I's warran

It's woar woar wad ye hae meat
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
She gied him bread and cheese to eat
And fain and fain was he I's warran

Sae woar woar wad ye hae a bed
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
She gied him a bed and he lay doun
And fain and fain was he I's warran

She jumpit behind him on the wa
And squeek cryed he I's warran
So woor woor wad ye be out
O aye quo he quo he I's warrant

She openit the dore and let him out
And fain was he I's warran
There being a hole afore the dore
In fell he I's warran

Woor woor I doubt ye are faun
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
Deil may care if ye cum out
Amen cryed he cryed he I's warran

Strangely enough, Emily Lyle notes a resemblance between the song and a macaronic fragment of a Manx song entitled *Haink Sooreedy Nish Gys Dorrays Ven Treoghe* (*A Wooer Came to the Widow's Door*) collected by the Folk Song Society:¹⁰ "Haink sooreedy nish gys dorrays Ven treoghe,/ As 'Faiht' veagh ecksh, as 'Faiht' veagh ayms,/ 'Hi, ho, will you be on? I mean', said he, 'I'm a true young man!" (Came a wooer now to the door of the widow-woman, And would that he were hired to her and she to him, etc). Unfortunately, this is all that remains of a song that would seem (cf. the first additional verse of the Buchan *Secret Songs* version) to deserve a place in the "Bridegroom" canon.¹¹

We can now see that, if we combine the first British Museum manuscript version with its expanded equivalent in the *Secret Songs* manuscript (for convenience I have called this version Buchan SS - as opposed to the second British Museum manuscript version which I have called Buchan MS), we have eight distinct versions of *The Bridegroom*. The comparative table I have constructed analyses these variants with regard to four main groups of 'traits' or elements of the story: the status of the male character, the occasion, the reasons given for the male

character's crying and the eventual conclusion to the story. Of these, only the alternatives offered for the second are, in fact, mutually exclusive. Each of these, it seems, can give us some insight into the analysis of this set of texts.

In fact, an examination of the first group of traits is revealing. Invariably the subject of the song is introduced as a bridegroom or wooer (MacBeath's introduction of a weaver we can presume to be a personal and a topical addition). Twice he is a young man but never an old man. Therefore, it is clear that the theme of impotence is not related to age and that, despite seeming initial similarities, the song is not a relative of such songs as *John Anderson My Jo* and *Duncan Macleerie* (both collected by Burns) which Gershon Legman classifies under the heading 'Darby & Joan', nor of the body of songs of the "Greybeard" family in which a young girl laments her marriage to an old man.¹²

To further elaborate from the table, we can see that the first songs discussed, the MacBeath and Sharpe versions (we have already noted their similarity) are specific as regards group three - ie, the only reason for the bridegroom's discomfort lies in his lack of suitable nourishment (for the time being, we will not consider Buchan AB). Therefore these two songs constitute a group which I have called the GASTRONOMIC GROUP. However, in the Crawford and the Buchan SS and Buchan AB versions (and, we

presume, also in the Manx which I have aligned with Crawford because of the obvious similarities - and also with Buchan for reasons previously noted) the reason for his discomfort lies in the invitation to bed. Therefore I have assigned these three versions to the IMPOTENCE GROUP. Furthermore, in the Buchan MS and the Cunningham versions, there is introduced the additional theme of a substitute lover called upon to do the duty of the bridegroom. These constitute the SUBSTITUTION GROUP.

If we accept this basic schema, then there are distinct ways of looking at the corpus of songs we have included here. It could be said that the Buchan SS version in the second group, being in some ways the most complete, provides a bridge between the three groups - as it has a gastronomic constituent and, if we stretch our imagination, we could tack on a 'substitution' conclusion and, perhaps, construct a model narrative for the Bridegroom canon. This, however, misses the point that these are different songs, with their own particular structure and flavour - but if we concern ourselves purely with narrative themes, I believe it is possible to postulate a linear progression from an assumed 'complete' SUBSTITUTION version through an IMPOTENCE version in which final drastic act is sublimated in favour of cursing or ejecting the bridegroom, to the GASTRONOMIC version in which all sexual references are sublimated in favour of perverse gourmandise. Of course, the immediate argument against this thesis comes in the form of the most enigmatic of the song texts

Comparative Table

	MACBEATH	SHARPE	CRAWFURD	MANX	BUCHAN SS	BUCHAN AB	BUCHAN MS	CUNNINGHAM
1/ STATUS	D	A	C	B C	A B	A	A	A
2/ OCCASION	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	A?
3/ CRIES	B	B	C		A B C*	B? C	C	
4/ CONCLUSION	A?		A B		A*		C	C
	GASTRONOMY			IMPOTENCE			SUBSTITUTION	

1/ STATUS
 A) bridegroom
 B) young man
 C) wooer
 D) weaver

2/ OCCASION
 A) wedding
 B) wooing

3/ CRIES
 A) to get in
 B) for food, etc.
 C) in/ invited to bed

4/ CONCLUSION
 A) cursed
 B) thrown out
 C) bribes other man

* not present in British Library MS version

we have considered, the Buchan AB text, which has passed into our elegant schema on the nod, as it were. The difficulty is, that if we accept the imposition of the gastronomic type as a later *substitution* for the more sexually explicit version, then it is totally contrary to our theory to find this crucial early version in which gastronomy and impotence are linked not syntagmatically but paradigmatically in the use of the bridal feast, with the sheep's tongue, etc, as a rather obvious metaphor for the bridegroom's failings. Therefore, we have two choices, we can either accept that the two themes were traditionally linked in this way and have somehow been dissociated through the travels of this song type, or we can, alternatively, postulate that the Buchan AB text is an anomaly, the work of an *individual intelligence* - the anonymous author (and dare we suggest Buchan himself who, we know, had already collected three separate fragments of the song at least) being aware, even as early as the early nineteenth century (shortly before Sharpe published his version), of the two distinct gastronomic and impotence types.

It goes without saying that we simply do not have enough information to opt conclusively for either proposition. However, in favour of the former we can cite the singularity of the Buchan AB version, the fact that many elements of the song are reminiscent of other pieces in Buchan's manuscripts, and the other distinct formal differences between that text and the others in the corpus discussed earlier. It could also be said

that the theory of linear progression gains some credence if we consider historical preference - the pure fool or incompetent lover is a stock figure of early metrical tables and of jestbooks.¹³ In fact, the impotent bridegroom did feature in seventeenth century broadside ballads, one example of which is preserved in the Lauriston Castle collection in the care of the National Library of Scotland, entitled *AN EXCELLENT NEW BALLAD, Concerning a Bridegroom and his Bride who were lately married at Borrowstounness, giving a full and true Account of their Behaviour, and of the Bridegrooms running away from the Bride the same Night, without Beding with her.*¹⁴ Whilst on very much the same theme as the songs we have already discussed, this ballad is very different in structure and style (notably in its efforts to convince its audience of its authenticity) but does seem to show the popularity of the impotent spouse. Similarly, the general idea of cuckoldry and substitute lovers and, especially, the notion of the cuckold unwittingly assisting in his own down fall is a common ingredient of many folktales - notably in the early Levantine tales which constitute, the *Decameron*. Presumably this sort of thing was too alarming or *infra dig* in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries in which the preference seems to have switched, in good Freudian fashion, to the oral function - and it is in this capacity that the Bridegroom enters the singing tradition as a typically comic 'cornkister' or bothy ballad. So perhaps when Peter Kennedy comments on the MacBeath version of this song that "this is a portrait of the weaver who is so worn

out at his loom and set in habits that before he thinks of the charms of his new bride he calls out for his plate of porridge"¹⁵ he is not quite *au fait* with the full story. Legman notes a joke that, strangely enough, seems to constitute the exact opposite of the bridegroom's dilemma: "Groom to bride on the morning after the wedding night: 'what would you like for breakfast?' 'You know what I like'. 'Yes, but you've got to eat sometime!'"¹⁶ Tragically, as we know, not all honeymoons are quite like that!

Despite the rather more elaborate provenance we have sketched, *The Bridegroom Grat* is a song that is generally especially associated with the unique song culture of the north-east of Scotland. Two other songs recorded in the Buchan manuscripts, both of which are rather unusual and enigmatic in their own way, and both of which are particularly associated with the tradition of the north-east (and are still sung in that part of the country today) are *The Soutters' Feast* and *The Soutter o' New Deer*, both linked, of course, by the trade of the souter (Buchan's spelling is not common but there are several versions) or shoemaker.

The Soutter's Feast, which is recorded both in the Museum manuscript and *Secret Songs*¹⁷, is a sort of Rabelaisian nonsense song depending for its effect on the exotic language and imagery, and the insistent refrain from which it is composed. A particularly interesting feature is the refrain, which is meant to be accompanied by the hand motions of a souter mending a shoe:

There came a souter out o' Ein,
Tum, tirry, arum;
Riding on a muckle prin,
Sing - Adli, umpti, arum,
Adli, umpti, dirimdi,
Didle, dadle, darum.

There came a souter out o' Fife,
Riding on a gully knife.

There came souters far an' near
Frae Turriff, Fyvie, an' New Deer.

And there came souters out o' Hell,
Riding on a diel himsell.

The souters they did hae a feast,
An' this begins a mery jest.
An' they did eat till they were fou,
An' they did eat till they were fou,
An ane o' them began to spew.

The souter spew' at the first bouck,
The tresser and the rack stock.
Sax ellesins intil a ring,
Eleven lasts upon a string.

Rusty whittles, five or sax,
A bunch o' birse, an' knot o' wax.

An' whan he thought that he was clean,
He spew'd a lang sharpening stane.

The souter gaed the sow a kiss,
Grumph! said he, it's for my birse.

O gin ye cou'd wash my sark,
As well as ye can grumph an' hark.

An' Oh gin ye cou'd bake me bannocks,
As well as ye can wince an' wannock.

I declare, my dearest life,
There's nane but you shou'd be my wife.

As he gaed in the e'e o' hell,
He saw some barked hides to sell.

Gin I was hanged in a tether,
I will gae down an' cheap this leather.

A more recent version of this song is recorded by Gavin Greig¹⁸ who notes: "*The Souters' Feast* is about as humorous a folk-song as we have ever come across... the song as we have it is clearly local, and it seems to belong to Central Buchan, the Maud district, we should say... the latter part of our ditty recalls the predicament of the souter in *The Turnament*, a poem written by William Dunbar". (The Dunbar poem is more commonly known as *The Sowtar and Tailyouris War* in which the unfortunate souter is "beschitting with Bellialis ers unblast.") Greig was aware of Buchan's version of the song but noted: "... we have reason to believe that Peter's version would not make for edification though we had it." However, *Hamish Henderson* comments: "*The*

Souters' Feast) is (curiously enough) not bawdy in the least; it is a bizarre gallimaufry of fantastical-far-cical Breughelesque humour."¹⁹ Arguably, this could not be said of the Greig Version - though curious enough. It begins:

The souter's wife she bare a son,
Tanteerie arum;
And at the birth there was great fun,
The eedle and the orum;
The Souters they wad haud a feast,
Tanteerie arum,
And wasna that a fine jest?
The eedle and the orum,
Thee-a-noodle, thee-a-num
The eedle and the orum.

A similar version was sung by Willie Mathieson, the noted source singer from Ellon, and also by Arthur Argo, the great grandson of Gavin Greig, and has proved popular to this day. No doubt its unusual rhythm and fantastic imagery, and also the schoolboy humour surrounding the topic of 'spewing', has led to this comparative popularity for a song that is really rather obscure and enigmatic. What is also interesting is that part of the song, notably the eleventh verse, in which the souter, presumably in his cups, kisses the sow and, for no particular reason, it seems, imagines it as his wife, clearly relates it to another song collected by Charles Kilpatrick Sharpe entitled *The Soutar and the Soo*:²⁰

The soutar gied the soo a kiss -
"Grumph," quo' scho, "it's for my briss."
"And whare gat ye sae sweet a mou?"
Quo' the soutar to the soo.
"Grumph," quo' scho, "and whare gat ye
A tongue sae sleekie and sae slee?"

This, in fact, seems to suggest a connection with the second
'souter song' preserved by Buchan²¹:

Of a story, a story,
Now ye shall quickly hear, -
A jolly souter ance there was
In the parish o' New Deer.
It is as true a story
As true, as true can be,
How the jolly souter did behave
Wi' has brave turnin' tree.

When he gaed to the market
To sell his rotten shoes,
They were made o' rotten leather
As anither souter does.
Wi' a' his lasts and lingels,
A merry man was he;
We're welcome, for we're sen' about
Wi' our brave turnin tree.

When he had made his market,
An' saul' a' his sheen,
An' he was comin' hame again
Himsell leave-a-lane,

(There were few to come him wi')
He minded on his noble thoughts,
Out ower his turnin tree.

Then he gaed to the tavern,
As it was drawin' late;
He call'd upon the landlady,
To bring him some meat.
For I am nae sae blate,
As ye take me to be,
It's a haggis I maun hae the night
Lay by me turnin tree.

The haggis it was cauld,
An' bein' something fat;
The ale was three nights auld,
An' by the fire he sat,
Till he was as het,
As het as het cou'd be,
I'll to the door an' take the air,
Sen' me my turning tree.

Whan he gaed to the door,
The evening it was clear,
Alas! said he, I fear I'll spew,
My haggis an' my beer.
For indeed I am as sick,
As sick as I can be;
Wi'lat he lats three boucks,
Out owre his turnin tree.

Syne forth came the auld sow,
As seen she fan' the smell,
An' forth came a' the gryces,

Mair than I can tell.
Some biggit in his hair,
An' some intil his cheeks,
But the auld sow thrust her runt
In the spever o' his breeks.

An' a' his private instruments
She gather'd in her cheeks;
The liquor made them smell,
She thought that they were leeks.
She thought that they were leeks,
Until she fan' then sower,
But as unsavory as they were,
She grew them hauf-an-hour.

O waes me, O waes me now,
For our souter's dead,
I saw the auld sow eating him
Upo' the midden head.
Up then comes the souter's wife,
Says - Care fells me now, -
I wish I'd gien my best aught,
An' that's ca'd my cow,
That I'd been here mysell, this night,
Afore the greedy sow.

This explicit and humorous tale of bestial fellatio is possibly unique in Scottish folksong. At the end there is a dual sexual pun on the concept of 'eating' (oragenitalism) and 'dying' (ejaculating). The wife's regrets give the unexpected twist at the end that relates us once more to the initial theme of male potency and dominance. Strangely enough, however, quite a

different version of this same tale has been recorded in recent years from the Border shepherd, Willie Scott²² entitled *Jock Geddes and the Soo*). Here, misfortune befalls the hero as he returns from his carousing:

Jock rase at last and made for hame:
He hedna taen his mother's biddin:
He couldna thrive - he tripped an fell
Wi aa his len'th alang the midden.

Jock jist lay still, fell fast asleep:
The drink had fairly stopped his kickin.
The soo cam by an smelt his mou,
An likin that, commenced the lickin!

Th' enormous soo still lickit on:
Cries Jock, "Noo, Jean, haud aff, that's plenty!
Let Kirsty hae a smack or twa,
For A'm shair ye haen mair than twenty.

The piece ends with Jock bemoaning his fate:

Braw, braw, to bey weel likit,
Braw, braw it is, but bless me,
Owre weel likit winna dae -
A never thocht a soo would kiss me!

One way to look at these three versions (recorded by Buchan, Sharpe and Scott) of this tale, perhaps, in line with our interpretation of the various versions of *The Bridegroom*, is to

see the more blatant sexual mishap of the Buchan version suppressed in the Sharpe and Scott versions in favour of the euphemism of the kiss. It is, however, surprising that the same motive should survive in these three very different forms, and also that a fragment of the same idea has, somehow, found its way into *The Souters' Feast*, a very different type of song, in the musing of the unfortunate souter.

Another song which is recorded by both Buchan and Sharpe with a refrain, in some versions, every bit as nonsensical as *The Souters' Feast*, is entitled *O As the Haggis Glowr'd*.:23

O as the haggis glowr'd
O as the haggis glowr'd
O as the haggis glowr'd
Out amo' the bree:

For I suppit a' my ain kail (repeat)
An' a' my neipers tee.

O what o' kail I got (repeat)
An' hauf a bannock tee.

I'll ca' the bicker roun' wi' glee
I'll taste again the barley bree,
The bannock tee shall join the spree,
When we get haggis bree.

Then I'll keep at hame my ain wife (repeat)
An' dawt my neipers tee.

'Neipers' is an uncommon term that seems to refer to girls who collect or thin neeps or turnips on a farm. A traditional Scottish 'delicacy', the haggis became widespread primarily because of its use as a method of employing offal scraps in the common diet of workers. Reay Tannahill traces a similar dish to pre-Bronze Age in her study *Food in History*.²⁴ The haggis was lauded by Burns and in the music hall tradition and is still an essential ingredient of Burns Suppers. Its special place in Scottish lore and tradition has ensured that it occasionally turns up in traditional song and poetry. ~This particular version of this song, however, is rather plain. A similar version, with a nonsense refrain - "*Fatharalinkum Feedle, etc*" - can be found in *Sharpe*,²⁵ but another song about the haggis, which has both the linguistic virtuosity and extravagant imagery of *The Soutters' Feast*, called *The Haggis of Dunbar*, is collected in *Secret Songs*:

There was a haggis in Dunbar,
Lowdi, litti, iddel;
Many batter, few waur,
Fader, linkum, todum, tinkum,
Down the town o' Random,
Towdi, litti, iddel, a,
Fader, linkum, fidell.

For to mak' the haggis fou,
Lowdi, litti, iddel;

They pat in a pund o' woo',
Fader, littim, fidell.
Fader, etc.

And for to mak' the haggis nice,
Lowdi, litti, iddel;
They pat in a pund o' mice,
Fader, littim, fidell.
Fader, etc.

And for to mak' the haggis fat,
Lowdi, litti, iddel;
They pat in a scabbit cat,
Fader, littim, fidell.
Fader, etc.

Those of us who are not particularly fond of Scotland's traditional dish will no doubt appreciate the grotesque humour of this piece. The interesting aspect of these particular songs, not generally favoured with publication at the time of their collection because of either their 'unsavoury' or trivial nature, is that, despite their sometimes nonsensical format, they have, in most case, survived in the oral tradition in some form or the other. They are, to an extent, demonstrably local songs - popular in the specific tradition of the north-east, and also particularly domestic in nature - dealing in local dishes, porridge or haggis, and gastric disasters, or farmyard antics and marital trials and tribulations. Although they are undoubtedly

strange, therefore, I have not included them in the chapter entitled Strange Tales which deals with more widespread folktale types of a peculiar or mystifying nature. Two songs, however, which are recorded by Buchan, do not fit into this 'domestic' category but do have obvious parallels in international folktale or folksong types are worth mentioning here - John Edward and The Duke's Daughter.

John Edward is recorded twice by Buchan²⁶ in substantially similar versions, although a couple of unique verses in each version and some small differences in vocabulary and spelling suggest that they were transcribed, possibly from the same singer, at different times. The beginning introduces us to the eponymous John Edward, who is intent on a practical joke:

John Edward something funny was,
He thought him on a wyle,
An' he wou'd to the upper kirk,
Some women to beguile.

The rowing o' me now, now, now,
The rowing o' me now,
Gae tell the dielfu' daddle o't,
My back it winna bow.

He was sae neat about the waist,
Wi' lovely yellow hair,
And he is on his journey gane,
His bairntimes to bear.

He put a mutch upon his head,
A cod upon his wyme,
And lain down at yon dyke side,
Like a maid in travailing.

And aye he cried, I'm ill just now,
It's louping in my side,
Gae tell the dielfu' daddie o't,
These pains are hard to bide.

John Edward, in his disguise, cons the wives into taking him in and calls for brandy, bread and cheese, but eventually his deceit is discovered ("he loot ae gude fart") and he gets his comeuppance, although in the end he is clearly amused by his prank:

Some they ruggit's yellow hair,
And some his nose they wrang,
But he gat frae them wi' a sprint,
And fast awa he ran.

Some they cried O had the rogue,
And some cried had the loon,
But he never mist his wanton jump,
Till he was through the toon.

As he gaed in the gallowgate,
He whistled and he leuch, -
Says - Had ye merry cummers a',
For I've fun eneuch!

John Edward is, in fact, a fairly accomplished comic ballad that would seem to deserve a place in the Child canon, which probably cannot be said of The Duke's Daughter²⁷ which is more a type of nonsense song along the lines of The Soutters' Feast than a narrative ballad, as these extracts demonstrate:

There was a duke's daughter,
She was a gallant farter,
Steer well the wind, steer well the wind,

There was a duke's daughter,
She was a gallant farter,
Steer well the wind and blow.

She farted till her father,
Ane auld ga'd eiver,
Steer etc.

She farted till her father,
Ane auld ga'd eiver,
Steer etc.

P___ and stones they are tee,
Pit and ca' her tail tee,
Steer etc.

P___ and stones they are tee,
Pit and ca' her tail tee,
Steer etc.

She farted till her sisters three,
A bonny ship to sail the sea,
Steer etc.

She farted till her sisters three,
a bonny ship to sail the sea,

Steer etc.

Mast and sails they are tee,
Pit and ca' her tail tee,
Steer etc.

Mast and sails they are tee,
Pit and ca' her tail tee,
Steer etc.

She farted ower yon heuch,
A gude gaen pleuch,
Steer etc.

She farted ower yon heuch
A gude gaen pleuch,
Steer etc.

Couter and sock they are tee,
Pit and ca' her tail tee,
Steer etc.

Couter and sock they are tee,
Pit and ca' her tail tee,
Steer etc.

This is another exuberant exercise in Rabelaisian nonsense. The young lady's prodigious feats of rectal mechanics are reminiscent of Burns's *There Was Twa Wives*²⁸ - "She farted by the byre-en'/ She farted by the stables" - and, also, considering the nautical metaphor, of the more recent, scurrilous and eternally popular *Good Ship Venus* - "The first mate's name was Carter,/ By God he was a farter". The most interesting feature is clearly the

refrain, reminiscent in some ways of The Soutters' Feast, which is a parody of a typical ballad refrain and adds an extra twist to the reading of the song.

Several other important songs found in Buchan's manuscripts, yet not collected in the published ballads, are worthy of note. Some of these, however, I would like to discuss in a subsequent chapter dealing with Buchan's contribution to our understanding of songs collected by Burns. One short lyrical piece, however, that crops up in the manuscripts, is worthy of consideration here - if for no other reason because of its long pedigree and type. This is My Apron Deary, a song recorded by Buchan in Secret Songs²⁹ in this form:

Twas forth in a morning, a morning of May,
A soldier and his mistress were walking astray;
And low down by yon meadow brow I heard a lass,
My apron deary, my apron now!

O had I ta'en counsel of father or mother,
Or had I ta'en counsel of sister or brother,
But I was a young thing, and easy to woo,
And my belly bears up my apron now.

Thy apron, deary, I must confess,
Is something shorter, tho' naething the less;
I only was wi' ye, ae night or two,
And yet you cry out, my apron now!

This short lyric is, in fact, a fairly common and typical type of song in the Scottish tradition. The recurring lament of the erstwhile maiden whose apron will not 'bide doon' has prompted many a folksong and this version seems to have had some currency in the eighteenth century. It can be found in almost identical form but with the addition of a final verse (beginning "My apron is made of a Lineum Twine,/Well set about wi' pearling Syne") in William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius*³⁰. A 'modified' version under the title of *My Sheep I've Forsaken* was later penned and this appears in Johnson's *Museum* attributed by Stenhouse to Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto (Stenhouse also discusses and dismisses the possible Gaelic origin of the tune) and in *Herd*³¹. Surprisingly, however, despite this established provenance, Buchan's other version of the song, recorded in the *British Library Manuscript*³² is substantially different, and is worth quoting. Note the final consolatory, and arguably inappropriate, verse.

A lad and lass met on the green,
And some bonny words pass'd them between,
She said aye sinsyne he's gar'd me rue,
My bonny white apron's o'er short now.

My apron deary, my apron now,
My apron deary, my apron now,
I being young and easy to woo,
My bonny white apron's o'er short now.

It was not the captain that governs them all,
Nor to the corporal that keeps the roll call,
But it's to the drummer that beats the tattoo,
My bonny white apron's o'er short now.

I being a lassie hadna liked the men,
My father would double my tocher again,
Wi' jamphin and flattery I was gar'd rue,
My bonny white apron's o'er short now.

Your apron deary, I must confess,
Is something the shorter, tho' naething the less;
Had your tongue, deary, for I'm to be true,
And dinna cry out on your apron now.

Another comparison may be found in an inferior but interesting metaphoric³³ song called Cow the Gown Green found in Secret Songs and in the British Museum Manuscript³⁴ (with an additional introductory verse) which ends:

As I was walking
Night nigh unto the town,
There I spied some fragrant flowers
Gently pressed down;
I smiling said within myself,
Somebody here has been;
Or else some gentle shepherdess,
Has got the gown of green.

The song in general is literary but the pastoral metaphor and the metonymic function of the imprint in the grass serve rather well in the last verse.

The versions of *My Apron Deary*, however, are excellent examples of the Scottish lyric tradition and, like many other of the neglected songs in the Buchan manuscripts, are worthy of our attention. Their general exclusion from published contemporary collections is more a matter of the taste of the time rather than any imputed value. That they have survived to this day in the oral tradition is sufficient testimony of their worth.

References

- 1 School of Scottish Studies tape SA 1960/109. The text is printed in *Tocher*, 12 (1973), 149-150. It can be found on a record Jimmy recorded for Topic, *Wild Rover No More*, 12T173. *Chapbook*, vol 3, 2 (ND) was a special issue devoted to MacBeath. The song was also sung by the noted source singer Willie Mathieson, and can be found in his manuscript songbook.
- 2 Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, *A Ballad Book* (Edinburgh, 1883), pp 23-24.
- 3 In fact, Cunningham used the tune as an idea for a sentimental song in Cromek's *Remains*, "A Weary Bodie's Blyth Whan the Sun Gangs Down."
- 4 Allan Cunningham, *Songs of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1825), vol II, pp 125-127. Strangely, Patrick Buchan, Peter Buchan's eldest son and the only member of the family to share his father's interest in literature (only two of Buchan's ten children survived him) records the song in his manuscript songbook (MS 2303/7, Aberdeen University Library) with a note that seems to paraphrase Cunningham - "what follows in the way of invitation from the bridesmaid and answer of the unfortunate wight I cannot quote without running the risk of being denominated a demoraliser."
- 5 MSS ADD 29.408, pp 276-278.
- 6 Harvard MS 25241.9. This manuscript was purchased from Buchan's nephew, Peter Scott, on behalf of the library by Francis James Child.
- 7 MSS ADD 29.408, p. 379.
- 8 Peter Buchan, *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1828), vol 1, pp 255-256.
- 9 E B Lyle (ed), *Andrew Crawford's Collection of Ballads and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1975), vol 1, pp 188-189. Lyle notes (p. iii): "John Smith ... was a tailor, and he is described by Crawford as being 'a very thirsty man'. He

came into Lochwinnoch from Stranraer, and was married in Lochwinnoch on 23 February 1783 to Margaret Kirkwood... and had several children."

- 10 *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 7 (1922-1926), 136-137. Notes (initialled A G G) compare it to a variety of humorous courtship-dialogues. The comparison could be extended, of course, to relate the Bridegroom canon to songs such as *What is that at my Bower Door* or even the bawdy *Barnacle Bill the Sailor*.
- 11 There is no directly relevant motif in Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1955), but the following are related: J1744.1 - Bridegroom does not know what to do on wedding night (India), K1371.5 - Man gets bridegroom drunk and enjoys the bride (Hawaii), K1844.3 - Groom deceives bride with substitute bedmate, K1915 - The false bridegroom (takes the place of the true bridegroom).
- 12 See Gershon Legman, *Rationale of the Dirty Joke*, First Series (London, 1969), vol II, p. 252. Of course, Buchan noted that the Buchan SS version was "the original of 'Old Robin Gray'" - a sentimental lyric credited to Lady Ann Barnard (1750-1807), a daughter of the Earl of Balcarres.
- 13 Cf the folktale type Aarne 1685 - The Foolish Bridegroom (who does not know how to perform sexual intercourse). See Legman, op cit, vol I, pp 129-132.
- 14 National Library of Scotland, Ry III.a.10(9).
- 15 Peter Kennedy (ed), *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (London, 1975), p. 479.
- 16 Legman, op cit, vol II, p. 106.
- 17 MSS ADD 29.408, pp 243-245.
- 18 Gavin Greig, *Folk-Song of the North-East* (Hatsboro, Pennsylvania, 1963), article X11.

- 19 Hamish Henderson, "At The Foot o' Yon Excellin' Brae" in *Scotland and the Lowland Tongue*, edited by J Derrick McClure (Aberdeen, 1983), pp 115-116.
- 20 Sharpe, *ibid*, p. 35.
- 21 Not recorded in the British Library manuscripts, but in *Secret Songs*.
- 22 School of Scottish Studies tape SA 1962/27 A4. The text can be found in *Tocher*, 25 (1977), 44-45.
- 23 MSS ADD 29.408, p. 165.
- 24 Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (London, 1973).
- 25 Sharpe, *ibid*, pp 12-13.
- 26 Sharpe, *ibid*, pp 12-13.
- 27 Harvard MS 25241.9.
- 28 James Barke and Sidney Goodsir Smith (ed.), *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (London, 1965), p. 69.
- 29 Harvard MS 25241.9.
- 30 William Thomson, *Orpheus Caledonius* (Edinburgh, 1733), pp 68-69.
- 31 David Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, &c* (Edinburgh, 1776), vol. 1, p. 174.
- 32 MSS ADD 29.408, p. 410.
- 33 The same concept can be found in a confused pastoral pastiche, *The Green-Gown*, recorded in Thomas D'Urfey, *Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 6 vols (London, 1719-1720), vol. II, p. 26.
- 34 MSS ADD 29.408, pp 396-398.

STRANGE TALES

I have already mentioned the importance of folktales collected by Buchan as representatives of internationally known story types. Also of great interest, however, are several tales collected in ballad form as strange and intriguing in every respect as the aforementioned 'souter' songs. The tale of *The Devil and the Feathery Wife* is a relatively well-known folktale type recorded by Aarne/Thompson as AT 1091 - *Who Can Bring an Unheard-of Riding Horse*¹ - with a listing of seventeen different national origins. It also features in Stith Thompson's *Motif Index* as K216.2 *Bring the devil an unknown animal* - "The man sends his naked wife on all fours in tar and

feathers. The devil has never seen such an animal."² It is noted in either source as existing in an English version. However, a version of this story can be found in the form of a song collected from Buchan and recorded in both the *Museum MS* and *Secret Songs*. The song is entitled *The De'il and the Feathery Wife* (sic).³ Basically, the story is that a man makes a pact with the devil, selling his soul in exchange for worldly goods. In order to escape he has to present the devil with an animal that he cannot name. His wife discovers his plight and rescues him by disguising herself as a strange beast:

By a' the plagues that's on the earth,
And ever Man befall,
Hunger and a scolding wife,
They are the worst of all.
In our town there lived
A man of mean degree,
And these two plagues him troubled much,
The worst of luck had he.

And he was in the forest once,
Betwixt hope and despair,
The devil he started from a bush,
And stood before him there.
O what's the matter, the deil he said,
Ye look sae discontent,
Sure ye want money to buy some bread,
Or pay some landlord's rent?

Deed, kind sir, ye read me right,
The cause of my disease;
Tell me your name, kind sir, said he,
O tell me't if you please.
My name is Duncan, said the deil,
I unto thee do tell;
Although that I be wandering here,
My dwelling is in hell.

What will ye gie, the deil he said,
I'll end all your debate,
Ye shall hae meal an' cattle eneuch,
And never want of meat.
I've naething to gie, the poor man said,
Nae thing under my hand,
But any thing that I can do,
Shall be at your command.

I'll make a bargain with you then,
A bargain sure to stand,
Ye'll bring me a beast at seven year's
end,
I cannot tell its name,
But if the beast I name aright,
(Mark well what I you tell)
Then ye must go with me, he said,
Directly down to hell.

The poor man then went home again,
Turn'd rich in each degree,
And all his neighbours wonder'd much,
Sae poor's he used to be.
When seven years where come and gane,
And all full gone and spent,
The poor man full of sorrow grew,

And sorely did Lament.

O what's the matter? his wife did say,
Ye look sae discontent,
Sure ye hae got some whore wi' bairn,
And seems for to repent.
Indeed, kind wife, ye wrong me much,
It's no so, I declare,
I've made a bargain wi' the deil,
It puts me in despair.

I've made a bargain with him then,
A bargain sure to stand,
To bring him a beast at seven year's end,
He cannot tell its name.
And if he name the beast aright,
(Mark well what I do tell,)
Then I must go with him, forthwith,
Directly down to hell.

Never mind it husband now, she says,
You cattle feed and keep,
For women's wit is very good,
Sometimes in present need.
Get me bird lime here, she says,
Lay it upon the floor,
Start naked I will strip mysell,
Anoint my body o'er.

Then get to me a tub of feathers,
And set them me beside,
And I will tumble o'er in it,
Till not a spot be freed.
When she had tumbled o'er in it,
Frae her neck unto heel,
Then merry said he, ye're a strange

beast,
You look just like the deil.

Then tie a string about me neck,
And lead me to that place,
And I will keep you frae the deil,
If I am granted grace.
When in the sight o' the deil he came,
He looked brazen bold,
Merry, quoth he, strange is your beast,
Your bargain seems to hold.

How many more hae ye o' them?
How many o' this kind?
I hae seven more o' these beasts,
That in this world do run.
If ye've seven more o' these beasts,
That in this world ye tell,
Ye fairly hae defeat me now,
And a' the deils in hell.

Surprisingly, in fact, another Scottish version of this folktale has been recorded from oral tradition much more recently - in the form of a piece of recited verse collected in Shetland in 1955 from Kitty Nicolson of Yell and preserved in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies under the title *Gudeman, Gudeman, what Aileth Thee?*⁴ It is a dialect piece that generally takes the form of rhyming couplets and is worth quoting in full:

Gudeman, Gudeman, What aileth thee?
You look sae discontent,
Ye don't hae money to buy breid,
Or pay the landlord's rent?
Yes, I hae money tae buy breid,
The rent is not yet due,
And yet but there's an awful tale,
That I maun tell to you.
For years we hae'd plenty loaves,
Yes, everything had we,
Where it came fae thou never asked,
And I never said to thee,
But him that's keepit wis sae braw,
The night is takin' me awa',
Unless I can bring tae him,
A beast he cannae name,
If I bring that he'll let me clear,
And I can bide at hame.
The gudewife she stoored at the fire,
And then she raise wi' speed,
Wemen's work is very good,
In times o' present need.
Bring me here a barrel o' tar,
And set it doon by me,
An' I'll anoint mysell in it,
An' nought but that be free,
An' bring me here a tub o' feathers,
I'll anoint my body ower,
And I will keep thee frae the deil,
If God will give me poo'er,
An' tie something about my airm,
An' lead me tae the place,
And I will keep thee from the devil,
If Gude will gie me grace.
He showed to him the long hair of her
head,

And told him it was her tail,
He turned to him her other part,
And told him it was her face,
She's awfy cheeks and (...)
Besides they're wondrous grim,
She has but one eye in her head,
And it is very dim.
Gang hame, gang hame, the deil he said,
It's name I cannae tell,
But enough to frighten me and mair,
Than a' the deils in hell.

Obviously, this is a tale around the popular and common theme of outwitting a rather (in this case) hapless devil who, having performed his Mephistophelean function of procuring a soul in exchange for wordly gear, has to forego the bargain because he, literally, cannot tell an arse from an elbow! In fact, the two pieces are largely similar suggesting a common origin. However, the anal reference in the Shetland version, absent from Buchan's song, draws a parallel with another song from *Secret Songs* along the same lines entitled *The Baker O' The Town O' Ayr*, a version of AT 1133 - *Making the Ogre Strong by Castration*. The relevant motif is K241 *The castration bargain: wife sent* - "the trickster castrates a dupe and is to come the next day and be castrated himself. He sends his wife as a

substitute". This is the tale told by Rabelais (IV, 47), *The Devil of Popefigland*, in which the devil, having challenged the husband to a "scratching match" is put to flight when the wife displays the large 'wound' he has given her between the legs with, supposedly, his little finger.⁵

In this case the tale is translated to the small Scottish town of Ayr, and the hero is given the fairly proletarian role of baker - making the piece a standard local humorous ballad:

A Baker in the town o' Ayr,
Fal la leary,
Went out to hold his weekly fair,
Fal la leary,
His bread to sell, his flour to buy,
Fal la leary,
He met a devil by the way,
Fal la leary.

O baker, baker, what means that?
What makes your grey horse sae fast?
Says he, I'll tell you what it means,
Yestreen frae him I took the stanes.

If this be true ye tell to me,
Ye'll lae me down, and sae geld me,
The baker lighted frae his horse,
It was to geld this wicked corse.

The knife was sharp, an' it gaed in,

And took frae him baith cod an' stane,
Now sin' that ye hae gelded me,
This day-month ye'se gelded be.

But that day-month his wife araise
An' she put on the baker's claes,
An' she is to the town o' Ayr,
For to hold her weekly fair.

Her bread to sell, her flour to buy,
She met the devil by the way,
O baker, baker, what means that?
O what makes your black face sae fat?

Says she, I'll tell you what it means,
Frae mysell I took the stanes,
Gin that be true that ye tell me,
Had up your doup that I may see.

She quickly lighted frae her horse,
And she held up her naked arse,
Then Nickie said, I had nae doubt,
But ye are gelded out an' out.

Her horse she mounted wi' a start,
An' play'd the devil wi' a fart,
Then he cried out, O fye for fye,
Another hole broke out, forbye.

In fact, versions of this song were collected by both D'Urfey and Farmer⁶ under the alternative title of *The Gelding of the Devil by Dick the Baker of Mansfield Town*, and the Nottinghamshire location is found in most of the broadside

versions of the ballad. Claude Simpson cites several early sources of the song under this title and notes that it was originally entered in the Stationer's Register in 1656.⁷ The story is discussed at length by Gershon Legman with reference to the internationally known tale-type and an American version from Maine (from Frank G Speck, "Penobscot Tales and Religious Beliefs", *Journal of American Folklore*, 48 (1935), 106). Legman's explanation of the 'gelding' tales is typically forthright: "In outwitting and castrating the Devil, in the folk tales and folk ballads on this theme, the hidden point is the necessary duality of these mutual and ambivalent forces of Good and Evil, personified as God and the Devil ... For, thus understood, in castrating the Devil one castrates God."⁸ Be that as it may, the song seems to gain its comic impetus from the reader's share in the complicity between man and wife who demonstrate both connubial understanding and, in the case of the wife, self-sacrifice in order to succeed in their ploy together to defeat the third party - devil. That the devil is successfully foiled and made the fool of his escapade is emphasised by the long-established, basic, and still established in folk speech, insult at the end of the song in which the wife,

exuberantly, shows the devil her arse (or genitalia - as suggested by 'another hole' - which suggests a link with the widespread traditional belief in the apotropaic power of genital display - cf *Feathery Wife*). However, although this reading can be applied to the *Feathery Wife*, certain details, notably the emphasis on the plague of the scolding wife in the Buchan version, may suggest an alternative reading. In order to emphasise this point I would like to draw attention to a version of this tale that is still performed in the oral tradition in this country. This is *The Devil and the Feathery Wife* as sung and recorded by the English folksinger Martin Carthy. This version is, in fact, simply a derivation of the Buchan version slightly altered, colloquialised, and set to tune by the great collector of English folksong, Bert Lloyd. Martin Carthy sings it, with concertina accompaniment on the record, in the highly stylised 'buttonholing' tradition of English comic songs.⁹

Now there was an old farmer lived over
the hill,
And a poor old fellow they say.
He was plagued by a rather scolding wife,
The worst of fortune and hay,
And as he cut wood in the forest one day,

Between dark doom and despair,
The devil himself he jumped out of a
bush,
And he stood before him there.

What is the matter? the devil he cried,
You look so discontent,
Haven't you got any money to buy your
food,
Or to pay your land or rent.
What would you give me? the devil he
cried,
If I should end your debate,
And I gave you money and beer enough,
So you'd never more want for meat.

But I've nothing to give you, the old man
cried,
I've nothing right here to my hand,
But if you would do what you say for me,
I'd be at your command.

Right then, I'll make you a bargain, the
devil he cried,
It's a bargain you just couldn't miss,
You bring me a beast at seven year's end,
I've got to say what it is
But if that beast I name aright,
You mark what I do tell.
You've got to come along with me,
For to view the ovens of hell.

So the old man prospered and prospered
well,
It was all gained and spent,
Until he came to the end of seven long

years,
Sorely he did lament.
O What is the the matter? his wife she
cried,
You look so discontent,
Sure you've got some silly young girl
with child,
Making you sore lament.

No, I made a bargain with the devil, he
cried,
It was a bargain I just couldn't miss,
I've got to bring him a beast at seven
years' end,
He's got to say what it is,
But if that beast he names aright,
You mark what I do tell,
I've got to toddle along with him,
To view the ovens of hell.

Oh, never you worry, his wife she cries,
For your cattle, your keep, or your feed,
For the wit of a woman it comes in handy,
Sometimes in an hour of need.
Go and fetch me the droppings from all of
our chickens,
And spread them all over the floor,
Stark naked I will strip myself,
And I'll roll in it over and o'er.

And fetch me the basket of feathers, she
cried,
Of the beast we had for our tea,
And I'll roll and I'll roll all over in
them,
Until never an inch be free.

So she rolled and she rolled in feathers
and droppings,
From her head down to her navel,
By Christ, he says, what a horrible
sight,
You look far worse than the devil.

When the devil himself came in,
He began for to steam and to hiss,
By Christ, he said, what an awful sight,
I'm damned if I now what it is.
So he started to shake and he started to
quake,
Saying, have you any more of these at
home?
Yes, he cries, I've got seven more,
That in my forest do roam.
If you've got seven more of these beasts,
That in your forest do dwell,
I'll be as good as my bargain and I'm off
home,
For she's worse than the demons of hell.

It seems to me that in the last line - *For she's worse than the demons of hell* - Lloyd has captured the tenor of the Buchan song to emphasise the obvious alternative reading - namely that the complicity which achieves the comic effect is not that between the man and wife but that *between the man and the devil*. In this way the plot can be seen as a scheme to debase and bestialise the wife to the greatest degree (as a punishment for her

vitreous tongue) with the inevitable agreement between the man and the devil that she is, in fact, the paragon of torment. The victory, then, is Pyrrhic in the sense that the man cannot escape his true persecutor - merely prove his point. The tale can therefore be related to a wider story type - of which *The Carle of Kellyburn Braes* is an example - in which the devil returns a scolding wife from hell after discovering that he can no more live with her than her husband.¹⁰

We can demonstrate that *The Feathery Wife* has survived, if not thrived, in the folk tradition of this country. Two of the songs recorded in the *Secret Songs - The Lancashire Farmer* and *The Crab Fish* - have a notable record of continued popularity in this country and internationally over the centuries - indeed, they are among the oldest folktales we can trace. *The Lancashire Farmer* is not the song commonly collected under the same title - a version of the classic ballad *The Crafty Farmer* (Child 283) - but, in fact, an older type. It is a version of a fourteenth century metrical tale, *The Tale of the Basyn*, recorded as AT 571A - *Tale of the Basin* - lover caught on a magic basin and left in an embarrassing position. The story is discussed by

Thomas Wright in *The Tale of the Basyn* (London, 1836) and he notes versions in the early chapbook, *The History of Jack Horner*, and a seventeenth century broadside printed for J Blane of London. The text of this can, in fact, be found in Euing's collection¹¹ under the title of *The Lancashire Cuckold: or, the Country Parish-Clerk betray'd by a Conjuror's Inchaned Chamber-pot*. Buchan's title, therefore, can be seen to be directly derivative and his text is, in fact, very similar to this earlier version. This is a widespread story type and versions can be traced to, for example, Spain and India. Tales of magical adhesion are not uncommon - Kittredge traces this form of enchantment as a popular belief in his *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929) - but this particular unusual and persevering story type might invoke an interesting psychoanalytical interpretation.

The Crab Fish is, however, an even more persistent and continually popular type¹² invariably, in recent centuries, in the form of a song. Buchan's text is fairly typical and complete:

There was an auld priest's wife
And she was big with lad,

Falaladidium, Faladeraldi.
And all that she longed for
Was a sea crab.
Sing fala, etc.

Up raise the auld priest,
And he put on his claise,
Falala, etc.
And he's taen up his pike staff,
And to the sea he gaes.
Falala, etc.

When he came to the sea shore,
The tide being gane,
Falala, etc.
There he saw a crab-fish
Sitting on a stane.
Falala, etc.

Gude morrow tae ye fishers,
That fishes in the fleed,
Falala, etc.
Hae ye ony crab-fish
To dee a woman gueed?

O we hae got some crab-fish,
Ane, twa, or three,
Falala, etc.
At twa pennies, or three pennies,
Just as we can agree.
Falala, etc.

Then he's taen up the crab-fish,
By the back bane,
Falala, etc.
And put it in his night-cap,

And syne came singing hame.
Falala, etc.

But where he has putten it,
Ye sanna guess,
Falala, etc.
But in into the chamerpot,
For the gudewife shou'd piss.
Falala, etc.

Then up raise the auld wife,
To do what she had wont,
Falala, etc.
But snap! got the crab-fish,
And took her by the C_____

Falala, etc.

O says, O says, the auld wife,
That ever I was born,
Falala, etc.
The deil is on the chamerpot,
And me upon his horn,
Falala, etc.

The auld priest he looted him,
It was to gie't a clout,
Falala, etc.
But snap! got the crab-fish,
And took him by the snout,
Falala, etc.

O alas! and O alake!
That e'er I brought you hither,
Falala, etc.
For my nose and your arse,
Are baith joined together.

Falala, etc.

The servant maid lay in her bed,
Laughing at the sport,

Falala, etc.

Says - I think ye hae got crab-fish,
Now o' a sad sort.

Falala, etc.

The similarities with *The Lancashire Farmer* are obvious - the adhesion to the 'enchanted' chamberpot and the subsequent incorporation of the lover/husband into the situation (although it is not altogether clear what this couple have done to deserve this fate) - but this song has, in fact, a longer history. Gershon Legman points out that this humorous ballad has probably been the longest genealogy of any bawdy song in English (although omitted by Child from his canon). A version can be found in the Percy Folio Manuscript, resurrected by John Hales and Frederick Furnivall, dating to the mid-seventeenth century, and also in Charles Kilpatrick Sharpe's *Ballad Book*¹³ where he notes: "This gross old ditty is founded on a story in "Le Moyen de Parvenir", a book of which the extreme wit is at least equalled by its beastliness". True, it is found in France as one of those popular folktales dressed in the raiments of 'cultured' verse known as *contes-en-vers*

(simply 'stories in verse') but, as Legman points out, its origin is probably much earlier, and it seems likely that it is one of several Levantine tales introduced to Italy around 1400. The version from *Le Moyen de Parvenir*, probably written by Beroalde de Verville at the beginning of the seventeenth century, is, however, particularly interesting.¹⁴ Briefly, a French governor brings home a crab which escapes to the chamberpot because it "thought it caught a whiff of salt water". When the wife enters the crab grabs "the rim, the edge, the lip, the flourish, the mouth, the pretty chink, the mound that stands on the edge of the moat, the extremity of Cape Woman". When the husband blows on it to try to release its hold, it fixes on to his upper lip so that "his nose was brought close to his wife's... that he was able to see plainly if any other had been there at it in his absence. 'Twould have been a clever seducer who could have cuckolded him then." They are rescued by the use of scissors.

In fact, this is the basic form that has survived and is still popular today. Many versions have been collected in this century. Notably, in England, by Cecil Sharp and Peter Kennedy, who notes an alternative final verse (collected from

'The eel's Foot', Leiston, Suffolk): "I started with a song and I finished with a ditty,/ There was a baby born he'd a crabfish on his tity"¹⁵, and also, notably, in the United States, where many variants have been recorded. Two of these are noted, along with an extensive list of European sources (copied, according to Legman, from Stith Thompson and Wesselski without proper acknowledgement) in an interesting article by Guthrie T Mead Jnr.¹⁶ Meade analyses several versions of the ballad by comparing the distribution of fourteen traits and their variations supposedly indigenous to the story. Analysed similarly, the Buchan version displays nine of these chosen traits - thus resembling most closely, it seems, the Percy Folio version. However, a major feature of this ballad is the constancy of the principal elements of the story. Thus, when Hamish Henderson notes that the Buchan version is "quite different from any of the versions you can come across in sergeant's mess or saloon bar"¹⁷ he is referring primarily to the verse form rather than the story content. The fact that so many versions of this ballad have survived, all "turning on an almost open *vagina dentata* theme, with the crab dragged improbably from the seashore to the chamber-pot to serve as

the teeth"¹⁸ suggests that whatever castration or other anxieties it seems to epitomise have widespread and popular appeal.

Of the other songs preserved in the *Secret Songs* collection that can justly be classified under 'Strange Tales', a couple are in what Legman calls the 'pure fool' category. *The Bashful Maid* is a version of an eighteenth broadside song noted by Claude Simpson as *The Doubting Virgin*¹⁹ in which the mother replaces the *ingenue* daughter for sexual intercourse (a theme with continued oral currency in joke form). Buchan's text is identical to that collected by Farmer.²⁰ Similarly, the eponymous hero of *The Tailor's Mistake* is uncertain as regards the process, not of mating, but of human reproduction in a comic song of which the provenance is uncertain:

There was a brisk young tailor lad was married of late,
Unto a beautiful creature, whose name it was call'd Kate,
And altho' that he aye thought he would get her maidenhead,
Within a month, or thereabouts, she was brought to a bed,

To a bed, bed, bed, to a bed, bed, bed.

Within a month, or thereabouts, she was brought to a bed.

The tailor he did rive his head, and scratched
baith his ears,
And sware by his bodkin, his elvan, and his
shears,
That she in every month into labour then shall
fall
I never, never will be able for to maintain them
all.

O then said the auld wife, my dear son it's true,
Ye hae but ane the first month, the first month I
had twa,
Yet kind Providence did aye for them two mouths
provide,
Therefore, my dear son, I pray you do not chide,
I pray you do not chide, chide, I pray you do
not chide,
Therefore, my dear son, I pray you do not chide.

Scare of all your sorrows and scorn for to fret,
She must have her number be't early or late;
The faster that she has them, the sooner she'll
have done,
So do not make sic rackets, I pray you, my son,
I pray you, my son, son, I pray you may son,
So do not make sic rackets, I pray you, my son.

A dozen then of cradles with haste I must provide,
A dozen then of nurses true to sit them all
beside;
A dozen then of Christnings and lyings in too,
And twenty dozen of gossipers - a right jovial
crew,

A right jovial crew, crew, a right jovial
crew,
And twenty dozen of gossipers - a right jovial
crew.

If that I do have a child every month in the year,
My charge will be great, friends, ye needna fear;
And those that employ me, may very well expect,
The taking of my wages, I will not neglect,

I will not neglect, neglect, I will not
neglect,
The takings of my wages, I will not neglect.

For to maintain them all, all, for to maintain
them all,
I never, never will be able for to maintain them
all.

The Farmer and Lace Merchant is another known
broadside ballad - virtually identical to a copy
in the collection formed by Sir Frederick Madden
for the University Library, Cambridge²¹ - which
would be a fairly mundane contribution to a later
section on tales of adultery if not for the
unusual form of retribution taken by the cuckold.
Finding the lace merchant bedding his wife, the
farmer robs him of his box of valuable belongings
and replaces the contents with 'a bastard child' -

Now with his boots and spurs on,
Into the room he goes,

And with his whip into his hand,
He turn's down the bed-clothes.
Then he began to whip them both,
And follow'd up his blows,
The servants they could no longer bear,
So run without their clothes.

And not thinking of a child there,
The lace-man took his box,
There he did run like a madman,
Blood running down his locks,
His wife seeing him naked,
She fell into a fit,
She thought by a gang of thieves,
He'd been robb'd or stripp'd.

She pitied him deplorably,
And did bewail his case,
But it's well you've sav'd your box,
The diamond ring and lace.
No longer had she spoke the word,
Than the child began to cry,
Which made the matter ten times worse,
They swore most bitterly.

Perhaps a comic and just return - but can there be a more sinister message exemplified in the fraught symbolism of the unwanted child confined to the box?

However, to return more directly to the stated subject of songs based on internationally known folktale types, two stories more commonly found as

conte-fables - that is, tales told by a mixture of song and prose - were collected by Buchan in song form. The first, *The Parson's Fat Wedder*, is a version AT 1735A (the relevant motif is K1631)²²

The Bribed Boy Sings the Wrong Song:

Martinmas is now come on,
And Christmas is drawing near,
And we have nothing in the house,
For to make good Christmas cheer.
The little wee boy standing by,
Hearing what his father did say,
Says, we will kill the minister's wedder,
And we'll have mutton without delay.

The priest he's got a good fat wedder,
As e'er was fed on corn or grass;
I've got some crumbs of bread in my
pocket,
Will wyle the wedder into the house.
We will put on the muckle pot,
And sticks below't to make it boil,
And we will kill the minister's wedder,
And we'll have mutton without any toil.

The little wee boy goes to the wood,
And aye so merrily as he sang;
My father has kill'd the minister's
wedder, -
I would not tell this to any man.
The minister being in the wood,
Leaning his back against an oak,
If you'll sing that song in the church,
I'll give you a crowdie and a new coat.

The morrow it being Christmas day,
The minister he must be there,
The people all flocked to the church,
The congregation for to view,
There'll be a boy here in a little,
Will sing a song which will be true.

The little wee boy came to the church,
And aye so merrily as he sang; -
I catch'd the priest in bed with my
mother,
I would not tell this to any man.
You are a liar, says the priest,
As sure's in the pulpit I do stand;
I never was in bed with your mother,
Nor yet so nigh as to touch her hand.

Then you are a liar, says the boy,
As sure's in the pulpit you do kneel,
I catched you in bed with my mother,
And your breeches hanging to your heel.
The minister being quite ashamed,
The people gave a loud hurra,
Running like mad folk frae the church,
Crying, such a priest we never saw.

But you would have laugh'd, had you but
seen,
How the little wee boy kept up the joke,
Running out after the minister crying -
Give me my crown, Sir, and my new coat.
The parson he's quite out of the parish,
Left him behind his church and wealth,
The boy and's mother fed on the wedder,
And every meal they drank his health.

In fact, although this tale was assigned its AT reference not by Aarne or Thompson but by Boggs - who noted a version collected in Spanish-speaking South America in which the subject is a cow rather than a sheep²³ - it now seems that it is fairly widespread internationally with versions from England, Italy, Yugoslavia and the West Indies as well as versions from the United States²⁴ and German prose versions noted by Klaus Roth²⁵ in his commentary on the *Secret Songs*. It has also been collected several times from oral tradition in Scotland this century - usually as a *conte-fable* rather than a ballad - a form which seems perhaps unsuited to the tale in Buchan's version - and has been discussed in some detail in an article by Alan Bruford²⁶. Bruford cites two notable versions from the School of Scottish Studies archive: one recorded from Gilbert Voy of Inganess in Orkney²⁷, the other from the famous Aberdeenshire ballad singer Jeannie Robertson²⁸ with the sung part of the tale ending:

As I stroll'd out one fine summer day
Who did I spy but Minister Gray?
He was rolling Molly among the hay:
He was toss'n her upside downward.²⁹

Dickie Melvin is also a song with a continuous pedigree. This is a version of a very old and widespread tale recorded as AT 1360C *Old Hildebrand* - the concealed husband tells what he sees. The husband has left home. Suspecting his wife he has himself carried back in a basket and finds his wife entertaining the priest. They make rhymes about the husband's absence and their own good times. From his hiding place he answers in rhymes. It is invariably found as a *conte-fable* and Buchan's text constitutes only the sung part of the story:

The wife sings -

Dick Melvin, Dick melvin, now since ye
are gone,
To bring me a bottle of Absolam,
I'll make ye a cuckold before ye come
home,
And we'll sing to the bottle more ale,
more ale,
And we'll sing to the bottle more ale.

The Parson sings -

Dick Melvin, Dick Melvin, so little ye
think,
We're eating your bread, and drinking
your drink,

And as sure's I hae life I will be with
your wife,
And we'll sing to the bottle more ale,
more ale,
And we'll sing to the bottle more ale.

Dick Melvin sings -

Good morrow now gentry, all, all in a
row,
I'm glad that your secrets I'm coming for
to know,
The parson's be gelded before we do go,
And we'll sing to the bottle more ale,
more ale,
And we'll sing to the bottle more ale.

They gelded the parson without more
delay,
Then went to a tavern, as I do hear say,
Dick and the Waggoner drank merry that
day
And they sang to the bottle more ale,
more ale,
And they sang to the bottle more ale.

The title *Old Hildebrand*, derives from the version printed by the brothers Grimm (Jacob Ludwig Carl and Wilhelm Carl) in which the parson is instrumental in ensuring the absence of the husband by preaching a sermon which suggests that he should make a pilgrimage to Gockerli for the

sake of his wife's health. His motive is, euphemistically, that he wants to "spend a nice day" with the wife. Hildebrand returns in an egg basket to discover them fiddling and eating pancakes.³⁰ This strange tale has, in fact, elicited a full length study by Walter Anderson³¹ in which he traces it to an English chapbook of 1655 in the Pepysian Library, Cambridge entitled *The Second Part of Tom Tram of the West, &c.* by Humphrey Crouch (a ballad writer and publisher, 1635-1671). In this version, the eponymous Tom Tram, a popular trickster in jestbooks of that time, helps William of Wansor outdo the parson Sir John.

In fact, this story seems to have survived and gained some popularity on England last century. Although the version noted by Katherine Briggs³² and taken from Alfred Williams³³ who notes "the following fragment I several times encountered, in Oxfordshire. It is probable that the whole was originally in stanzas (sic); but those who had any knowledge of the piece only remembered the story in outline ... I heard it at Bampton and Alvescot ... between 1914 and 1916", is fragmentary, it seems that the tale was known throughout the country under various different titles including

Dick Rigby, the Maltster, Long Tom, the Salt Carrier (Tom Tram ?) and *Old Wigsby*. A dinner party rendition of the last of these is recorded by the Edwardian historian A G Bradley in his book *Round About Wiltshire*:³⁴ "It was a three-part piece, and the utterances of each of the trio were delivered according to the singer's conception of their respective vocal qualities ... Wigsby defended himself, and, of course, put the blame on the lady in a high-pitched tenor adapted to the part of a youthful village beau. And when it was finished and the table duly wrapped with knife-handles and appreciative palms, church-warden pipes, *de rigeur* on these occasions, were waved through the mist towards the man of one great song and a pull was taken at the port by those who still stuck to port, and at the brandy and water by those who had got into the second stage." Buchan's version is undoubtedly derived from these rural English variants as the similarities to the Williams version make clear. Surprisingly, however, an almost identical version to Buchan's was collected by the Hammond brothers from William Miller of Wootton, Dorset, in April 1906 (Hammond D369) and can be found in their manuscript collection.³⁵ Apart from the rousing 'alehouse' chorus, the interesting feature of this

song in common with Buchan is the fate of the parson - who is summarily castrated! Although it seems to be universally assumed that the cuckold has the right to perform the gelding of the transgressor upon discovery, it is invariably the case that the penalty can be in some way be 'bought off' - as in, for example, *The Lancashire Farmer* or *Johnny Cowper* - and this most unpleasant fate avoided. This is, in fact, what does happen in the *Tom Tram* version, and in other versions the parson is merely beaten or, as in Grimm, chased away. The severity of the penalty in this case, however, does not seem to detract from the joviality of the occasion in the slightest.

An interesting comparison can be made with another song collected by Buchan, *The Dyer of Roan*; the similarity being that the transgressor is also in this case a clergyman - an Abbott - and the song has an international dimension (the setting being France - "good king Lewis's land" - and 'Roan' a variant of 'Rouen'. This is made clear by a reference to 'pass-par-tout' and the transgressions of Monsieur L'Abbe are notably employed to poke fun at foreign habits and the Catholic rite of confession - seldom understood by the Protestant faith). In this song, the dyer -

upon discovering the Abbot bedding his wife -
employs the tools of his trade to exact suitable
retribution:

The Abbot, as you may believe,
Had but little to say for himself;
He knew well what he ought to receive,
For his being so arrant an elf,
His clothes he got on with all speed,
And conducted he was by the dyer,
To be dunckt (as you after may read)
And be cooled from his amorous fire.

Quoth the dyer, most reverend father,
Since I find you're so hot upon wenching,
I have gather'd my servants together,
To give you a taste of our drenching.
Here - Tom, Harry, Roger, and Dick!
Take the Abbot, undress him, and douse
him,
They obey'd in that every same nick,
To the dye-vat they take him and souse
him.

To behold what a figure he made,
Such a monster there never was seen;
'Twas enough to make satan afraid,

It may be regarded as surprising that in stanza
nine the dyeing is accepted as adequate punishment
- "Twas much better than using him rough,/ Since
he only had lain with his wife" (although the

indelible nature of the stigma is stressed) whereas, as we have already seen, castration is accepted as the ultimate penalty for this transgression (although it is worth noting that the gelding is not usually considered in the spirit of anger or revenge but in the spirit of successful combat). This song, in fact, is regarded by Hamish Henderson as "an excellent example of arch eighteenth-century English bawdry, quite plainly the product of a single pen and intelligence"³⁶ and almost identical versions can be found from other contemporary sources³⁷ - so this may account for the contrived and enigmatic form of punishment. What is clear, however, is that neither the conclusion of *The Dyer of Roan* (or *The Farmer and Lace Merchant* which we have already considered) nor the conclusion of *Dickie Melvin* are typical of this class of song or tale of adultery - the usual practice being (as we shall see below with reference to a larger category of songs collected by Buchan - often related to body of popular legend found in, for example, early jestbooks and the *Decameron*) to buy off the aggrieved husband's right to exact the ultimate penalty in one way or the other.

Dickie Melvin and *The Parson's Fat Wedder* are both of great interest as they are both of demonstrable international popularity (for example, German versions of both are noted by Klaus Roth and Latin American variants by Boggs) and they have survived as *conte-fables* in the popular tradition of this country until this century.³⁸ The fact that Buchan seems to be the only one of the early collectors to record either of these songs/tales demonstrates once more the contemporary relevance of his manuscript collections and his debt to the living oral tradition of the time.

references

- 1 Antii Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale* (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1961). 2nd revision by Stith Thompson. The origins are Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian, Lappish, Danish, Irish, Basque, French, Spanish, Catalan, Walloon, German, Czech, Slovenian, Serbocroatian, Russian. For a record of the Irish versions (from Connaught and Munster) see Sean o' Suilleabhan and Reidar T H Christiansen, *The Types of Irish Folktale* (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1963), 213.
- 2 Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1955).
- 3 MSS ADD 29.408 pp 302-306 (under the title *The Devil Outwitted*) and Harvard MS 25241.9.
- 4 SA 1955/101/5. Alan Bruford, Archivist at the School, drew my attention to this version. The lacuna at the end of the thirty-ninth line, where we may expect a reference to the female vagina, is due to a slurring on the tape, perhaps because of the singer's embarrassment.
- 5 The distinction here is the emphasis on the husband's combatative prowess.
- 6 Thomas D'Urfey, *Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 6 vols (London, 1719-1720), III, pp 147-150. John S Farmer, *Merry Songs and Ballads Prior to the Year AD 1800* (privately printed, 1897), V, pp 62-64.
- 7 Claude Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music* (New Brunswick, 1968), p. 272.
- 8 Gershon Legman, *The Rationale of the Dirty Joke* Second Series (New York, 1975), 491-492.
- 9 I am indebted to Martin Carthy and to Topic Records for this transcription. The song is recorded on the Topic album *Out of the Cut* - Topic 12TS426.
- 10 See Katherine M Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folktale*. 4 vols (London, 1970-71), I, p 54. An English version of this tale is entitled *There Was An Old Man in Sussex Did*

- Dwell. A related reference in Briggs is AT 1164B - *Devil frightened by Threatening to Bring Mother-in-law and Even the Devil Cannot Live with a widow.*
- 11 Introduced by John Holloway, *The Euing Collection of English Broadside Ballads* in the library of the University of Glasgow (Glasgow, 1971), p 320.
 - 12 "The crab-fish' ... still to be heard in barrack-room, on building sites and in city pubs as well as country pubs". A L Lloyd, *Folksong in England* (London, 1967), p 192.
 - 13 Charles Kilpatrick Sharpe, *A Ballad Book* (Edinburgh, 1883), pp 10-11.
 - 14 Beroalde de Verville, *The Way to Succeed* (The Hesperides Press, 1930), vol 1, p 199. (Translated by Oliver Stonor and introduced by Arthur Machen).
 - 15 Peter Kennedy, *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (London, 1975), p. 452.
 - 16 Guthrie T Meade Jnr, "The Sea Crab", *Midwest Folklore* (1958), VIII, 2, 91-100.
 - 17 Hamish Henderson, "At the Foot o' yon Excellin' Brae", in *Scotland and the Lowland Tongue*, edited by J Derrick McClure (Aberdeen, 1983), pp 100-128, p. 122.
 - 18 Gershon Legman, *The Horn Book* (London, 1970), p. 247.
 - 19 Simpson, *ibid*, p. 239.
 - 20 Farmer, *ibid*.
 - 21 This is edited by John Holloway and Joan Black as *Later English Broadside Ballads* (London, 1975).
 - 22 Antii Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale* (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1961). 2nd revision by Stith Thompson, and Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1955).
 - 23 Ralph S Boggs, *Index of Spanish Folktales*, FF Communications No 90 (Helsinki, 1930).

- 24 In fact, this song seems to have been fairly widespread in the United States.
- 25 Klaus Roth, "Peter Buchan's 'Secret Songs of Silence'", *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* XVI (1971).
- 26 Alan Bruford, "The Parson's Sheep", *Scottish Studies* 124 (1970), 88-93.
- 27 SA 1969/154/A2. Also printed in full in Alan Bruford, *The Green Man of Knowledge* (Aberdeen, 1982), p 39, and David Buchan, *Scottish Tradition* (London, 1984), pp 60-61.
- 28 SA 1954/91/A1.
- 29 Other versions are recorded in *Tocher 4* (1971), 118-121. An English version collected in Calver, Derbyshire can be found in S O Addy, *Household Tales With other Traditional Remains* (London and Sheffield, 1895), p 18 and is reprinted in Katherine M Briggs and Ruth L Tongue, *Folktales of England* (London, 1965), p 118.
- 30 The Brothers Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (New York, 1963) pp 164-167.
- 31 Walter Anderson, *Der Schank vom Alten Hildebrand, Eine Vergleichende Studie* (Dorpat, 1931).
- 32 Katherine Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk Tales, The English Language, Part A, Folk Narrative*, 2 vols (London, 1970).
- 33 Alfred Williams, *Folk-songs of the Upper Thames* (London, 1923), pp 293-294.
- 34 A G Bradley, *Round About Wiltshire* (London, 1907), pp 376-377.
- 35 Frank Purslow (ed) *Marrowbones* (London, 1968), pp 31-32.
- 36 Hamish Henderson, *ibid.*
- 37 John Watts, *The Musical Miscellany* (London, 1729-1731), vol III, p 60.
- 38 And also in the United States. Gershon Legman records an American version collected by Mellinger Henry in Tennessee in his

Rationale of the Dirty Joke 1st Series (London, 1969), vol 2, p399. He is, however, wrong in thinking that this is the only version collected in that country as Herbert Halbert, in "The Conte Fable in New Jersey", *Journal of American Folklore* (1942), 55, 133-134, notes two versions along with a version, collected from the same singer, of AT 1735A *The Bribe Boy Sings the Wrong Song*.

BURNS SOURCES ACCORDING TO BUCHAN

This chapter takes its impetus from the excellent essay by Alexander Keith, *Burns Sources Suggested by Buchan*¹, written over fifty years ago, and is also indebted to William Walker's pioneering work on the relationship between Peter Buchan and the songs of Robert Burns.¹ I do not wish, however, to merely parrot old arguments, but to approach the topic with three new objectives. Firstly, to collate and revise the work undertaken by Keith and Walker generally. Secondly, to draw on new material from Buchan's manuscripts (notably the *Secret Songs*) that was not available to Keith and Walker. Thirdly, to draw on our retrospective knowledge of the relationship between Burns and

folksong. Regrettably, advances in Burns scholarship over the last fifty years with regard to this field have been extremely limited² and it is not possible to contest that, despite the mammoth editorial task undertaken by James Kinsley in his three-volume annotated edition of Burns,³ any more light has been cast on this important topic by literary scholars in the time elapsed since Keith completed his study. In fact, whereas the two earlier editions of Burns that we shall consider in detail do consider the evidence for sources supplied by Buchan (in one case to damn it) Kinsley barely mentions Buchan and has little time in general for folksong sources in his work. However, with our more extensive contemporary knowledge of the nature of folksong, and access to the full range of manuscript sources of Buchan's songs, we can, hopefully, detail more completely Buchan's contribution to our knowledge of Burns sources. In so doing, we must be aware that the critics - notably Henley and Henderson - are blinkered by two distinct failings. The first of these failings consists of their resolution to steadfastly ignore folksong origins of Burns's work in favour of literary origins, and, secondly, and more specifically, their intent to repudiate, out of hand, all the suggestions of Buchan - for

the various reasons that we have already seen in operation with regard to other critics (and which can also be demonstrated in their own work.)

Keith is mostly concerned with the contribution made by Buchan to Hogg and Motherwell's edition of Burns.⁴ Buchan corresponded frequently with William Motherwell between 1826 and 1832 (he also, occasionally, wrote to Hogg) and it is the material relayed through this correspondence that eventually informs the notes to the Hogg and Motherwell edition of Burns. Some of this material can still be located in the letters between Buchan and Motherwell preserved in the Houghton and Glasgow University Libraries, but much of it seems to have been lost. Buchan himself notes his contributions in a letter to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe:

You will have seen by this time from some of the advertisements in Blackwood's and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine that I have been contributing my mite in the song department to Hogg and Motherwell's edition of Burns' works, just now publishing in Glasgow by A Fullarton & Co. You have read Allan Cunningham's - I observe a letter addressed to you in the 7th vol by Burns. I was able to send *ten letters* to the Glasgow Edition, which

never appeared in any of his works prior to my sending them. Six of them never were in print before...

Buchan also suggests in another letter that he possessed some material in Burns's own handwriting, but there is little evidence for the nature of this material. Buchan's contributions to the volume largely involve, in fact, tracing north-eastern versions of songs collected by Burns.

Keith deals specifically with 18 songs which earn Buchan the censure of Henley and Henderson - "of the forty notes in the 1834 Edition undoubtedly contributed by Buchan, the Centenary Burns editors roast eighteen"⁵. Further to these, however, we can consider six songs from the Buchan manuscripts which also cast light on Burns sources - and we can deal with these in some detail. The requisite list of songs, therefore, with their Kinsley numbers, is:

songs from Keith

1/ My Nanie O	4	
2/ My Harry Was a Gallant Gay		164
3/ Theniel Menzies' Bonny Mary		177
4/ To the Weavers Gin You Go	194	
5/ McPherson's Lament		196
6/ Up in the Morning Early		200

7/ O'er the Water to Charlie	211
8/ Go Fetch to Me a Pint o' Wine	242
9/ The Tailor He Fell Thro the Bed	286
10/ Eppie Adair	307
11/ What Can a Young Lassie	347
12/ The Weary Pund o' Tow	360
13/ My Collier Laddie	366
14/ Hey Ca Thro	381
15/ A Red Red Rose	453
16/ The Lass That Made the Bed To Me	571
17/ I'll Ay Ca In By Yon Town	574
18/ My Hoggie	

songs from manuscripts

19/ Dainty Davie	140	(659)
20/ Whistle O'er the Lave O't	235	
21/ The Lea Rig		392
22/ Duncan Gray		394
23/ The Mill, Mill O	tune =	406
24/ The Whirly Wha		682

Of the songs that Keith "rescues" from Henley and Henderson's dismissal, *Theniel Menzies* provides a good example of Henley and Henderson's style and Keith's counter argument. Henley and Henderson comment - "Buchan (the ingenious and obliging) 'remembers to have seen many years ago a copy of this song in a very old Aberdeen magazine, said to be by a gentleman of that City'. He also supplies a set which he describes as the 'oldest on record', at the same time stating that it is 'from recitation, and never in print'..."⁶ The

implication is clearly that the alternative version is a pure invention of Buchan's. However, Keith points out that the source referred to by Buchan, the *Aberdeen Magazine* ("(of which) the Centenary editors, lulled to sleep in the cradle of their erudition, had never heard") is fairly easily located. In fact, the British Museum edition of the *Aberdeen Magazine* for 1788 is marginally annotated (presumably by its owner, Bishop Watson of Laurencekirk) and notes that the song was almost certainly composed by one John Marshall.⁷ Keith follows this and concludes that the Buchan version cannot be said in any way to be a corruption of the magazine version - "it is full of the signs which usually indicate a rough folk-song, while the 'Aberdeen Magazine' was not likely to get into the hands of the peasantry".⁸ Keith, in fact, demonstrates that there is every indication that Buchan was correct in every detail, yet Henley and Henderson cannot accept any part of Buchan's suggestions, because, according to Keith, they fail to do the necessary background research, and also because they are blinkered by their bias against Buchan.

Keith is doubly correct on this occasion. However, I believe that it is not generally correct to accuse Henley and Henderson of lacking

scholarship - although we have ample ground for accusing them of persecuting Buchan. They do this, firstly, through a continual sneering tone, and, secondly, through more direct censure. An example of the latter is their remarks on *It was a' for our Rightfu' King*. Hogg had noted in his *Relics* that this song was written by a certain Captain Ogilvie, and these are the editors' comments regarding that attribution: "there is no earlier copy than that which was written by Burns... We can scarce go wrong in assuming that Hogg's informant was Peter Buchan. Now, neither Hogg nor Buchan knew that Burns had sent the thing to the *Museum*. Moreover, his name had never been associated with it. Thus, the ingenious Buchan, still bent on fathering everything on somebody, had full scope for his idiosyncrasies..."⁹ There is, in fact, *absolutely no evidence* that Buchan was responsible for this attribution. Why, we may ask, not blame Hogg, who printed it? The answer is simply that, as Keith suggests in relation to *Theniel Menzies*, they take every opportunity to aim a "contemptuous kick" at Buchan. Basically, they are following the by now common pursuit of whipping the "whipping boy".

However, there is more than a mere attempt to ostracize Buchan to be seen in their censure - there is also evident a more general failing of the times. We can, in fact, identify several distinct categories of their attacks. The first group are associated with a personal dislike of Buchan:

1/ blatant bias. They take Burns's word (or anyone else) before Buchan's always.

2/ they accept as a starting point that Buchan is a fabricator of songs.

3/ they do not mention Buchan whenever there is indisputable evidence that he may be right.

The second group are associated not with personal bias, but with their perspective within their era and the current climate of folksong scholarship:

4/ they always accept the precedent of the printed text (or the earliest published 'respectable' version).

5/ they fail to understand the real fluid nature of the folksong text.

6/ they are opposed to Aberdeenshire - which is parochial (the 'North of Scotland' has more positive connotations).

We can demonstrate these separate categories with reference to specific songs. With regard to the first category, we have already seen two blatant cases. Another prime example appears in the notes to *The Lass That Made the Bed to Me*: "Not content with either Cromek (or Burns) or Stenhouse, Peter Buchan's is (as ever) to the fore, in Motherwell's edition, with a version described as 'the original song'."¹⁰ Other sources are accepted before Buchan. Also, one of the Burns editors' "chief gadgets", as Keith puts it, is to assume that Burns derived some of his material from the manuscripts of David Herd. Herd's word is always accepted as precedent to Buchan's and there is some suggestion that Buchan had copied from Herd. However, the Herd manuscripts were not commonly known in Buchan's time and there is no evidence that Buchan was familiar with them (although he was familiar with Herd's *Scottish Songs*). Keith notes - "The Peterhead collector certainly never saw the Herd MS. He could not have held his tongue about it if he had".¹¹ In the second category, they note with regard to *The Weary Pund o' Tow* that, "Buchan furnished Hogg and Motherwell with several stanzas of a "very old song which perhaps Burns had in view when he composed the above". As it repeats the Burns chorus verbatim,

Burns almost certainly must have had it in view, if it be the 'very old song' which Buchan said it was. But he said nothing as to where he got it; and it is plainly patchwork."¹² Similarly, with regard to *Eppie Adair*, for which Buchan supplies an interesting alternative version entitled *The Earl of Kilmarnock's Farewell to his Wife*, their first thought is that it may be fabricated. In the third category, suffice it to say that they have little to say with regard to some classic "Burns's songs" such as *Duncan Gray* and *The Lea Rig*, for which Buchan contributed copious notes to Motherwell, other than that they accept the versions in Herd's collection as precedent. However, these will be considered in more detail later.

Examples of the fourth category abound. For example, with regard to *O Gin My Love*, two versions of which are recorded in Buchan's ballad manuscript (one, as Keith notes, is really a parody of the original), they note that, "the Buchanism thus fathered is only a sorry hash of some chapbook set. They all derive from a blackletter (here they give examples from the British Museum and Pepys collections of blackletter ballads)... setting aside the Buchan rubbish, we have found these several

derivatives..."¹³ And they note several chapbook versions. Keith defends Buchan in this case by noting that this song, "is the best example of Burns availing himself, of phrases which had been the traditional minstrel's stock-in-trade for generations".¹⁴ And for *O'er the Water to Charlie*, they note that, "it is hard to say how much Peter Buchan's, 'taken down from recitation', is indebted to Peter Buchan - especially as internal evidence shows that, as he gives it, it did not all exist before his own days. No printed copy of any such ballad anterior to Burns is quoted by Buchan (they give examples of broadsheets)"¹⁵ The fifth category is really a derivation of this blinkered attitude. For example, in their inability to understand that there does not need to be a version of a song already in print for it to be genuine. In reference to *To the Weavers*, they note that "(a version from Buchan) who 'never saw it in print' - has no sort of claim to consideration"¹⁶. Similarly for *My Collier Laddie* which Buchan, "didn't pretend... was ever in print".¹⁷, and secondly, in their obsessive search for published precedents, as in *The Weary Pund of Tow*, where they fail to comprehend that the similar chorus may simply be a formulaic trait of the song type. As for the sixth category, there are also several incidents: for *Hey Ca'*

Thro, they note that, "Buchan supplied the customary original... a Buchanite jumble of Fife and Aberdeenshire"¹⁸, for *The Tailor Fell Thro' the Bed*, they note that, "Buchan gives us what he says is the old song. It consists of the chorus, with an Aberdeenshire variation, and the following silly stanza (also pure Aberdeen)..."¹⁹ Keith gives the perfect riposte to this by demonstrating that a stanza Buchan cites with regard to *Duncan Davidson* -

I can drink an' no be drunk;
I can fight an' no be slain;
I can kiss my neighbour's wife,
An' aye be welcome to my ain.

- which is in all respects a fairly standard formulaic folksong element, can also be found in a version of *The Barnyards of Delgaty* collected by Greig - thus demonstrating the true resilience of the north-east tradition.

In retrospect (or even at the time), every single example in which Henley and Henderson damn possible sources cited by Buchan can be controverted with detailed reference to the individual textual evidence, and Keith does just that in several cases. However, there is a more general sense in which their accusations are

blatantly absurd. As we know from our knowledge of Buchan's history, he was not a capable fabricator of songs, unlike some contemporaries, and on every occasion possible he was only too pleased to identify his own poetic excursions. Also, despite his stringent schedule and his obvious financial problems, there is no evidence that he received one penny for his contributions to Hogg and Motherwell. He gave of his advice freely and willingly, and it is difficult to understand why he would have wished to spend so much valuable time fabricating misleading references for this purpose. Thirdly, his tendency to "father" songs or, rather, suggest possible attributions was a common tendency of the time, and one followed equally rigorously by subsequent editors, including Henley and Henderson, with the difference that they were more intent on attributing everything possible to Burns, and only Burns.

We can now see that Buchan's contribution to Burns scholarship was important, and fourfold. On different occasions Buchan -

1/ appended important general or historical notes.

2/ contributed another song on same theme.

3/ provided a version of the traditional song that served as a model for Burns's version.

Among the first category, a good example is *McPherson's Farewell*. This very well known song is given in full by Buchan with consequent notes on its history and versions of the (supposedly true) tale on which it was based. His version is notable for a reference to 'Braco Duff', a personage with 'rage enough' who still appears in some sung versions. Buchan takes the background of the story to be Aberdeenshire, although it was very widespread. *My Harry, or Highland Harry*, is a prime example of a song that has clear Aberdeenshire origins, as evidenced by the location 'Knockhaspie'. Buchan details the origins of a song that was evidently very familiar to him and gives it a family history that may or may not be accurate. A good example of the second category would be a song from Buchan, *The Rushes Green*, printed in Hogg and Motherwell, which differs from *Green Grow the Rashes O*, but employs the same metaphor - "if it does not refer

to the song which we have attempted to illustrate,
at least it deals in rushes" ²⁰ - of which this is
a sample verse:

If I strew yon rushes, fair maid,
I'll up and gather them bedeen,
And take you in arms twa,
And row ye in the rushes green.

There are several examples of the third category.
Buchan gives excellent traditional analogues of
classic Burns songs such as *My Nannie*:²¹

As I gaed down thro' Embro town,
To view the streets o' the city, O,
I heard a young man making a moan,
Is there nae ane here to pity, O?

And aye he said my Nannie, O,
My sweet and lovely Nannie, O;
Nae friend nor foe shall ever know
The love I bear to Nannie, O.

And *I'll aye ca' in by yon town*:²²

Ye'll gang nae mair tae yon town,
For fear o' Molly Black again;
Ye'll gang nae mair tae yon town,
For fear ye meet mishap again.
They'll change ye frae the claes sae red,
Unto the coat sae black again,
And gie ye debt tae hap your head,
And ne'er be welcome back again.

So far we have considered songs that are noted primarily in Hogg and Motherwell and discussed by Henley and Henderson. However, with our retrospective knowledge of the Buchan manuscripts, we can now examine in more detail some prime examples of Buchan's more general contribution to folksong scholarship *per se* which, either directly or obliquely, inform our knowledge of Burns sources.

The Mill, Mill, O is a song that appears in many of the early collections and seems to have been particularly favoured for its melody. Burns mentions it in an entry in his *Common Place Book*²³ dated September 1785: "There is a certain irregularity in the Old Scotch Songs... for instance the fine old song of the "Mill Mill O", to give it a plain prosaic reading, it halts prodigiously out of measure; on the other hand; the song set to the same tune in Bremner's collection of Scotch Songs which begins "To Fanny fair could I Impart," &c., it is most exact measure, and yet, let them both be sung before a real Critic, one above the biasses of prejudice, but a thorough Judge of Nature, how flat and spiritless will the last appear, how trite, and lamely methodical, compared with the wild-warbling cadence, the heat-moving melody of the first."

However, Burns was forced to admit that the old song was "on account of decency, inadmissible" (to the *Musical Museum*) to Thomson, and used the tune himself as the basis for *The Soldier's Return (When Wild War's deadly Blast was Blawn)* whilst confining the less delicate version to the *Merry Muses*. Hecht, who records Herd's manuscript version, *As I Came Up Yon Bonny Waterside*, in reply to the charge that the tunes of folksongs were often the produce of angels and the words the creation of devils, suggested that such 'improvements' were "meant to deliver the angelic tune from the diabolic words"²⁴. Buchan himself obviously approved of the tune as he used it (as well as that of *Dainty Davie*) for one of his own songs in *Recreation*. In fact, Buchan's version has all the ingredients of Herd's song but the essential dissimilarities of the texts suggest perhaps a wider diffusion of the song than previously suspected. The song is in the common tradition of the lascivious miller - cf *The Cuckold, or The maid gaed to the Mill*²⁵ and *When I gaed to the Mill*²⁶, the chorus develops well the sexual metaphor of the mill grinding - used in similar fashion to the scenes of lapping waves, etc. employed euphemistically by film directors. Gershon Legman notes that the song seems to "turn on the folk idea of the theoretical possibility of

raping a non-consenting woman *in her sleep...* (the present writer has demonstrated emphatically, in the winter of 1964/5, that it *is possible*)."²⁷ Interestingly, this song has recently been re-set by the composer Serge Hovey, in collaboration with the folksinger Jean Redpath, with some success.

Another song that falls into a similar category as *The Mill, Mill O* and which has an equally long pedigree is *Dainty Davie*. This song is supposedly based upon a true incident in the career of a noted Scottish minister which is described in some detail in *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display'd*²⁸ (a volume which formed part of Buchan's own library):

A party of King Charles II, his guards being sent to apprehend Mr David Williamson (one of the most eminent ministers now in Edinburgh) for the frequent rebellion and treason he preached then at field meetings; and the party having surrounded the house where he was, a zealous lady, mistress of the house, being very solicitous to conceal him, rose in all haste from her bed, where she left her daughter of about eighteen years of age; and having dressed up the holy man's head with some of her own night cloaths, she wittily advis'd him to take her place in the warm bed with her girl; to which he modestly and

readily consented; and knowing well how to employ his time, especially upon such an extraordinary call, to propagate the image of the party, while the mother, to divert the troopers' enquiry, was treating them with strong drink in the parlour, he, to express his gratitude, applies himself with extraordinary kindness to the daughter; who finding him like to prove a very useful man in his generation, told her mother she would have him for her husband; to which the mother, though otherwise unwilling, yet, for concealing the scandal, out of the love to the cause consented, when the mystery of the iniquity was wholly disclosed to her.

Herd preserved a version of this song in his manuscript and noted "The following song (as well as the preceding) was made upon Mass David Williamson on his getting with child the Lady Cherrytree's daughter, while the soldiers were searching the house to apprehend him for a rebel."²⁹ The 'preceding' song mentioned is *Mass David Williamson*³⁰ which begins "Mass David Williamson,/ Chosen of twenty,/ Gaed to the pulpit/ And sang *Killiecrankie*" and is quoted in Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*. Hecht argues that Herd's version of the song inspired Burns, who sent the song to Thomson for the *Musical Museum* whereupon it was altered to make two verses run

together³¹, and used the chorus for his song *Now Rosy May*. There is also a short version in the *Merry Muses*³² which Hecht also argues is derivative:³³ "The comparison makes it clear that the version of *Dainty Davie* in *Merry Muses of Caledonia* was derived from the version given by Herd with express artistic intentions. There is no doubt whatever that Burns himself was the author of these changes. This supports our conjecture that even in the cases in which we have no other versions apart from those in *Merry Muses of Caledonia* the gut of the song may be old but very frequently it underwent the poet's encroachment to heighten the artistic effect". Gershon Legman discusses Hecht's supposition noting the final proof offered by a version of the song discovered in the Cunningham Manuscript³⁴ the additional verse goes:

He laid my back against a stane,
An' mony a thump he gae my wame
An' weel I wot he ca'd it hame
For he was my dainty Davie.

Clearly the quasi-romantic historical model for the song was soon superseded by the amorous mode and, in fact, by the late nineteenth century seems to have become the subject of gross ribald parody - and as such appears in two versions in *Forbidden*

Fruit, a fascinating little volume of bawdry, some of which is purported to come from the pen of Burns, of which one copy only exists - in the Dunfermline public library. The first³⁵ purporting to come from the *Merry Muses* (although clearly of a more recent provenance) introduces the obvious, if banal, sexual metaphor:

He led her to her father's land,
Winsome Davie, funny Davie,
And put a stiff thing in her hand,
He called his 'little Davie'.

The second is rather more crude and distasteful.³⁶ Buchan's version, however, is fairly standard:

Among the Presbyterian race,
Some guidly men's come to this place,
But nane o' them that kent my case,
Nor guess'd my doubts like Davie.

Well's me on his curly pow,
Davie laddie, Davie laddie,
Well's me on his curly pow,
My bonny Dainty Davie.

When first my Davie I did see,
The very smile blink'd in his e'e,
He was a blythsome sight to me,
I thought I lov'd my Davie.

O little did my minnie dread,
Of what I stood in greatest need,

It was my fancy for to feed,
Upo' my Dainty Davie.

Some says he has some muckle pelf,
Horse and cattle, lands and wealth,
But I wou'd rather hae himself,
My bonny Dainty Davie.

The last time he and I did meet,
It was upo' the open street,
Where kindly he did me saleet,
My bonny Dainty Davie.

As we came thro' my father's glen
He gae me kisses nine or ten,
And something else, ye sanno ken,
Because he was my Davie.

As we came by yon water side,
He stopt the stream, and then did ride,
But yet for a' I did him bide,
Because he was my Davie.

As we were walking up the hill,
And there o' me he got his fill,
But yet for a' I lay me still,
Because he was my Davie.

When twenty weeks were came and gane,
Now my stays wou'd no less on,
It's now my time to sigh and moan,
All for my Dainty Davie.

Next time we meet upo' the lee,
The very saut tear blint my e'e,
And mony heavy sigh did gie,
Unto my Dainty Davie.

O Davie lad, well may ye mind,
Sin I reliev'd you out o' pine,
And now to me you will prove kin',
My bonny Dainty Davie.

Then Davie pledged his faith and vow,
To me he ever wou'd prove true,
And I should ne'er hae cause to rue,
My bonny Dainty Davie.

Then to the kirk we quickly went,
And married were wi' sweet content,
And aye sin syne I'll ne'er repent,
I lov'd my Dainty Davie.

Similarly, *Whistle O'er the Lave O't* is a traditional version of the song which Burns adapted for Johnson's *Museum*. Although the expression is somewhat clumsy, however, Buchan's version from the *Secret Songs* is unique:

Lucky Tap o'er the Abby strand,
She keeps maids at her command,
If ye bring siller in your hand,
Ye'll whistle o'er the lave o't

Lucky she keeps maidens ten,
And she is feasting but and ben,
And they are doing what ye ken,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

And of her trade she is so nice,
She's break her neck before her price,
Wha'll be first shall cast the dice,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

We darena say that Jean's a whore,
Tho' she be set like a re-tour,
By dancing four jigs in an hour,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

Lucky sent her to the well,
Batter she had gane hersell,
The stanes within her pitcher fell,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

First came a barber and a baker,
She gae them Jean, they wou'dna take 'er,
Then brought ben Betty to the baker,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

Next came a writer wi' his quill,
Said - She was maiden to his will,
Says she, Ye're but a rattle skull,
Gae whistle o'er the lave o't.

Next was Crispin stout and bauld,
And in his hand a piggin awl,
But lucky cur'd him o' the cauld,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

A handsome brewer to her came,
And for his ale he would have rum,
She set his breeches in a flame,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

There came a sailor wi' a roar,
And sware he'd been too long on shore,
To gang on board he did implore,
To whistle o'er the lave o't.

Upon her deck he keist an e'e,

Cried - Hard the weather, helm a-lee,
Then crept astern right cunninglie,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

A sodger came to sell his sark,
She sware for it she'd gie in wark,
Then call'd him out into the dark,
To whistle o'er the lave o't.

Next was a butcher wi' gully an' steel,
He wou'dna 'gree without a feel,
He sware that he wou'd roast her yiel,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

Now the kirk folks were ill content,
They gae in sic a sad complaint,
That lucky paid nae buttock-rent,
For whistle o'er the lave o't.

Now lucky she has fled the town,
Lost her fame and great renown,
Besides her trade is pluckit down,
At whistle o'er the lave o't.

Gershon Legman notes that "Burns' parody is hateful and unpleasant, and far from an improvement in any but the expurgatory sense"³⁷ and refers to a fragment of the song preserved by Herd³⁸ which begins:

My mither sent me to the well,
She had better gane hersell,
I got the thing I dare nae tell,
Whistle o'er the lave o't.

This is similar to Buchan's fifth verse which is, strangely enough, also referred to in a note on Scottish song in *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display'd*:³⁹ "There be four kinds of Songs, Profane Songs, Malignant, Allowable, and Spiritual Songs. Prophane Songs, *My Mother sent me to the Well, She had better gone her self, For what I got I dare not tell, But kind Robin loves me.*" Legman takes this to indicate the song is a derivative of the earlier *Kind Robin Loves Me*, a song published in a sentimental, expurgated form by Herd and Ramsay. There may be some connection, but the origin of these old words is lost in time. Hamish Henderson has noted an old Gaelic verse preserved in an article entitled "Gaelic Erotica":⁴⁰

Chuir mo mhathair mi do'n allt,
'S mor b'fhearr dhi fein dol ann,
Bhris mi 'm pigidh, 's dort mi an leann,
'S chuir mi an ceann a cheil 'ad.

In translation the connection with the Herd and Buchan versions is clear:

My mother sent me to the burn,
It would be better to go herself,
I broke the pitcher and poured out the ale,
And set them at strife.

Fortunately, this old song has survived in the popular tradition and a version was sung by the late Jimmy Macbeath. Buchan's version, however, is distinct - a notable feature being the procession of various professions immortalised in other songs who lay down their siller - thus relating it to a body of songs such as D'Urfey's *A Ballad of All the Trades*.

Songs such as *Dainty Davie* and *Whistle O'er the Lave O't*, however, whilst best known in Burns versions, have never been directly attributed to Burns.⁴¹ Songs that are demonstrably of folk origin, but which are, in the popular imagination, inextricably associated with Burns, can also be investigated with the help of Buchan. In fact, two songs in particular, both extremely well known and both popularly accepted as Burns songs (although scholarly evidence has long demonstrated their folk origin) demonstrate the importance of Buchan's contribution to our knowledge of Burns's sources. These are *The Lang Girdin' O't* and *The Lee Rig*.

The Lang Girdin' O't is better known (to Burns aficionados at least) by the title *Duncan Gray* and as such was preserved by Burns⁴² who made several attempts to revise the song and, despite the fact

that he wrote to Thomson, "I have been at *Duncan Gray* to dress it in English, but all that I can do is deplorably stupid", it is his 'polite version', in which the refrain is emasculated as "ha, ha, the wooing o't" that has survived in popular taste. There is also a version in Herd's manuscript.⁴³ Stenhouse suggested that the song was composed by one Duncan Gray, an eighteenth century Glasgow carter. However, Buchan sent a couple of verses of an older version to Motherwell who, due to the lascivious nature of the song, refused to print it ("Mr Buchan has furnished us with two other stanzas which he thinks will bear 'handling', but which we, in deference to the taste of the age, decline to touch.")⁴⁴ Fortunately, Buchan also recorded a version of this song in *Secret Songs* which is notable for its vitality and its Peterhead setting and would seem to testify against this tradition:

As I came in by Peterhead,
Hech hey, the girdin' o't;
I met a lassie clad in red,
An' that's the lang girdin' o't.
She was a dainty dame indeed
An' was right decent in her weed,
By dancing she had gained her bread,
A time, they ca' the Girdin' o't.

As I cam in by the north shore,

Hech hey, the girdin' o't,
In by Marget Cullen's door,
An' that's the lang girdin' o't.
He took her to a cellar door,
Of kisses he gae her five score,
And what they did was something more,
For there they danc'd the girdin' o't.

They wou'dna stay into the barn,
Hech hey, the girdin' o't;
But into red the ravell'd yarn,
An' that's the lang girdin' o't.
The lad he got the lass wi' bairn,
An' yet he thought he'd dane nae harm,
An' yet he thought he'd dane nae harm,
Though he had danced the girdin' o't.

Oh her boddise wou'dna lie,
Hech hey, the girdin' o't;
Nor yet her apron wou'd it tie,
An' that's the lang girdin' o't.
Her petticoats kilt till her hose,
She thought she'd supped mony brose,
It wasna so as she suppos'd,
For she had danc'd the girdin' o't.

To Doctor Anderson she went,
Hech hey, the girdin' o't;
Thinking this plague for to prevent,
And that's the lang girdin' o't.
The Doctor winked wi' his eye,
And said the nine months will draw nigh,
That ye'll be forc'd in bed to lie,
For ye hae danc'd the girdin' o't.

As Doctor Moir was ready by,
Hech hey, the girdin' o't;

She at the window did him spy,
An' that's the lang girdin' o't.
Says, - Sir, is there nae remedy,
Else for health I'll surely die,
For I hae danc'd the girdin' o't.

If a' young woman wou'd do well,
Hech hey, at the girdin' o't,
And stay at hame an' spin their wheel,
That's the lang girdin' o't.
There wou'd be nae use for cuttie stools,
Nor to the parish becomes as fools,
I'm very sure the smart they'll feel,
If ance they'll dance the girdin' o't.

Gershon Legman suggests that this excellent version was "probably his (Buchan's) own composition or based on a folk-version quite different from that of the *Muses*."⁴⁵ Buchan supplied his version of the song to Motherwell who refused to print it noting that "very little is lost by the oblivion to which we have consigned the remainder of the old ditty, which, like the majority of those of the 'olden time', is valuable only as illustrating that freedom of manners and broad humour which obtained among our ancestors. The strains of Burns entirely supersede the coarse original."⁴⁶ We would disagree and, in fact, the case in favour of Buchan is settled by another version of the song, this time under the title forwarded by Burns, preserved in his *British*

Museum manuscript.⁴⁷ This is undoubtedly a 'folk-version' with echoes of the *Merry Muses* version and of the Herd version (in the last verse). The setting this time is Aberdeen:

As I came in by Aberdeen,
Hech hey the girdin' o't;
I met a lassie cled in green,
An' that's the lang girdin o't.
The bravest lass that e'er was seen,
She might complete wi' Venus green;
And by the glancing o' her een,
I kent she knew the girdin o't.
My bonny lass I then did say,
Hech hey the girdin o't;
How far hae ye to gang this way,
An' that's the lang girdin o't.

Quickly then she answer'd me,
Hech hey the girdin o't;
I'm gaen three miles out ower the lea,
An' that's the lang girdin o't.
If ye will gang alang wi' me,
Sae weel's I like your companie,
I said wi' her I'd walk a mile,
I then jumped ower a stile;
Gin she wou'd tarry here a while,
And dance wi' me the girdin o't.

The baith sat down upo' the green,
Where we were neither heard nor seen,
And there played her Duncan Gray,
Out ower the hills and far away;
The lassie smiled on me right gay,
Then danc'd wi' me the girdin o't.

But when will we twa meet again,
For o' your company I'm fain,
If ye will play me Duncan Gray,
Out ower the hills and faur away;
I will adore you night an' day,
And dance wi' ye the girdin o't.

When twenty weeks were come and gane,
The lassie's stays wou'd nae gae on,
She thought she supped mony brose,
It wasna sae, as she'd suppose,
For she in bed still did repose,
Because she'd danced the girdin o't.
When forty weeks were come and gane,
The lassie she brought hame a wean,
And now we've got a lovely boy,
O him I wish she'll hae great joy,
I drank a shilling at his joy,
Because she'd danced the girdin o't.

I bought my love a bow o' maut,
And bade her brew guid ale o' that;
They mask'd it thick, an' mask'd it thin,
Till masked out the maskin' pin,
And first a drop wou'd it had in,
Sae ends the lang girdin o't.

Despite its rough edges, this song is a primary example of a genuine folk-source for one of Burn's songs which testifies both to the important influence of the north-east tradition on Burns and to the perspicacity of Buchan in advising Motherwell - despite the wilful disregard of Burns editors to this day.

The Lang Girdin' O't is undoubtedly an important example of Buchan's contribution to our understanding of traditional folk sources for songs collected by Burns. The most important of Buchan's contributions to this area, however, probably lies with the two versions he collected of one of the finest lyric folksongs in the Scottish tradition, *The Lea Rig*. This song is certainly known best by the version popularised by Burns which appears in his collected poems:⁴⁸

When o'er the hill the eastern star
Tells bughtin-time is near, my jo,
And owsen frae the furrowed field
Return sae dowf and weary O;
Down by the burn where scented birks
Wi' dew are hanging clear, my jo,
I'll meet ye on the lea-rig,
My ain kind Dearie O.

At midnight hour, in mirkest glen,
I'd rove and ne'er be irie O,
If thro' that glen I gaed to thee,
My ain kind Dearie O:
Altho' the night were ne'er sae wet,
And I were ne'er sae weary O,
I'd meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind Dearie O.

The hunter lo'es the morning sun,
To rouse the mountain deer, my jo,
At noon the fisher takes the glen,

Adown the burn to steer, my jo;
Gie me the hour o' gloamin grey,
It maks my heart sae cheary O
To meet thee on the lea-rig
My ain kind Dearie O.

This is, if you like, the "composed" version of the song, clearly derived from a traditional version, as Burns makes plain in a letter to George Thomson: "'Who shall rise up & say, 'Go to, I will make a better!' - For instance; on reading over the lea-rig, I immediately set about trying my hand on it: & after all, I could make nothing more of it than the following, which Heaven knows is poor enough". Burns also contributed a "traditional" version to the *Musical Museum* under the title *My ain kind Deary-o*:⁴⁹

Will ye gang o'er the lee-rigg,
My ain kind deary-o,
And cuddle there sae kindly wi' me,
My ain kind deary-o.

At thornie dike, and birken tree,
We'll daff, and ne'er by weary-o;
They'll feug ill een frae you and me,
My ain kind deary o!

Nae herds wi' kent, or colly there,
Shall ever come to fear ye-o;
But lav'rocks, whistling in the air,
Shall woo, like me, their deary-o!

While others herd their lambs and ewes,
And toil for warld's gear, my jo
Upon the lee my pleasure grows,
Wi' you, my ain kind deary-o!

And he contributed a version to the *Merry Muses* which Barke and Goodsir Smith suggest is an original folk version but which, we can clearly see in retrospect, is simply a pastiche of the folksong probably composed by Burns:⁵⁰

I'll lay thee o'er the lee-rig,
Lovely Mary, deary, O;
I'll lay thee o'er the lee-rig,
My lovely Mary, deary, O.
Altho' the night were ne'er so wet,
An' I were ne'er so weary O;
I'd lay thee o'er the lee-rig,
My lovely Mary, deary, O.

Look down ye gods from yonder sky,
An' see how blest a man am I;
No envy my fond heart alarms,
Encircled in my Mary's arms
Lyn' across the lee-rig,
Wi lovely Mary, deary, O;
Lyn' across the lee-rig,
Wi' my ain kind deary, O.

Despite the popular attribution of the song to Burns, however, the bard himself never claimed authorship. In fact, in the interleaved *Musical Museum*, he notes that it was "mostly composed by

Fergusson in one of his merry humours", although he also notes that the tune appears in Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion*⁵¹ and appends an stanza from an earlier version - "There is an excellent song under the same title, however, which is much older than that of Fergusson":⁵²

I'll rowe thee o'er the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O;
I'll rowe thee o'er the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O.
Altho' the night were ne'er sae wat,
And I were ne'er sae weary, O,
I'll row thee o'er the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O.

There is a version recorded in Fergusson's poems, originally printed in a song collection, *The Charmer* in 1782:⁵³

Will ye gang o'er the ley-rigg
Wi' me, my ain kind deary O,
And cuddle there fu' kindly,
Myne ain kind dearie O ?

I'll row you east, I'll row you west,
I'll row you the way you like best,
And I'll row you o'er the ley-rig,
Mine ain kind deary O.

At thornie dyke and birken tree,
We'll daff and ne'er be weary O,
They'll skug ill een frae you and me,

My ain kind dearie O.

Nae herd wi' kent or collie there
Shall e'er come near to fear ye O,
But lav'rocks, singing in the air,
Shall woo like me my dearie O.

While others herd their ewes and lambs
And toil for wardly gear, my jo,
Upon the ley, my pleasure grows,
Wi' you, my ain kind dearie O.

Tho' the night were ne'er sae dark,
And I were ne'er sa weary,
I'd meet on the ley-rig
My ain kind deary.

It seems obvious that the two versions contributed by Burns to the *Musical Museum* form, when compounded, the gist of Fergusson's version, with the rather sentimental substance to the verses and the more blatant chorus. This could be easily explained, of course, if the Burns versions were indeed precedent to Fergusson's. As they are not, we must presume, I think, that Burns has exercised his editorial prerogative to divorce, in effect, two opposing components of the song. This has clearly been effected in the cause of supposedly literary taste. What would seem the simplest explanation, is that *The Lea-Rig*, in its traditional form, is a more straightforward euphemistic sexual song. Both Burns and

Fergusson, it would seem, have worked with the base material to construct a lyric more attuned to the sentimental taste of the time. Surprisingly, however, nearly every literary scholar and admirer of this fine song has chosen to dig no deeper into its possible origins and accepted the attribution to one or the other of Scotland's most noted eighteenth century poets (Buchan's friend Grosart, for example, accepts this in his edition of Fergusson's poems - "This excellent song has long been fugitively known to have been written by Fergusson, but was only positively affirmed to be so by Mr. Laing in his invaluable Notes to the 'Museum'")⁵⁴ It can, however, also be found in other collections - for example, in the Herd manuscripts, edited by Hans Hecht. Firstly, in a form, recorded by Herd, almost exactly identical to the Fergusson version:⁵⁵

Tho' the night were ne'er sae dark,
And I were ne'er sa weary,
I'd meet on the ley-rig
My ain kind deary.

The evidence clearly supports the case that this was a widespread and popular traditional song before, somehow, it became too exactly associated with the Burns text and remained frozen in this form. The case, however, is largely supported

and substantiated by two interesting, and clearly traditional, versions of the song collected by Buchan - neither of which, for some reason, has been seriously considered by literary scholars or Burns editors in the past (with the exception of Gershon Legman in his edition of the *Merry Muses* in which he states - "What appears, however, to be the original folksong is fortunately preserved in Buchan's *Secret Songs of Silence*").⁵⁶ This is the version from the *Secret Songs*:

Excuse me now my dearest dear,
I cannot now come near thee, O,
For I've been at the waur horse,
And I am wet and weary, O,
Cast aff the wet, put on the dry,
Come to your bed my deary, O,
And row me on the lee rig,
My ain kind deary, O.

The laddie and the lassie,
Gaed out to gather prinkle, O,
The laddie's breeks were riven,
The lassie saw his pintle, O,
How dare ye be sae baul', sir?
An' you my father's cottar, O,
As to put in your lang thing,
For I lat out my water, O?

I'll row you up, I'll row you down,
I'll row till ye be weary, O,
An' row you on the lee rig,
My ain kind deary, O.

The first verse here seems to have all the characteristics of traditional song, although the second verse, with its rather crude finale, may be seen as a sort of gross parody of the original form. Another version, however, was recorded by Buchan. It can be found in the British Museum manuscript and also, in full, in Hogg and Motherwell's edition of Burns (there are only minor differences of spelling and punctuation in the two texts) entitled *The Ware-Horse* and accompanied with a note from Buchan - "Burns and Fergusson have exerted their skill to make words worthy of so fine a air; but my great grandmother's way ran thus:"

I hae been at the ware-horse,
Till I am wet and weary, O;
Cast off the wet, put on the dry,
Come to your bed, my deary, O.
I'll row you up, I'll row you down,
And row till I be weary, O;
I'll row you on the lea-rig,
My ain kind deary, O.

But how are ye sae bauld, Sir,
And you my father's cottar, O;
As row me on the lea-rig,
Ane me his eldest dochter, O?
As row me up, and row me down,
And row till I be weary, O;
And row me on the lea-rig,

My ain kind deary, O.

Then tho' the night be ne'er sae dark,
And I be wet and weary, O;
I'll hap you in my petticoat,
My ain kind deary, O.

Then row me up, and row me down,
And row till ye be weary, O;
And row me on the lea-rig,
My ain kind deary, O.

Buchan also contributes an explanation of the title: "To those unacquainted with the term of Ware-horse, it may be necessary to add, by way of explanation, that along the rocky and steep coast of the east of Scotland the adjoining land were manured with a kind of sea-weed, called ware, which was carried on the backs of dwarf horses in wooden creels or curroches and led by the young women belonging to the farm. - The men's duty was to gather it from the sea, load the horses, and afterwards spread it on the land".⁵⁷ Hecht was aware of this version but dismissed it as a source for the song, strangely doubting also the precedence of Herd's version: "It is very probable that Herd got one or even both versions from Fergusson. Still I do not believe the *Lea-Rig* to be a creation of Fergusson's, who probably only transmitted it. Buchan told Motherwell that the original of *Lea-Rig* was a song called *The*

Ware-horse. His great-grandmother had sung it. In fact this song is no more than a modern vamp. As a source of *Lea-Rig* it is out of the question."⁵⁸ It is hard to understand Hecht's precise opposition to Buchan's version, as it seems to possess traditional credentials in at least the same degree as the Herd or Fergusson versions. Motherwell also comments on *The Ware-horse*: "In the first instance, however, we may state that we have never once heard the originality of Fergusson questioned, save in one instance, and that by Burns himself, who, in speaking of the Edinburgh poet's 'My only jo and dearie, O', says, 'it is written after an old song, much superior to it'; but he does not - for what reason we won't pretend to say - give the original, but gives what he calls the copy. We have searched out this original, and have found it much to Fergusson's song, being full of false rhymes, and it only bears a distant resemblance".⁵⁹ Looking at all these texts in retrospect, however, we can see that what we have in these texts collected by Buchan is simply a traditional song in a form that shifts its emphasis away from the sentimental towards the more blatantly sexual. The contemporary opposition to these texts probably derives from an undue concern for the former model. Burns and

Fergusson, it seems, had simply worked with the materials of a raw song that they found particularly attractive (Burns, for example, constructed versions of several songs, such as *John Anderson, my jo*, in both sexual and sentimental modes). What is particularly interesting in Buchan's contribution to our understanding of the song is the specific reference to the practice of collecting ware. This specific local and period detail has a certain appeal - actually rooting the meaning of the song not just in a sexual or sentimental encounter but in the daily work activities of the people in a manner that falls just short of the metaphoric.

As in *The Lang Girdin' O't*, however, it is important that here we have a contribution from Buchan that clearly derives from a specifically north-east tradition. Burns spent some time in the north-east and it is undoubtedly true that, in the past, the influence of his sojourn there, especially in terms of song collecting, has been underestimated. This is one of the faults of Burns scholarship that an examination of these possible sources enables us to identify. Another is, of course, the difficulty some scholars have in identifying or acknowledging the concept of the

fluid text, seeking instead to identify a single literary origin for texts. It is also true, however, that there seems to be a peculiar feature of Burns songs, or songs popularised by Burns - such as *The Lea-Rig* or *The Mill, Mill O* - that for some reason they seem to become frozen in the single text form constructed or collected by the bard. This could either suggest the particular power and efficacy of the work of Burns, or, perhaps, the way that the sentimental mode, in most cases, exercised a sort of hegemony during, especially, the Victorian period. What is certain, however, is that Burns was an astute and thoughtful employer of folksong types for various purposes. This is demonstrated by studies of Burns's textual editing of ballads such as Emily Lyle's detailed account of the collation of *Tam Lin*. A great deal more work, however, needs to be done in this area.

references

- 1 Alexander Keith, *Burns and Folk-Song* (Aberdeen, 1922).
- 2 A more recent work, Mary Ellen Brown, *Burns and Tradition* (London, 1984), is particularly disappointing in this respect.
- 3 James Kinsley (ed.), *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*. 3 vols (Oxford, 1968).
- 4 *The Works of Robert Burns*, edited by the Ettrick Shepherd and William Motherwell, Esq. (Glasgow, 1835), 4 vols.
- 5 Keith, *ibid*, p. 49.
- 6 *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, edited by William Ernest Henley and Thomas F Henderson (Edinburgh, 1896-97), 4 vols.
- 7 The magazine also printed versions of the following songs that may be of interest: 1788 - *I Sat on my Sunkie, The Boatie Rows, Cauld Kail in Aberdeen*, 1789 - *The Plow Boy, My ain kind deary O, Braes of Yarrow*).
- 8 Keith, *ibid*, p. 81.
- 9 Henley and Henderson, *ibid*, vol. III, p. 435.
- 10 *Ibid*, vol. III, p. 420.
- 11 Keith, *ibid*, p. 58.
- 12 Henley and Henderson, *ibid*, vol. III, p. 380.
- 13 *Ibid*, vol. III, p. 402.
- 14 Keith, *ibid*, p. 65. Buchan also supplies a version of another Burns favourite, *The Silver Tassie*, best known as *Gae bring tae me a pint o' wine*. This version contains the crucial verse upon which, it seems, Burns based the song - "Ye'll bring me here a pint of wine,/ A server, and a silver tassie,/ That I may drink before I gang,/ A health to my ain bonny lassie". The rest has partly some merit but features a bathetic conclusion which Keith attributes to corruption. Buchan

attributes this to an Alexander Leslie of Edinburgh. Henley and Henderson refer to the song as "an idiotic piece". *The Silver Tassie* has survived in the oral tradition and can be found, for example, in John Ord, *The Bothy Songs and Ballads of Aberdeen and Moray, Angus and the Mearns*, (Glasgow, 1930).

- 15 Henley and Henderson, *ibid*, vol. III, p. 328.
- 16 *Ibid*, vol. III, p. 303.
- 17 *Ibid*, vol. III, p. 383.
- 18 *Ibid*, vol. III, p. 397.
- 19 *Ibid*, p. 336. Another example of an interesting Aberdeenshire version is of *Up in the Morning Early* - for which Buchan gives an unusual local variant: "Up in the morning, up in the morning, / Up in the morning early; / Frae morn till night, our squires they sat. / And drank the juice o' the barley."
- 20 Hogg and Motherwell, *ibid*, vol. II, pp 99-100.
- 21 *Ibid*, vol. II, pp 94-95.
- 22 *Ibid*, vol. II, p. 201.
- 23 Robert Burns, *Common Place Book* (Edinburgh, 1969), p.48 (edited by Raymond Lamont Brown from the edition of 1872).
- 24 Hans Hecht, *Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts* (Edinburgh, 1904), p. 115.
- 25 David Herd, *Scottish Songs* (Edinburgh, 1973), fp 1776, p. 148.
- 26 Hecht, *ibid*, p. 135.
- 27 Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, edited by Gershon Legman (New York, 1963). Far from enlightening us regarding any aspects of this particular song, this comment seems to reveal Legman as part of the tradition of the sexual braggart from Robert Burns to Frank Harris and on.
- 28 Gilbert Crockatt and John Munroe, *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display'd* (Rotterdam, 1738).
- 29 Hecht, *ibid*, p. 140.

- 30 Ibid, p. 207.
- 31 Kinsley, *ibid*, vol. II, p. 706.
- 32 Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, edited by James Barke and Sydney Goodsir Smith (London, 1965), p. 97.
- 33 In *Archiv für das Studium der neuen Sprachen und Literaturen*, CXXIX (1912-1913). Quoted in Legman, *Merry Muses*, *ibid*, p. 197.
- 34 Gershon Legman, *The Horn Book* (London, 1970), pp 134-35. Legman discovered the Cunningham manuscript in the British Library in 1959. Another song found in the *Merry Muses*, *The Whirlie Wha*, appears in this manuscript in a shorter version, and also in the *Secret Songs*.
- 35 Anon, *Forbidden Fruit* (Glasgow, ND), pp 98-99.
- 36 "Davie took me to the glen,/ And he took out his writing pen,/ And in my arse he signed his name,/ You're aye my Dainty Davie." *ibid*, p. 38.
- 37 Gershon Legman (ed.), *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, (New York, 1960), p. 229.
- 38 Herd, *ibid*, vol. II, p. 208.
- 39 *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display'd*, *ibid*, p. 134.
- 40 In *Kryptadia*, vol 10 (Paris, 1907), 295-367.
- 41 One song which is rather tangential to the argument but worth mentioning is *Maggy Lauder*. Burns testified to the popularity of the common version of this song which collectors, with the exception of Robert Chambers, have generally attributed to Francis Semple, of the poetical Semple family of Belltrees, near Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire, who produced several lyrics in the middle of the seventeenth century. In that version the eponymous heroine is metaphorically seduced by the tuneful chanter of her suitor, Rob the Ranter; here, in Buchan's version, she is led a merry dance of a less euphemistic sort by her 'merry shaver'. It is doubtful if this song is antecedent to the popular version which can be found in almost every

nineteenth-century songbook and which the collector Maidment noted as a broadsheet hawked around the streets of Glasgow at the beginning of the century. It has been suggested that the original of this song is Irish - *Maggy Laird* (strong or powerful Maggy).

- 42 Barke and Goodsir Smith, *Merry Muses*, *ibid*, p. 126.
- 43 Hecht, *ibid*, p. 208.
- 44 Hogg and Motherwell, *ibid*, vol. II, p. 211.
- 45 Legman, *Merry Muses*, *ibid*, p. 243.
- 46 Hogg and Motherwell, *ibid*, vol. III, p. 211.
- 47 MSS ADD 29.409, pp 381-83
- 48 Kinsley, *ibid*, vol. II, p. 664.
- 49 William Stenhouse, *The Scots Musical Museum* (Hatsboro, Penn., 1962), first published 1853, p. 50. The *Musical Museum* also records an extended version of the song apparently penned by William Reid, a Glasgow bookseller, which begins: "At gloamin, if my lane I be,/ Oh, but I'm wondrous eerie, O;/ And mony a heavy sigh I gie,/ When absent frae my dearie, O:/ But, seated 'neath the milk-white thorn,/ in e'ening fair and clearie, O;/ Enraptur'd, a' my cares I scorn,/ Whan wi' my kind dearie, O." This clearly shows the potential of the song to be adapted to the sentimental tradition which probably ensured its popularity in Victorian times. The tune certainly seemed to be adapted by every amateur rhymester of the nineteenth century including Buchan. See, for example, Gardner's *The Songs of Scotland* (Paisley, 1888).
- 50 Barke and Goodsir Smith, *Merry Muses*, *ibid*, p. 132.
- 51 James Oswald, *Caledonian Pocket Companion* (London, 1742-49), vol. VIII, p. 20.
- 52 Stenhouse, *ibid*, p. 53.
- 53 See Matthew P McDiarmid (ed.), *The Poems of Robert Fergusson* (Edinburgh, 1986), vol. 2, p.272.

- 54 Alexander B Grosart, *The Works of Robert Fergusson* (Edinburgh, 1879), p. 63.
- 55 Hecht, *ibid*, pp 100-101. The reference is MS I, 128b, II, 67a; the chorus in C.E. III, 479., but there is also a second version collected by Herd as a fragment of four lines which appears in the manuscripts but is not written in Herd's hand: Hans Hecht, *ibid*, p. 101. The reference is MS I, 60a, II, 51b; the chorus in C.E. III, 498. The Herd version was actually known to Buchan and can be found in *Ancient Ballads*, p. 105.
- 56 Legman, *Merry Muses*, *ibid*, p. 211.
- 57 Hogg and Motherwell, *ibid*, vol. III, pp 53-54.
- 58 Hecht, *ibid*, p.282.
- 59 See *The Renfrewshire Magazine* (December, 1846), p. 122.

SONGS OF SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS

In previous chapters we have looked at songs from the Buchan manuscripts that are of peculiar interest because of their unusual nature or their relative scarcity as texts in the printed tradition. The most notable feature of the *Secret Songs* manuscript, however, is that the majority of songs included are of an explicitly sexual nature. They are of the type, in fact, that was comparatively rare because it was generally expunged from printed collections. In this way the collection brooks comparison with Burns's *Merry Muses* as an important early corpus of bawdry and sexual folksong. Two categories of such

songs are of particular interest. Firstly, metaphoric sexual songs, of which there are several examples, and, secondly, songs dealing with adultery, which are particularly well represented in the *Secret Songs* and which are unique in that they are often genuine song versions of tales best known in prose versions - in some cases in early jestbook form or, notably, as related by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*. This locates them in a more general European rather than local or national context. There are, in fact, too many of these songs, and their provenance is so complex, that it is not possible to discuss them all in sufficient detail here. However, some examples of songs in both categories are worth citing.

Of the various versions of metaphoric sexual songs in the collection, some of which, like *My Apron Deary*, we have already seen, and songs not exclusively metaphoric but partially employing sexual metaphors (a substantial amount of the collection), two examples may suffice to give an idea of the variety of such types. The first, *The Weaver and his Shuttle* develops a fairly obvious sexual metaphor in a humorous fashion:¹

On a bank o' broom I plac'd my loom,
Where primroses were springing, O;
My rural choice made birds to rise,
And set them all a singing, O.

I hung my claes to work at ease,
And kept a firm treadle, O,
An' sune I drew twelve good long bores,
Before I broke a treadle, O.

My treadle pin I fired in,
But all things in good order, O;
At every shot a double rook,
Until I wrought her border, O...

Martha Vicinus, in *The Industrial Muse*² discusses one such example entitled *The Bury New Loom* which is fairly similar to Buchan's song in effect, although the long complex lines suggest that this piece is not really from the singing tradition. In fact, such elaborate metaphoric excesses were popular as broadsheet ballads during the golden age of handloom weaving:

I said: My dear lassie, believe me, I am
a good joiner by trade,
And many a good loom and shuttle before
me in my time I have made.
Your short lam and jacks and long lams I
quickly can put in tune.
My rule is in good order to get up and
square a new loom.

She took me and showed me her loom, the
down on her warp did appear.
The lams, jacks and healds put it motion,
I levelled her loom to a hair.
My shuttle run well in her lathe, my
treadle it worked up and down...

Vicinus comments on this song:

(it) combines highly specific details with complete impersonality, partially because it deals with sexual intercourse and not individuals, but also because the writer speaks in complete confidence that his audience will understand the world he describes, and the nature of the symbols used. There is no distance between them and the poem since it is based on their own knowledge of the harmonious movement of an intricate machine as representative of the most important human actions... The richness of the weaving community life can be seen in its contribution to the creative imagination of both poet and reader; only a deeply felt and understood vocation can be seen in its contribution to the creative imagination of both poet and reader... The weaver and joiner are part of a society in which their identity and actions are furnished by the machinery that is central to their respective vocations. Their energy does not go into acquiring each other or material goods, but into enjoying each

other...

She also compares this with a later song, *The Steam Loom Weaver*, in which the metaphor has developed to encompass the era of factory production (as opposed to cottage industry) and concludes: "the richness and subtlety of the earlier song have been reduced to a simple use of vocational names. The commonplace is defined in and of itself." Buchan's version, it would seem, with its rural references and simple style, belongs to the earlier tradition and is a prime example of songs of this type. This is illuminating in itself, for, despite the fact that Buchan was collecting during a period of industrial expansion, and did much of his work, after leaving Peterhead, in industrial cities, there is little evidence in any of his manuscripts of a growing body of industrial folksong. The sexual songs in the *Secret Songs* are often of proven antiquity and rural rather than urban provenance. Buchan's work generally can be said to come from the old order and it also, notably, eschews a later sentimental tradition - as is apparent in the contrast between, for example, the work of Buchan and of his sons. This can be seen in another classic example of a metaphoric song -

The Bedmaking:

My father he fee'd me far, far, frae hame,
Till a very kind master, and I a dainty dame,
But my mistress and I cou'd nae ways agree,
Twas a' for the love my master had for me.

My mistress she sent me up to the laft,
Twas to make the men's bed, baith fine and saft,
My master he followed, and gae to me a ring,
And bade me remember the bed-making.

My mistress she followed hard at the back,
I kenna what she thought, but naething she spake,
I kenna what she thought, but to me said naething,
But hurried me down frae the bed-making.

She hunted me baith frae the kitchen and ha',
And syne thro' the parlour, amo' the ladies a',
They asked me the matter, and how it had been,
And I told them I was at the bed-making.

My mistress she turned me out of the door,
Calling me many strumpet and whore,
My sheen were so thin that I foot I cou'dna rin,
And it's made me remember the bed-making.

Sae a' ye young maids, take a warning by me,
And never make the men's bed when ye canno see,
For I made the beds when I cou'dna see to spin,
And I got a bonny boy at the bed-making.

Again, this is a song quite common in the southern
English singing tradition (recorded by Hammond and

Gardiner among others) that demonstrates the quality of some of the texts from this paradigm collected by Buchan. The most significant work undertaken on sexual folksongs recently has been a detailed study by Roger Renwick³. Renwick further subdivides the category of the metaphoric sexual song into three groups - symbolic, euphemistic, and metaphoric - with the metaphoric category only referring to the more blatant metaphoric type, where the metaphor is consciously constructed or imposed on the order of the song text, such as, for example, the weaving metaphor in the texts we have looked at. The symbolic group, according to Renwick, are more enigmatic, associating traditional symbols, or motifs, with the act of sexual intercourse, whereas the euphemistic model employs the idea of the structures of everyday speech to refer euphemistically to sexual content. With this in mind it can be seen that the majority of Buchan's songs in the *Secret Songs*, such as *The Silent Flute* and *The Weaver and his Shuttle*, fit into the metaphoric category, whereas some, such as *The Bedmaking* or *My Apron, Deary*, may be said to fit into the euphemistic category. Very few seem to belong to the symbolic category, although there are songs in the ballad manuscripts of this type.

It seems, therefore, that Buchan's categorisation of sexual, or 'amatory' songs consists of the more specific, rather than the tacit, model of sexual liaisons.

With regard to the tales of adultery collected by Buchan, we have already discussed four - *The Lancashire Farmer*, *The Farmer and Lace Merchant*, *The Dyer of Roan*, and *Dickie Melvin*, all of which can be seen to have a long pedigree. Two other interesting texts that bear comparison are concerned with millers, a profession traditionally, for their sins, associated with lasciviousness. One of these is *The Cuckold*, which is a nice example of a coherent longer version of a fairly standard traditional song:

Hark and yese hear, and a story I'll tell,
Concerning a millar that liv'd at a mill,
He was as good a millar as ever pick'd a stone,
But yet he never cou'd be content with his own.

But it fell on a time, and as it happen'd so,
A pretty, pretty fairmaid to the mill did go,
To grind for her father, a bushel of his corn,
Which made the millar's heart fu' glad, and for to burn.

He stepped up to her and these words he said, -
This night ye must lie with me, ye fair maid,

I hae to myself sworn, and it shall be so,
Then it is in vain to answer me no.

When he brought her home, he to his wife said,
O ye will kind to this pretty fairmaid,
When ye make her bed in the parlour below,
For she is a farmer's young daughter, you know.

The girl stept aside, and to his wife said,
I winna sleep in your parlour's good bed,
Your husband has sworn by my life this night,
That surely he is to bereave you of your right.

Then she lay herself down on her parlour bed,
And he kiss'd his own wife in the girl's stead;
But now of his thoughts he was almost wild,
For fear that he had got this fairmaid with child.

He call'd his man Jack, now I have a ram,
And to you I will give him for the same,
Then says the millar, the ram shall be mine,
And this pretty fairmaid she shall be thine.

Then he's done him down to the parlour bed;
And kissed his mistress in the girl's stead,
But little, alas! did the millar know,
That this pretty maid would have tricked him so.

Then early next morning as the sun up rose,
This pretty fairmaid to the mill-lead she goes,
And there she got herself and horse ready
And her corn ground mill and multure free.

Good morrow pretty maid, and how do you do?
And how did your last night's quarters please you?
You very willing to me did comply,

When I unto came so privately.

But I didna sleep in your parlour bed,
Ye kissed your ain wife in my stead,
O diel, said the millar, if that be true,
For my man Jack he has kissed her too.

Now, now says Jack, I will have my ram,
For I didna bargain to lye with your dame,
O said the millar, the ram shall be thine,
And the horns of him ever after be mine.

How foolish, how foolish, a poor stupid ass,
That didna ken my wife frae a bonny lass,
But since it is so, I must be content,
For I'm made a cuckold by my own consent.

The fairmaid she's done her home, and she sang,
How she beguiled the millar and his man;
And if ye wont believe me, ye may go and see,
I've got my corn ground mill and multure free.

The miller, recognising himself for a cuckold, awards himself the horns of the ram.⁴ "Mill and multure free" relates in this case to the usual miller's fee, inappropriate on this occasion.⁵ In the second song, *The Horned Millar*, however, the common tradition of the lascivious miller is reversed. The miller is cuckolded by his wife but accidentally obtains the lover's trousers with their pockets full of money. This version is set in the vicinity of Edinburgh, as Buchan's first

verse makes clear:

In Cannymills there liv'd a millar,
Who lately came by a purse o' siller,
But how it was, I'll plainly tell you,
But wou'na wish the same befall you,
 O poor forsaken millar,
 O poor millar, O.

In fact, a very similar version can be found as a broadsheet cited by Holloway and Black⁶, with the attribution to Canonmills, but with sufficient differences to suggest that there may have been a degree of oral transmission.

The Cuckold, however, is a variant on a very old folktale type, with a motif recorded by Aarne/Thomson as K1544 - Husband unwittingly instrumental in wife's adultery (usually shares his bedmate with other, not knowing that she is his wife), which also features in another interesting song in *Secret Songs - The Yorkshire Tale* (this can also be found in Farmer and Watt). In fact, this general theme of ploy and counter ploy and, especially, mistaken identity, is a very common type that appears in many early collections of tales such as the *Decameron*, the *Heptameron*, and *Cent Nouvelle Nouvelles*. Similarly, Buchan

also collected a song called *The London Prentice*, which is not the usual ballad called by this name (better known as *Blow the Candle Out*) but a version of a song sometimes known as *Bow Bells*, after an obvious metaphor for sexual intercourse:

As they were playing at the game,
Bow-bells did sweetly ring;
She said to him, methinks, to me,
It is a pleasant thing.

In this song the eponymous prentice disguises himself as a gentleman and sleeps with his master's spouse who, for recreation, is employing herself at a house of ill repute. This song had some popularity in England last century and was collected by Vaughan Williams and others.

Four other songs from *Secret Songs*, however, are of interest, as they are all versions of established folktale types that are also found in the *Decameron*. *Fun Upon Fun* is a fairly common type (noted as AT 1441 and motif K1223 - Mistress deceives lover with a substitute) in which the lover is replaced by a dark-skinned woman to deceive the adulterer, and features in the *Decameron* (VIII, no. 4), and another Buchan song, *The Sailor's Frolic* (again not the same as the

song collected commonly in southern England with that title) features in the *Decameron* (VIII, no. 8) with the relevant motif Ki566 - Cuckolded man shuts wife's paramour in chest and he's on chest with latter's wife. Of more interest, however, are two songs based on motif K1423 - The enchanted pear tree, which has an established provenance, and featured both in the *Decameron* (IX, no. 9) and in Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*. The basis of this is that the cuckold sees his wife's adultery from a perch on a tree, but is persuaded that the tree is enchanted or that it has effected his sight in some way. The first of these songs, *The Absent Farmer*, is fragmentary, but the second, *The Pretty Chamber Maid*, has the gist of the story:

Not far from town a country squire,
An open hearted blade,
Had long conceiv'd a strong desire,
To kiss his chamber maid.
One summer's eve, quite full of glee,
He took her to the shade,
And underneath a mulberry tree,
He kiss'd his chamber maid.

The parson's wife, from window high,
The am'rous pair survey'd;
And strongly wish'd none can deny,
She'd been the chamber maid.
The sport being o'er, poor Betty cried,

Dear Sir, I'm much afraid,
That woman there will tell your spouse,
That you have kiss'd her maid.

A likely thought the squire conceiv'd,
That she should not upbraid,
And instantly his spouse he brought,
Where he had kiss'd his maid.
There underneath the mulberry tree,
Her ladyship he laid;
And there most sweetly kiss'd was she,
Just like the chamber maid.

Next morning came the parson's wife,
(For scandal was her trade;)
I saw your spouse, Ma'am, on my life,
Great with your chamber maid.
When, where, and how ? the lady cried,
I'll straight discharge the jade;
Twas underneath the mulberry tree,
He kiss'd your chamber maid.

This scandal, cried her ladyship,
Shall not my spouse degrade;
Twas I myself that made a slip,
And not my chamber maid.
Both parties parted in a pet,
Believing nought was said,
And Betsy keeps her place as yet,
The pretty chamber maid.

This is an interesting and fairly ingenious version of an international folktale type⁷ which further testifies to the widespread nature of the

collected texts. Obviously, these interesting versions of tales of adultery merit further study, but I have referred to them here primarily to make the point that one of the most important features of the *Secret Songs* is the diversity and the international aspect of its contents. In this way, it is substantially different in many ways from Burns's *Merry Muses*. Especially interesting, also, is the fact that several tales of adultery can be found in one collection all centring round the popular theme of adultery as a game with its own internal structure and rules, with scant regard for the moral or ethical aspects of this pursuit, nor, indeed, for the notion of sexual pleasure - as the true fulfilment comes not from the sex act itself but from successfully cuckolding the husband (or from catching out the cuckold or the wife - that is, succeeding within the rules of the game.) This is why, surprisingly perhaps in view of the chronological and geographical gap, Buchan's songs have much the same tone and note of frivolity as the tales in the *Decameron*.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note the various fates that befall the cuckold or the lover within this corpus of songs, from being totally

humiliated to gaining successful revenge on the cuckold. Taking some examples from *Secret Songs*, we can list these in the form of a progression:

The Cuckold	husband cuckolds himself
The Pretty Chamber Maid	lover deceives wife
Fun Upon Fun	lover deceived by substitute
The Lancashire Farmer	lover stuck to basin
The Horned Millar	lover loses money
The Farmer and Lace Merchant	lover robbed and given bastard child
The Dyer of Roan	lover dyed (stigmatised)
Dickie Melvin	lover castrated

As these examples make clear, there is usually (but not always) some sort of penalty to pay for the transgression, but the diversity of the different punishments suggest that the crux of these narrative types is not the imputed moral dilemma, but instead hinges on the ingenuity (or otherwise) of either the husband or the lover or, in some instances, the wife.

Finally, there are many other examples of fairly common (and some not so common) songs of sexual encounters in *Secret Songs* that deserve, if space

permitted, further scrutiny. Some of those that immediately spring to mind are *Clout the Caudron* (a common piece also found in the *Scots Musical Museum*), *The Merry Merchant*, and *The Wanton Trooper*. Rather than list these, however, it is, in conclusion, worth quoting in full a fine example of a popular and fairly common ballad that develops an unusual metaphor. This is *The Lady and Poor Pedlar*, which is, in fact, a version of a fairly widespread song in Scotland, which appears in the *Scots Musical Museum* as *The Poor Pedlar*:

Sweetly sang the nightingale,
And sweetly sang she, O;
But sweeter sang the proud pedlar,
As he walk'd o'er the lee, O.
Five hundred pounds into my pack,
Of goods and white morice, O;
And I wou'd give it all he said,
For a night of a gay lady, O.

A lady lay o'er castle wa',
Beholding dale and down, O;
And she beheld the proud pedlar,
Come singing thro' the town, O.
Sing on, sing on, ye proud pedlar,
The sang ye sung just now, O;
I never sung the sang, lady,
But I dunst well avow, O.

Five hundred pounds into my pack,
Of goods and white morice, O;

And I wou'd give it all this day,
For a night of a gay lady, O.
O where are all my servant maids,
That I pay sweat and fee, O,
Go open the yetts, pretty Betsy, she said,
Let the pedlar into me, O.

She's taen him by the milk white hand,
And led him up the stair, O;
Then brought him to her ain chamber,
Where a well made bed was there, O.
He lay there the live lang night,
Until the break of day, O,
And turn'd him till her little wee pack,
When he thought o' going away, O.

She's taen the pack into her arms,
And diddled it on her knee, O;
Were it worth as much, and thrice as much,
Ye'd not hae a single bawbie, O.
He stood mourning at the yetts,
That makes such noise and din, O.
Till her good lord came hame, O;
Says - who is that stands at my yetts,
That makes such noise and din, O.

O pity, O pity, kind sir, he said,
If any grace can be, O;
O hae some pity, my lord, he said,
On a poor pedlar, like me, O.
I hae travelled along this way,
Wi' other pedlars nine, O;
We kist the cavels us among,
Who'd gie the rest their dine, O.

The cavels gied up, the cavels gied down,

And the cavels fell on me, O;
But I hadna mortar to grind my spice,
Till I borrowed it frae your lady, O.
I borrowed your lady's spice mortar,
The pistol it was my own, O;
Now she's kept my plack in pledge of that,
I wadna the truth were known, O.

He put his hand in his pocket,
And gae her guineas nine, O;
O take you this, my jewel, he said,
It will buy you jewels five, O.
Ye'll gie the pedlar's pack again,
His pack and his pack-pan, O;
Never be too hard for a poor man,
That has his bread to win, O.

She's taen his pack into her arms,
And kist it o'er the wa', O;
And lightly leuch the proud pedlar,
My pack has gotten a fa', O.
I'll tak my pack upon my back,
And I'll sing thro' the town, O;
That I hae cheated a gay lady,
Though my name's but Jamie Brown, O.

Songs such as these, preserved by Buchan in his manuscripts although not employed by Child in his collection of classic ballads, demonstrate the importance of more fully investigating Buchan's extensive contribution to folksong collecting and especially to the neglected area of sexual folksong.

references

- 1 This compares with *Will Ye Lend Me Your Loom, Lass*, also found in both the *Secret Songs* and Buchan's ballad manuscript - "I've lent my loom to nine or ten,/ They were a' uncanny men,/ The hindmost o' them brake his pen,/ The first time he wan in, O".
- 2 Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London, 1974), pp 40-41.
- 3 Roger DeV Renwick, *English Folk Poetry* (London, 1980).
- 4 That the cuckold would "wear the horns" is traditional in popular lore. One explanation of the term is given in Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* - "In the rutting season the stags associate with the fawns: one stag selects several females, who constitute his harem, until another stag comes along who contests the prize with him. If beaten in the contest, he yields up his harem to the victor and is without associates until he finds a stag feebler than himself, who is made to submit to similar terms. As stags are horned, and made cuckolds of their fellows, the application is palpable.
- 5 Compare *The Maid Gaed Tae the Mill*, in Herd's *Scottish Songs*. As in the words of the song - "I am a miller tae my trade,/ And many's the bonny lass I've laid." - the lasciviousness of the miller is emphasised, and leads, in fact, to his own downfall. Part of the tradition of the secret society of the Miller's Word was that the miller possessed the ability to charm maidens to obtain their sexual favours.
- 6 John Holloway and Joan Black, *Later English Broadside Ballads* (London, 1975), pp 111-113.
- 7 See Aleksandr Afanasyev, *Russian Secret Tales* (New York, 1966), pp 54-56. Another song in *Secret Songs* that features the idea of voyeurism (again from a tree top) is *The*

Wanton Virgins Frightened. This song seems to have been a popular broadside ballad in the eighteenth century and can be found in almost identical form in *D'Urfey* and *Farmer*. Claude Simpson, in *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music* (New Brunswick, 1972), pp. 422-423, traces a similar piece to the seventeenth century: "D'Urfey's poem was itself a reworking of an older piece, found in *Westminster Drollery*, 1672, II, 100, as 'The Bathing Girls... To the common Galliard Tune', beginning 'It was in June, and 'twas on Barnaby Bright too'." *Walsh and Tillinghast* list it as a broadside ballad inscribed "London, Aldemay Church Yard" entitled *The wanton virgins frightened, with the spy's downfall from the tree-top to the pond bottom; or, The old man strangely surprised and bugbear'd.*

CONCLUSION

There is no need to emphasise the importance of Buchan's contribution to the history of ballad-collecting more than I have already attempted to do. The pre-eminence of his ballad texts in the Child canon and the quality of those individual texts is sufficient testimony to that. Instead, in this short chapter I would like to offer some further conclusions on aspects of Buchan's work that have been largely ignored, and suggest some further research opportunities in this area.

There is no doubt, of course, that the texts

employed by Child are of prime importance, but there is also a fashion in which Child served the unfortunate function of defining the canon of the traditional ballad too stringently and at too early a date. This sort of hegemonic influence of the Child texts, of course, affects the work of all the ballad collectors and also applies to Buchan. There is no doubt that there are several longer narrative songs in the Buchan manuscripts that have not been privileged to appear in Child but have especial interest in their own right. Similarly, there are many texts excluded from Buchan's published work because of the taste of the time that deserve further study - most notably the songs from *Secret Songs of Silence*.

To give a suitable example, one of the songs collected in the *Secret Songs* which has survived in the popular tradition to this day is *The Minister's Maid's Courtship*:

When I was a bonny wee lassie,
I liv'd by yon river side,
A bonny wee laddie courted me,
For to make me his bride.
My master being one of the
clergy,
I kentna well how to do;
But I courted aye wi' my

laddie,
And pleas'd the minister too.

We waited a' opportunities,
Aye when they were frae hame,
We kissed and clapped each
other,
Sae merry as we were then,
Sa merry as we were then,
Our vows for to renew;
So aye I courted my laddie,
And pleas'd the minister too.

It was on a fine summer
evening,
I went out to meet wi' my lad,
He took me into his arms,
Our hearts being wond'rous
glad!
Oh! I maun own my crime, Sir,
Tho' it be to my shame and
disgrace.
And what came o' me then,
Ye needna believe me now;
But aye I courted my laddie,
And pleas'd the minister too.

When I came hame to my
mistress,
She scolded and she flet;
Says, where hae ye been
walking,
That ye hae stayed sae late?
That ye hae stayed sae late,
Your master I will tell;
Thinks I, madam, ye needna

fash,
For I'll hae that to do mysell.

But I keep it aye up my
courage,
And made nae muckle din,
And my laddie came aye and saw
me,
Aye as he gied out and in,
Aye he pried mou';
So aye I courted my laddie,
And pleased the minister too.

But when the summer was over,
O pale and wan grew I;
Like ane risen out o' a fever,
Or ane just like to die!
My master he came and ask'd me,
What was the matter wi' me?
If I knew any thing that wou'd
ease me,
At my command it shou'd be.
I went out for to meet wi' the
lad,
The lad that gaes out wi' your
mass,
His voice it was too shrill,
He pitched o'er high for me,
And aye sinsyne I remember,
That I've been liking to die.

Then my laddie was sent for,
And he came hinging his mou';
Says, Mess John, had ye been a
gude bairn,
We wou'dna hae sent for you.

My lassie is lying sick,
And on you she lays all the
blame,
And ye ken ony way ye hae
wrang'd her,
Ye'll raise her up again.

O I never harm'd your lassie,
Neither by night nor by day;
But it was on a fine summer
evening,
When crossing over the way.
When crossing over the way,
I learn'd her how to sing,
And pitched the high notes o'
Bangour,
Has driven her out o' tune.

Be pleas'd to marry your
lassie,
O marry your lassie to me;
For I am resolved to hae her,
Whether she live or die.
Whether she live or die,
To make her my wedded wife,
So I will live wi' my lassie,
A sweet and contented life.

This pleasant song, better known after the unusual metaphor for sexual intercourse only noted in the penultimate stanza here as *The High Notes of Bangour*, has remained in the popular oral tradition of the north-east to this day. A

notable version was sung by the late Willie Mathieson of Ellon and preserved in his extensive notebook of songs, a copy of which is now in the possession of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. In fact, also preserved in the Mathieson songbook - which is as good an indication of the repertoire of a typical singer from the North-East tradition in this century - are several other songs collected by Buchan in the *Secret Songs* - such as *The Soutters'' Feast* and *The Parson's Fat Wedder* - also known from the version collected from the great ballad singer, Jeannie Robertson. Another song collected in recent times from Jeannie Robertson is also recorded in the *Secret Songs* under the seemingly unpromising title of *Hitum Titum* and begins:

As I walked down and farther down,
There I spied a wonder,
There I met a bonny lass,
But she was straiten'd under.

Sing - Hittum, tittum, tadium,
My hittum, tittum, tirie,
My hittum, tittum, tadium,
Sing - fal di dal di dearie.

It continues with a metaphor that is more clinical than sensual and ends with the typical rejoinder of the folksong sot:

He turn'd her ower upon her back,
And he applied a plaister,
Then turn'd her on the other side,
Sae nicely as he drest her.

When that she got up again,
She was sae merry hearted,
She jumped out ower three threaves o'
bear,
And hauf a stook to part it.

Fair fa' the man that got the son,
Fair fa' the wife that bear him,
He's eas'd me sae o' a' my pain,
That I can rin my errant.

First whan I came to the toun,
I cou'dna step a strae bed,
But now my thighs are grown sae wide,
I jump but ower hale threaves o't.

But I wou'dna that my minny kent,
That I was at the tavern,
I wou'd get cow the orratie,
For drinking o' my apron.

I drank my hose, I drank my sheen,
I drank my silken garter,
I drank my smock below my coat,
And syne I drank my apron.

Despite the rather rough and ready transcriptions of these songs, the idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation, and the occasional unfelicitous addition, it is fair enough to say that some of Buchan's texts, with their exuberant and colourful language, are closer to actual sung versions of the songs than any in the collections of most of his contemporaries.

One thing that is notable, however, about the *Secret Songs* collection, is its variety. This makes the classification of the songs difficult. Klaus Roth,¹ for example, employs a two-level system of categorisation:

I. LOVE SONGS (Liebeslieder)

a) Courtship and Seduction
(Liebeswerbung und Verführung)

Maggy Lauder
Dainty Davie
The Weaver and his Shuttle
Row'd a' Together
Hittum, Tittum
The Landry Maiden
The Astrologer
The Bed-making
The Sodgers of Edinburgh
The Lang Girdin' O't

Wattie and Jeannie
The Bonny Lad
Damon and Coila
John and Susan
My Apron, Deary
The Silent Flute
The Bashful Maid
The Double Entendre
The Gown of Green
The Minister's Maid's Courtship
The Mill, Mill O
The Lee Rig

b) Sexual Prowess
(Sexuelle Überlegenheit und
Prahlerie)

Johnny McBey
Whistle O'er the Lave O't
Will ye lend me your loom, lass?
The Young Dairymaid

c) Sexual Inferiority
(Sexuelle Unterlegenheit und
Schwache)

The Wanton Trooper
Slow Willie Stenson
The Dusty Wife's Daughter
Kist Yestreen
The Bridegroom Grat
Slow Men of London

d) Love Lyrics
(Liebeslyrik)

The Protestation
Cleon and Sylvia
The Cordial
The Gallant Schemer's Petition

e) Humorous Love Songs
(Liebesscherz)

Pope Joan's Kissing Dance

II. JOCULAR SONGS (Scherzlieder)

a) Humorous Songs
(Scherzhafte Lieder)

The Soutters' Feast
The Soutter o' New Deer
The Haggis o' Dunbar
The Merry Merchant
Gibbie Brown
Gossip John
The Happy Beggar Wenches

b) Obscene Humorous Songs
(Obszöne Scherzlieder)

The Duke's Daughter
The Fartoturdoniad

III. Schwank Ballads (Schwankballaden)

a) Ballads of Adultery
(Ehebruchschwank)

Clout the Caudron
The Lancashire Farmer
The Horned Millar
The Cuckold
Johnny Cowper
The Lady and Poor Pedlar
Dickie Melvin
The Irishman and Cobler
The Dyer of Roan
A Yorkshire Tale
The London Prentice
The Sailor's Frolic
The Farmer and Lace Merchant
The Pretty Chamber Maid
The Parson's Fat Wedder
The Absent Farmer

b) Courtship and Seduction
(Werbung und Verführung)

The Tailor's Courtship
The Whirley Wha
The Friar and Maid
The Penitent Nun
Fun Upon Fun

c) Foolish Actions
(Dummes Handeln)

John Edward
The Crab Fish
The Wanton Virgins Frightened

d) Clever Actions
(Kluges Handeln)

The Tailor's Mistake
The Baker o' the Town o' Ayr
The Lasses of Kinghorn
The Diel and the Feathery Wife
Hay of Ranna's Lament
Preston Peggie

This Germanic *volkskunde* approach has the advantage of clearly classifying the songs both according to their content (as in the songs of adultery) and according to their form (narrative ballads as opposed to lyric songs) but it also has the disadvantage of failing to differentiate between the rather uninspired 'art' songs and the more resilient texts that have actually survived in the sung tradition (for example, *The Silent Flute* and *The Minister's Maid's Courtship* both fall into the first category, although they have very little in common). A more simplistic, but useful, approach to categorisation for an edition of the songs might be more clearly based on the categories I have attempted to employ in this

thesis for the comparative analysis of some song
texts:

STRANGE TALES

The Baker o' the Town o' Ayr
The Deil and the Feathery Wife
The Lancashire Farmer
Dickie Melvin
The Dyer of Roan
The Tailor's Mistake
The Parson's Fat Wedder
John Edward
The Farmer and Lace Merchant
The Bashful Maid
The Soutter o' New Deer
The Soutter's Feast
The Haggis of Dunbar
The Crab Fish
The Duke's Daughter
The Bridegroom Grat

SONGS OF SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS

The Cuckold
The Absent Farmer
Gossip John
Johnny Cowper
The Sodgers of Edinburgh
The Wanton Trooper
Hay of Ranna's Lament
Preston Peggy
A Yorkshire Tale
The London Prentice
The Sailor's Frolic

Fun Upon Fun
The Pretty Chambermaid
The Dust Wife's Daughter
The Landry Maiden
The Astrologer
The Bed Making
The Merry Merchant
The Lady and Poor Pedlar
Wattie and Jeanie
Row's a Together
The Tailor's Courtship
The Bonny Lad
The Wanton Virgins Frightened

METAPHORIC LOVE SONGS

The Minister's Maid's Courtship
Johnny McBey
Clout the Caudron
Whistle O'er the Lave O't
Hitum Titum
The Young Dairymaid
Will ye lend me your loom, lass?
The Gown o' Green
Slow Willie Stenson
Slow Men of London
My Apron Deary
The Weaver and his Shuttle, O

BURNS SONGS

The Lee Rig
The Mill, Mill, O
The Lang Girdin' O't
Dainty Davie
Maggy Lauder

Kist Yestreen
The Whirley Wha

'ART' SONGS

The Silent Flute
The Double Entendre
The Cordial
The Happy Beggar Wenches
The Irishman and Cobler
John and Susan
The Friar and the Maid
The Penitent Nun
Cleon and Sylvia
Damon and Colia
The Gallant Schemer's Petition
Pope Joan's Kissing Dance
The Protestation
The Lasses of Kinghorn
Gibby Brown
The Fartoturdoniad

The variety of the texts in *Secret Songs* is also apparent in terms of their geographical location. Several are set in Aberdeenshire - Peterhead, New Deer, Littermill, Kincaddie, Strachen, Rathen, Mormond and Benachie are all mentioned (although most of these are mentioned in one song).² Some mention other locations in Scotland - Edinburgh, Canonmills, Stockbridge, Perth, Dunbar, Kinghorn, Ayr - and others feature locations in England - London (six times), Lancashire, Yorkshire,

Preston, Salisbury, Brampton. It is also of interest to take a tally of the different professions featured:

doctor/ surgeon/ barber	6
servant girls	6
souter/ cobbler	5
brewer	4
(alehouses are mentioned times)	8
farmer	4
minister/ parson	4
friar/ priest/ abbot	4
soldier	4
sailor	3
tailor	3
miller	3
merchant	3
weaver	2
baker	2
tinker/ pedlar	2
astrologer/ fortune-teller	2
fisherman, midwife, dyer, waggoner, clerk, butcher, writer, porter, butler, ferryman, apprentice, laundry maid, dairymaid	1
each	

Servant girls are exactly matched (six each) by the Dukes and Lords who are invariably linked with them. The variety of professions, however, not only demonstrates a sort of folksong democracy

but, in many cases, serve a distinct purpose - to reinforce stereotypes or, as in the metaphoric songs, to employ the tools of a trade to promote sexual imagery.³

Bearing in mind the range and complex nature of the texts in the collection - and the sheer number of texts - a complete annotated edition of the *Secret Songs* would be a mammoth task, well outwith the remit of this thesis. However, a complete edition would require, in addition to the specific research on some folktale types and the relevance to Burns sources I have tried to cover, to draw comparisons with a variety of European sources (pace the schwank ballads and *Decameron* tales detailed by Roth and myself) including the French tradition of conte-en-vers, and to investigate the sexual songs in the Kinloch collection - described by Legman as *Burlesque and Jocular Songs* - in the Houghton Library - neither of which I have been able to do in sufficient detail. This would indeed be a worthwhile venture, as the *Secret Songs* is more extensive and varied than the *Merry Muses* - the only other major early collection of bawdry with oral credentials. It is true that the *Merry Muses* is a more considered and homogeneous piece of work which can be placed firmly within

the remit of Burns scholarship and clearly has a place within the established canon of Scottish literature and folklore, but the *Secret Songs*, despite its rough and ready nature is more various and, in many ways more curious and problematic than the earlier collection. Part of the reason for this is that Buchan refused to exercise 'discretion' - or even simply fussiness - in his collecting activities, despite the advice of most of his contemporaries. He collected wide and far - whatever he could, whenever he could - and the final extent of his work is quite remarkable. It was, however, circumstance as much as endeavour that ensured Buchan's place in the canon of the great collectors. He was fortunate to be the first to tap the rich vein of song in the north-east of Scotland, he was not too proud, despite his pretensions, to seek the tradition at its heart, amongst the farm workers, the itinerants, the common folk. He was a printer at the start of the great period of broadsheet literature, and, unlikely most of his contemporaries, he was far travelled and used his experience - as woeful as much of it was - to guide him in his endeavours. If the first two of these characteristics informed his collection of the classic ballads, the last two are definitely

apparent in the nature of the *Secret Songs*.

Lastly, one of the interesting features of the *Secret Songs* is their relationship to established folktale types - some constituting the only known version in verse or song of fairly well-established types (and, of course, there are the two important versions of conte-fables I have already discussed). The most notable versions of types recorded in Aarne/Thomson are as follows:

AT571A	The Lancashire Farmer
AT1091	The Diel and the Feathery Wife
AT1133	The Baker o' the Town o' Ayr
AT1360C	Dickie Melvin
AT1358C	Johnny Cowper
AT1419J	The Horned Miller
" "	The Absent Farmer
AT1420A	The Lady and Proud Pedlar
AT1441	The Cuckold
AT1423	The Pretty Chamber Maid
AT1735A	The Parson's Fat Wedder

Buchan, however, also collected many prose versions of traditional tales. In this thesis I have not had the opportunity to discuss Buchan's manuscript collection of folktales, preserved in the National Library of Scotland and which was published by the Buchan Field Club in 1908.⁴ This is an extremely interesting collection of

some of the best-known traditional story-types collected from the north-east. Apparently, Buchan began collecting prose tales in the North-East after his return from London, and he wrote to Motherwell on the 21st of November, 1827 from Peterhead: "I have since my return to this place, been collecting all the old and curious fabalous (sic) Scottish Tales, among the peasantry in Abdnshire, and for that purpose have sent my old man agoing and he is just now returned, laden with some very romantic ones. - What do you think of this, being the first ever attempted in Scotland". Clearly, then, most of the tales were collected or recited by James Rankine and Buchan seems aware of their novel quality. On the 23rd of November Motherwell replied with encouragement: "Your present labours in collecting the traditions of the north country I think will prove no less interesting but in my humble opinion will be more productive of cash than the ballads." The collection was collated by Buchan sometime in 1828 and he met Motherwell in Edinburgh sometime in January 1829 with the intention of receiving his opinion. However, for some reason Motherwell had to hurry off. He seems to have courted support for their publication from another source. On the 4th of February of that year he wrote to Charles

Kilpatrick Sharpe:

I have this day finished the volume of Tradition Scottish Tales, in the manner which you recommended, with a blank to every written page, for your Notes, etc. and hope it will meet with your approbation. This is the first attempt of the kind even made in Scotland whether it receive that encouragement from the public I could wish. I have said nothing by way of Notes to explain or illustrate them, of though much might be said on the antiquities, manners and superstitions of the ancient Scotch. They are now in the hands of a gentleman very well qualified to do them justice; and I trust he will do as he promised.

Buchan seems to have found the editing of the tales an extremely difficult task as he suggests in a letter to Motherwell: "The tales have cost me considerable trouble in copying, more particularly at the present time as I have been often indisposed. Indeed, I must say that I have not entered into the spirit of them with the same feeling and zeal as I did that of the Old Ballads, which has made the task the more irksome to me." However, he seems to have been enthused by Sharpe's promise, and about a month later wrote to Motherwell:

The Prose Tales, My very Dear Sir, were sent some weeks ago, to a much valued friend, Mr Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Edinh. He has proved himself worthy of the name. - When I had the honour of an interview with him last he made me promise to write a clean copy of all the Tales I possessed, and send him, as it was his intention to write an Introduction and Notes to them, and also to enrich them with characteristic designs etched by himself, afterwards to dispose of them to good account, and give me the whole proceeds. - What a friend! - Could you believe such another was in existence!

Buchan's faith was, however, unfortunately misplaced. In August, 1829 he wrote to Sharpe in dismay at having heard nothing of the manuscript in the several months since sending it. Later in the year, Motherwell contacted Sharpe with a request to see the manuscript. However, he had to report on the 19th of December, 1829, that he had had no reply. Buchan replied on the 2nd of February, 1830: "You mention of having written to Mr Sharpe for a look of the prose Tales; I wish you had seen them, as your opinion, and advice whether to go on in collecting, or dropping the concern altogether, would have gone a great way

with me in future. Mr Stevenson wrote me many months ago, saying he was to send me a remittance, and at the same time said that Mr Sharpe was to write me in November last, but I have heard from neither of them since, and know not what has become of the Tales, or if the idea of publishing them be dropped altogether." Clearly, Buchan's acquaintance with Sharpe and with Stevenson, the bookseller, had not served him particularly well on this occasion. His seemingly innocent query about the worth of continuing collecting was undoubtedly of great importance, as it seems that there was some cost involved in engaging the attention of Blind Jamie or other collectors, and with no remuneration appearing, and Buchan's financial position continually slipping towards the edge, this was of prime concern. Sharpe, however, seems to have escaped from his promise fairly easily and laid the responsibility on Motherwell as a letter from Buchan to him dated March 1831 seems to suggest. In December 1831, Buchan wrote to Motherwell - "I have long looked for the publication of the Ancient Tales. When are they to be printed?". It seems, however, that there was no ready market for such a collection at about that time (although they were to prove more popular later in the century) and that

Motherwell's earlier optimism was now on the wane - and he suggested as much in a letter to Buchan in January 1832:

The only reason for the non appearance of the Tales is the dulness of the book trade and the wish I have of adding a few more popular stories to the collection. Two new ones I have got and some others I am promised. At present it is almost out of the question to hope to get a publisher to undertake a work of any sort not political.

The prose tales were destined not to appear in Buchan's lifetime and, indeed, Buchan himself, in the face of his worsening financial position and also due to his growing interest in his other work and alternative plans to publish more ballads and also the *Secret Songs*, seems to have lost interest at this point.

The tales were eventually published by the Buchan Club, but did not receive notable critical praise. The probable reason that they have never attracted a great deal of scholarly attention is that Buchan chose to rewrite all the tales from the original transcriptions in his own inimitable style. Hamish Henderson demonstrates what they have lost

by comparing the language to more recent transcriptions from informants such as Belle Stewart and Duncan Williamson, collected by the School of Scottish Studies:

Buchan's tales are somewhat wooden anglicised recensions which reproduce neither the language nor the flavour of his originals; furthermore, the incidental trappings bear witness to the florid self-indulgent imagination of the editor... Nevertheless, Peter's collection does consist almost entirely of identifiable international folktales... and it is undoubtedly the first repository we have - and the only one until this century - of tales circulating in the Scots-speaking areas of the North-East.⁵

Clearly, Buchan had his faults - his oft-cited vanity was one, for example, but he was also an arch-conservative, constantly praising the system that so often dinged him down and sycophantic in his praise of those who despised him which did not serve him well. Perhaps his over-enthusiasm for his own poetic muse was a minor aberration (and how can one have anything but admiration for one who wrote so many books, on so many different subjects, when faced with such adversity) and, as posterity has shown, it was not a fault that notably afflicted his great work of ballad collecting. That it does, to an extent, spoil his collection of prose folktales is a small price to

pay. Others, at a later date, were to follow on from Chambers and Campbell in collecting prose narratives in the original language of their narration. Buchan's collection, as Henderson suggests, was an important early contribution that may have excited more interest if published during his lifetime. However, in this case, Peter can once again be excused.

references

- 1 Klaus Roth, "Peter Buchan's 'Secret Songs of Silence'", *Jahrbuch fur Volksliedforschung*, XVI (1971).
- 2 The song is *Gibbie Brown*, possibly written by Buchan.
- 3 In fact, all these metaphors are combined into one song - *The Tradesmen* from D'Urfey's collection.
- 4 Peter Buchan, *Ancient Scottish Tales* (Aberdeen, 1908).
- 5 Hamish Henderson, "At the Foot o' Yon Excellin' Brae", in *Scotland and the Lowland Tongue*, edited by J Derrick McClure (Aberdeen, 1983), pp 106-107.

Short Title Bibliography of Peter Buchan's Publications

The main sources for this bibliography are the following, although no one source is complete and the collation of all three reveals significant omissions:

1/ James Cameron, "A Bibliography of Peter Buchan's Publications", *Publications of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, vol. IV, part 1 (October, 1900), pp 105-121.

2/ John A Fairley, "Bibliography of the Works of Peter Buchan", *Transactions of the Buchan Field Club*, vol. VII (1905), pp 123-149.

3/ John A Fairley, "Bibliography (of Peter Buchan, etc.)", in William Walker, *Peter Buchan and Other Papers on Scottish and English Ballads and Songs* (Aberdeen, 1915), pp 127-158.

Of particular interest is item number 61 - *Man, Body, and Soul*. This work is described in the catalogue of Buchan's library thus: "Man, Body, and Soul, as he Was, as he Is, as he Will be, Including an Historical Account of the Creation of the World, and the Garden of Eden, &c... This work was written above a dozen of years ago, and submitted to several literary judges, amongst whom I may mention the late Dr. George Kerr, whose opinion I have in writing. There is a curious circumstance attends this MS. which will be explained satisfactorily at an after period. In the meantime, I may mention, that in sending it to Aberdeen (for I then sojourned in Peterhead,) the greater part of it was clandestinely copied, mangled, and afterwards published in a Fifteen Shillings volume, and notwithstanding its garbled state, went through two large impressions. For particular reasons I did not then expose the plagiarist, nor claim the merit of my own labours, but three months before *his* work, as he called it,

appeared, I showed the ORIGINAL Manuscript to at least a dozen or twenty highly respectable gentlemen in Edinburgh, and in Aberdeen, who will have no hesitation in coming forward when called upon, in affirmation of the above. The work (first ed.) he published anonymously, and of course under a different title." *Catalogue of the Private Library of Peter Buchan* (Aberdeen, 1837), p. 3. This would date the writing of this piece to around 1824, the year of the publication of Buchan's other major philosophical treatise, *Scriptural and Philosophical Arguments; Or, Cogent Proofs From Reason and Revelation That Brutes Have Souls*, item 41. It is, in fact, advertised in this work as "intended for publication by the same author/ EVIDENCE/ of/ the Creation of the World/ the Fall of Man/ Original Sin/ &c./ from Scripture and Heathen/ Testimony", and referred to in the text as "a work which the author intended to have published along with the present; but, for various causes, it has been laid aside for a little time". Despite this reference, however, it is not at all clear who the plagiarist referred to was or under what title the work was eventually published. The manuscript has never been found.

Item 32, Watt's *Vocabulary*, a school textbook for Latin, is also interesting, as only one copy is known to exist and it is not recorded originally by either Cameron or Fairley. Its discovery is, in fact, noted in *The Aberdeen Free Press* of 10th December, 1907, in an article entitled "Interesting Additions to Reference Library" - "... of the items just acquired by the Aberdeen Library one is referred to by the two detailed bibliographies above mentioned; another is referred to in one of them; while the third has not hitherto been known to exist as printed by Buchan. Of the first, "The Artless Muse", the British Museum, the Mitchell Library Glasgow, and the Advocates' Library have a copy; but of the third, the 'Vocabulary' by Watt, Buchan's edition, there is no other known copy... The second of the publications, also a 12mo, is "A Vocabulary, English and Latin; for the use of Schools. By Thomas Watt, A.M. A new edition: Corrected and Improved. Peterhead: Printed by P. Buchan, for G. Clark, Aberdeen; and Alex Sangster, Peterhead, 1824." This small work of 76 pages went through many editions in the course of the hundred years that elapsed between the first edition and Peter Buchan's edition as above, Watt being a well-

known grammarian whose Latin grammar was used often in preference to Ruddiman's. It was on a new edition of Watt's "Latin Grammar" that James Melvin, of the Aberdeen Grammar School, first tried his hand as an author, in 1822, two years before the first edition of his "Latin Exercises". Peter Buchan's edition of the "Vocabulary", as above said, has not hitherto been known."

It must also be noted, however, that all of Buchan's works, with the exception, perhaps, of the ballad collections, are very scarce and several may, in fact, only survive in one or two copies. In fact, Buchan himself makes mention of the scarcity of some of these imprints during his own lifetime in a letter to John Stevenson dated 23rd April, 1827 - "I am, however, sorry it is not in my power to send you all the different books you have mentioned, as several of them are now entirely out of print, and cannot be had for love or money". The particular works that he cites are items 1, 27, 29, 31 and 33. Fairley, in his article in the *Buchan Field Club*, *ibid*, also notes the scarcity of several works - notably, item 40, Anderson's *Charity to the Poor*, not known to exist until 1902, item 1, *The Recreation of Leisure*

Hours, of interest especially because it is illustrated with woodcuts by Bewick, item 37, *Witchcraft Detected and Prevented*, of which Fairley could only trace four copies despite the fact that it went to three editions and Buchan himself notes sending one hundred copies for sale to Stevenson in 1827, and items 5-18, *The Selector*, the only complete set of which Fairley noted as being in the possession of W L Taylor, the president of the Buchan Field Club - presumably the set now in the possession of the Aberdeen Public Library (it is described by Taylor in *Bibliography of Peterhead Periodical Literature* (privately printed from *Scottish Notes and Queries*, 1889), pp 1-2). However, because of their idiosyncratic nature, their local interest, and Buchan's important contribution to the history of printing, all of Buchan's works are now very collectable and often fetch high prices on the rare occasions they come up for sale. With this in mind I have attempted to construct a table indicating library holdings of copies. The libraries featuring in this are the libraries with the most substantial holdings of Buchan's works - the British Library, The National Library of Scotland, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow, The Aberdeen Public Library, the

Peterhead Public Library, and the Houghton Library, Harvard University. Some of the early works, however, some are, perhaps surprisingly, not represented in these major collections. Despite the scarcity of these works, however, one library, the Peterhead Public Library, still offers them on public loan.

I have also collated the known chapbooks printed by Buchan. There is evidence that for some time printing broadsheets, chapbooks and other ephemera was the 'bread-and-butter' work of the Auchmedden Press. It is likely that many others were produced but have not survived. Of those recorded, nos. 1-20 are bound together in one volume collected by George Gray of the University of Glasgow, nos. 17, 25, 26, and 34 are the property of the British Museum, and no. 33 is in Aberdeen University Library. Nos. 21-24 were collected by Fairley who was also in possession of duplicate copies of nos. 1, 2, 5, 6, 14, 15, and 18. It is probable that nos. 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 were also in the possession of Fairley when he composed his bibliography. Fairley also notes a collection of twenty-two chapbooks printed at Aberdeen and Peterhead in the *Sale Catalogue of the Library of*

Andrew Jervise, Esq., F.S.A. Some of Buchan's chapbooks may have been preserved in this volume but it has not been traced.

It is also worth noting that Fairley records five titles advertised by Buchan but never, apparently, published - *Evidences of the Creation of the World* (1824), *A Two Years' Residence in Aberdeen* (1833), *Tales of the Three Friars, etc* (1834), *North Country Minstrelsie, Ancient and Modern* (1834), *Ancient Scottish Tales and Ballads* (1840). It is unlikely that Buchan ever completed works under these specific titles but he probably incorporated material intended for these publications into other works. Another project that Buchan embarked upon but never completed, seemingly, was a dictionary of the Scots language, although a specimen page of this dictionary was recovered by Fairley and is now in the National Library.

Finally, major manuscript sources for Buchan's work are also briefly cited. Details of some of these can be found in H L D Ward, *Catalogue of the Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1883), and William Montgomerie, *Bibliography of Scottish Ballad*

Manuscripts, 1730-1825 (Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1954). Also of interest is a short article by William Macmath in *Publications of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, vol. 1 (1896).

a) Main Works

1. Peter Buchan, *The Recreation of Leisure Hours* (Edinburgh, 1814).
2. Alexander Leslie, *A Candid Statement of the Opinions held by Calvinists and Arminians, on the Doctrines of Election* (Peterhead, 1816).
3. Peter Buchan, *Letter Addressed to T. M. Author of a Letter Addressed to A Leslie* (Peterhead, 1816).
4. *Rules and Regulations of the Marischall Lodge of Gardeners of Peterhead* (Peterhead, 1816).
- 5 to 18. *The Selector*, Nos. I to XIII (6 June 1817 to 21 November 1817) - printed by Buchan at Peterhead.

19. *Review of Pamphlets (Occasioned by the Candid Statement)* (Peterhead, 1817).
20. *The Life and History of Doctor Adam Donald, Prophet of Bethelnie* (Peterhead, 1817).
21. 2nd edition of above.
22. 3rd edition of above.
23. Joseph Anderson, *The Artless Muse* (Peterhead, 1818).
- 24 to 26. *The Caledonian; or, Donald's Letters to His Country- Folk*, Nos 1 to 3 (17 April 1818 to 1 May 1818) - printed by Buchan at Peterhead.
27. Peter Buchan, *Annals of Peterhead* (Peterhead, 1819).
28. Peter Buchan, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Character of Mr Alexander Leslie* (Peterhead, 1819).
29. Charles Dawson, *Don: A Poem* (Peterhead, 1819).
30. *The Artist's Vade Mecum* (Peterhead, 1819).
31. Peter Buchan, *Scarce Ancient Ballads* (Peterhead, 1819).

32. A H Watt, *A Vocabulary, English and Latin; For The Use of Schools* (Peterhead, 1824).
33. *Curious Collection of Scottish Poems* (Aberdeen, 1821).
34. *An Act For Supplying The Town of Peterhead, In The County of Aberdeen, With Water* (Peterhead, 1822).
35. *Strictures of the Right Rev. Bishop Torry's Pastoral Address To The Members of the Episcopal Chapel* (Peterhead, 1822).
36. *The Bookbinder's Complete Instructor* (Peterhead, 1823).
37. *Witchcraft Detected and Prevented* (Peterhead, 1823).
38. 2nd edition of above (Peterhead, 1824).
39. 3rd edition of above (Peterhead, 1826).
40. Rev. James Anderson, *Charity to the Poor Briefly Characterised and Recommended* (Peterhead, 1823).
41. Peter Buchan, *Scriptural and Philosophical Arguments; Or, Cogent Proofs From Reason and Revelation That Brutes Have Souls* (Peterhead, 1824).

42. *Regulations of the Marischall Lodge of Gardeners of Peterhead* (Peterhead, 1816).
43. Peter Buchan, *Man, Body, and Soul* (c. 1825) - this work is believed to exist under a different title but no copy has been discovered.
44. *Rules and Regulations of the Peterhead Savings Bank* (Peterhead, 1825).
45. Peter Buchan, *Gleanings of Scotch, English, and Irish Scarce Old Ballads* (Peterhead, 1825).
- 45x. 2nd edition (an exact reprint) of above (Peterhead, 1891).
46. Peter Buchan, *The Secret History of Macbeth, King of Scotland* (Peterhead, 1828).
48. Peter Buchan, *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1828).
51. Peter Buchan, *The Orphan Sailor* (Aberdeen, 1834).
52. Peter Buchan, *The Peterhead Smugglers of the Last Century* (Edinburgh, 1834).
53. Peter Buchan, *The Parallel; Or, Whigs and Tories Contrasted* (Edinburgh, 1835).
54. Peter Buchan, *Advice to the Electors of Great Britain and Ireland* (Aberdeen, 1836).

57. Peter Buchan, *Autobiographical Sketch of the Life of Peter Buchan* (Glasgow, 1839).
59. Peter Buchan, *The Eglinton Tournament* (Glasgow, 1840).
60. Peter Buchan, *Britain's Boast* (Glasgow, 1840).
61. Peter Buchan, *Glasgow Cathedral and Necropolis* (Glasgow, 1840).
62. Peter Buchan, *Address To The Workmen, &c.* (Carrick-on-Shannon, 1853).

b) Books cited under Buchan's authorship. (There are nineteen works ascribed specifically to Buchan's authorship covering a period of thirty-nine years. However, as Buchan contributed freely to other works and also adapted material from other sources for publication under his own name, this list is not particularly useful.)

1. Peter Buchan, *The Recreation of Leisure Hours* (Edinburgh, 1814).

3. Peter Buchan, *Letter Addressed to T. M. Author of a Letter Addressed to A Leslie* (Peterhead, 1816).
27. Peter Buchan, *Annals of Peterhead* (Peterhead, 1819).
28. Peter Buchan, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Character of Mr Alexander Leslie* (Peterhead, 1819).
31. Peter Buchan, *Scarce Ancient Ballads* (Peterhead, 1819).
32. Peter Buchan, *An Historical and Authentic Account of The Ancient and Noble Family of Keith* (Peterhead, 1820).
41. Peter Buchan, *Scriptural and Philosophical Arguments; Or, Cogent Proofs From Reason and Revelation That Brutes Have Souls* (Peterhead, 1824).
45. Peter Buchan, *Gleanings of Scotch, English, and Irish Scarce Old Ballads* (Peterhead, 1825).
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51. Peter Buchan, *The Orphan Sailor* (Aberdeen, 1834).
52. Peter Buchan, *The Peterhead Smugglers of the Last Century* (Edinburgh, 1834).
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57. Peter Buchan, *Autobiographical Sketch of the Life of Peter Buchan* (Glasgow, 1839).
59. Peter Buchan, *The Eglinton Tournament* (Glasgow, 1840).
60. Peter Buchan, *Britain's Boast* (Glasgow, 1840).
61. Peter Buchan, *Glasgow Cathedral and Necropolis* (Glasgow, 1840).
62. Peter Buchan, *Address To The Workmen, &c.* (Carrick-on-Shannon, 1853).

c) Chapbooks

1. *Andrew Lammie (the Trumpeter of Fyvie) or, Mill of Tiftie's Annie* (1817).
2. *The Very Old Song of the Roman Nobleman: or, The Cruel Blackamoor in the Wood* (1817).
3. *The Enchanted Lover, with the Answer* (1817).
4. *A Dispute Between the Gardeners and the Tailors for the Antiquity of their Trades* (1824).
5. *Two Original Songs by T. M.* (N.D.).
6. *Four Excellent Songs* (N.D.).
7. *The Canty Carly, or the Reveled Bridal of Auchronie* (N.D.).
8. *Three Excellent Songs* (N.D.).
9. *Three Excellent Songs* (N.D.).
10. *A New Song On the Times* (N.D.).
11. *Two Excellent Old Songs* (N.D.).
12. *The Buchanshire Tragedy, or Sir James on the Ross* (N.D.).

13. *Symon and Janet; To which is added The Old Ballad of the Sheffield Apprentice* (N.D.).
14. *Three Excellent, And at present very fashionable Songs ...* (N.D.).
15. *The Belfast Mountains* (N.D.).
16. *The Longing Maid* (N.D.).
17. *The Duke of Gordon's Three Daughters* (N.D.).
18. *Captain Glen's Unhappy Voyage to New Barbary* (N.D.).
19. *A Pennyworth of Wit, or the Deluded Merchant and his Harlot* (N.D.).
20. *The Middlesex Flora* (N.D.).
21. *The Wanton Wife of Bath* (N.D.).
22. *The Beautiful Old Song of the Babes In The Wood* (N.D.).
23. *Dear Meal* (N.D.).
24. *The Roving Boy; or New Deer Prodigal* (N.D.).
25. *Susie Pye; Or, Young Beichan's Garland* (1826).
26. *Young Grigor's Ghost* (1817).

27. *The Sorrowful Husband* (N.D.).
28. *Three Excellent, and at present very fashionable, Songs* (N.D.).
29. *The Ewie Wi' The Crookit Horn* (N.D.).
30. *Six Beautiful Songs* (N.D.).
31. *The Taxes* (N.D.).
32. *The Curious and Entertaining History of Jean of Bogmoor* (N.D.).
33. *The Curious and Entertaining History of Jean of Bogmoor* (N.D.) - different imprint.
34. *An Excellent Old Scots Song, Entitled Gill Morice* (N.D.).

d) Major Manuscript sources (ballad and song manuscripts and letters to and from Buchan)

National Library of Scotland

Letters to and from Buchan

MSS vol 1 207

208

	210
vol 2	3115
	3915
	3925
vol 3	4040
	4042
vol 5	7197
vol 7	9391
vol 8	9754

British Library

MSS ADD 29,408

MSS ADD 29,409

Described in the manuscript catalogue as follows -
 "Collection of ancient Scottish and English ballads, formed by Peter Buchan, corresponding member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and used by him as the foundation of his "Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland, hitherto unpublished" (Edinburgh, 1928). Two volumes: - Vol. I. "Ancient Minstrelsy of the North of Scotland, foundation of his "Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland, hitherto unpublished" (Edinburgh, 1928). Two volumes: - Vol. I. "Ancient Minstrelsy of the North of Scotland, in its original purity, and hitherto unpublished," preceded by a table of contents, and a portrait of James Rankine, a blind beggar, employed by Buchan in collecting ballads. Vol. II. "Stragglings Ballads, etc.," chiefly English. The ballads on ff. 208-254 originally formed part of Vol. I.; and

those on ff. 256-277 are "copied from an unprinted MS. written by Lady Robertson of Lude in 1630." A note inserted at f. 278 refers to a MS. volume of ballads in possession of the family of Steward of Urrard, also written, in 1643, by Lady Margaret Robertson, "daughter of John Robertson of Lude, and wife of Alexander Stewart of Bonsheid." Paper; XIXth cent. Folio."

Houghton Library

MSS(C) - English

25241.10.5

25241.9

25241.10

15263.19.6

Ballad manuscripts described in the manuscript catalogue as follows - 25241.10.5: "The ancient unpublished ballads of Scotland, chiefly historical and legendary, as taken down from the recitation of very old people. With explanatory notes. 1827. Manuscript. f. pp. (1124)", 25241.9: "Secret songs of silence, chiefly Scottish, ancient and unpublished from the recitation of very old people, by Sir Oliver Orpheus, bart. Manuscript. f. pp. (10), 181."

Glasgow University Library

MS Robertson 9/1-79

1207/2

1207/3
1207/14

Aberdeen University Library

MSS, 2303/1-9

These manuscripts are described in *Descriptive list of letters and papers of and relating to Peter Buchan and his family, collected by William Walker, 1811-1915* (University Library, Manuscripts and Archives Section, Aberdeen, 1970).

Disposition of items in various libraries

	British	National	Mitchell	Peterhead	Aberdeen	Houghton
	B	N	M	P	A	H
item						
1.		N	M		A	
2.						
3.					A	
4.						
5-18.		N			A	
19.						
20-22.						
23.						
24-26.						
27.	B	N	M	P	A	H
28.		N			A	
30.						
31.		N		P		H
32.	B	N	M	P	A	
33.						
34.						
35.						
36.						
37-39.		N				
40.						
41.	B	N			A	
42.				P	A	H
43.						
44.			M			
45.	B	N		P		
46.	B	N			A	
47.				P		
48.	B	N	M		A	H
49.			M			
50.		N	M			
51.	B	N		P	A	
52.		N		P	A	H
53.	B	N	M	P	A	
54.	B	N			A	
55.	B	N				
56.	B	N				
57.		N	M	P	A	
58.						
59.	B	N	M		A	H
60.						
61.					A	
62.			M	P		

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anon (Maurice Ogle?), *Forbidden Fruit: a collection of popular tales by popular authors, including Meitor, Walker, Caesar, Cowper, Turner, Wyper, Lover, Howitt, Burns* (Glasgow, ND).

Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale* (FF Communications, Helsinki, 1961). 2nd revision by Stith Thompson.

S O Addy, *Household Tales With other Traditional Remains* (London and Sheffield, 1895).

Alexander Allardyce (ed), *Letters from and to Charles Kilpatrick Sharpe* (Edinburgh, 1882).

William Alexander, *Notes and Sketches Illustrative of Northern Rural Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1877).

Walter Anderson, *Der Schwank vom Alten Hildebrand, Eine Vergleichende Studie* (Dorpat, 1931).

Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, *A Study of English Village Life* (Cambridge, 1961).

James Barke and Sidney Goodsir Smith (ed.), *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (London, 1965).

Ernest W Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America* (Mouton, 1966).

Dan Ben-Amos, *The Complex Relations of Simple Forms* (Austin, 1976).

Dan Ben-Amos, *Patterns of Structure and Role Relationships in the Child Ballads in the United States* (America, 1966).

John Bell, *A Right Merry Book of Garlands* (Newcastle, ND).

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, translated by G H McWilliam (Harmondsworth, 1972).

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Published Papers

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Why did 'the Bridegroom Greet'?

IAN SPRING

JIMMY MACBEATH was born in Portsoy in 1894 and died in Tor-na-Dee Hospital, Milltimber, Aberdeen in 1972. He was a performer of folk songs — notably bothy ballads recollected from his days as a farm servant in Banffshire before the First World War — acclaimed as both a source singer and a popular folk club artiste. The song 'Grat for Gruel' was a favourite rendition universally associated with Jimmy that remains extremely popular to this day. This version was recorded from Jimmy by Hamish Henderson in 1960:¹

'He Widna Wint his Gruel'

There was a weaver o' the North
And oh but he was cruel
Oh, the very first nicht that he got wed
He sat and he grat for gruel.
He widna wint his gruel,
He widna wint his gruel,
Oh the very first nicht that he got wed
He sat and he grat for gruel.

'There's nae a pot in a' the hoose
That I can mak' your gruel';
'Oh, the washin' pot it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel.
For I maun hae ma gruel,
I cannot wint ma gruel;
Oh the washin' pot it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel.'

'There's nae a spoon in a' the hoose
That you can sup yer gruel';
'Oh the gairden spade it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel.
For I maun hae ma gruel,
I canna wint ma gruel;
Oh the gairden spade it'll dae wi' me
For I maun hae ma gruel.'

She gaed ben the hoose for cakes an' wine,
 And brocht them on a too'el.
 'Oh gy'wa gy'wa wi' your fal-de-rals
 For I maun hae ma gruel.
 For I maun hae ma gruel,
 I canna wint ma gruel;
 Oh gy'way, gy'wa wi' your fal-de-rals
 For I maun hae ma gruel.'

Come all young lassies take my advice
 And never mairry a weaver,
 The very first nicht that he got wed
 He sat an' grat for gruel.
 He widna wint his gruel,
 Oh he widna wint his gruel;
 Oh the very first nicht that he got wed
 He sat an he grat for gruel.

Although this song seems to be associated with the strong tradition of bothy ballads and 'cornkisters' sung by itinerant farm workers and mostly collected around the turn of the century, an earlier version does exist and can be found in Sharpe's *Ballad Book* under the title of 'The Bridegroom':²

There lived a man into the west,
 And O! but he was cruel;
 Upon his waddin' nicht at e'en,
 He sat up and grat for gruel.

They brought to him a good sheep's head,
 A napkin, and a towel, —
 'Gae tak' your whim-whams a' frae me,
 And bring me fast my gruel.'

the BRIDE speaks

'There is nae meal into the hous,
 What shall I do, my jewel?'
 'Gae to the pock and shake a lock,
 For I canna want my gruel.'

'There is nae milk into the hous,
 What shall I do, my jewel?'
 'Gae to the midden and milk the soo,
 For I wanna want my gruel.'

With regard to this piece, Sharpe notes a similarity to a few lines of a song on a similar theme:

This song, from some original words of the air to which Auld Robin Gray was latterly adapted, appears to have been composed on a similar melancholy event. 'The bridegroom grat when the sun gaed down (*Repeat*) / And "Och", quo' he, "It's come o'er soon"', &c.

In fact, these lines relate both the songs already quoted to a wider body of texts concerning the 'greeting' bridegroom, and if it is not abundantly clear why the gentleman concerned should turn so lachrymose at the thought of the impending dusk or a night without a bowl of porridge, then perhaps a perusal of these texts might afford a clue.

The connection between the Sharpe version and an older text is, fortunately, made clearer by Allan Cunningham who, in his *Scottish Songs*, includes a version almost identical to Sharpe's, collected from the recitation of Sir Walter Scott (although he adds a sentimental and inappropriate last verse) and notes:

I remember the remains of an old song which, bequeathing its name to a popular air,³ still survives as a specimen of the humour of ancient days. It may still be remembered under the name of 'The Bridegroom greets when the sun gangs down'.

He then includes a few lines:

It's lang till day, quo the silly bridegroom,
I'll sit a wee langer and clout my shoon;
I'll gie any man a hundred marks and three
This night that wad bed wi' a bride for me.

Come in to your bed, thou silly bridegroom,
The lilly white sheets they are weel spread down!

I dare not quote any more of this lively lyric: the invitation of the bridesmaid and the answer of the bridegroom might please a less scrupulous generation, but they would make ours blush.⁴

Clearly, the main impetus of this fragmentary older text seems to derive from a very different matter — the bridegroom's distress has nothing to do with mere dietary peccadillos but seems to centre around his inability to consummate the marriage with his virgin bride; a task for which he seeks a willing substitute! However, before we consider this alternative theme, we must look at the other texts for this song that have survived.

The Peterhead ballad collector, Peter Buchan, records this song in his manuscripts no fewer than three times. In his manuscript collection of

ballads in the British Library, this version is noted under the title 'The Bridegroom Grat When the Sun Went down':⁵

A young man came to my bower door,
 And sair grat he, and sair grat he,
 A young man came to my bower door,
 And sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye be in, young man, said I?
 Fou fain quoth he, fou fain quoth he,
 Wou'd ye be in, young man, said I?
 Fou fain, said I, I trow.

I drew the latch, an' he wan in,
 And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
 I drew the latch, an' he wan in,
 And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna sitten a little wee while,
 Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,
 He hadna sitten a little wee while,
 Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye hae meat, young man, said I?
 Fou fain quoth he, fou fain quoth he,
 Wou'd ye hae meat, young man, said I?
 Fou fain quoth he, I trow.

I put on a kettle and boil'd a nettle,
 And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
 I put on a kettle and boil'd a nettle,
 And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna eaten a little wee while,
 Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,
 He hadna eaten a little wee while,
 Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye hae a bed, young man, said I?
 Fou fain, quoth he, fou fain, quoth he,
 Wou'd ye hae a bed, young man, said I?
 Fou fain, said he, I trow.

I stript him then, and laid him down,
 And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
 I stript him then, and laid him down,
 And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna lien a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,
He hadna lien a little wee while
Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye hae a neipour, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, fou fain, quoth he,
Wou'd ye hae a neipour, young man, said I?
Fou fain quoth he, I trow.

I stript me then, and laid me down,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I stript me then, and laid me down,
And blythe was he, I trow.

However, if this appears to end too abruptly, it is because Buchan has chosen to omit, presumably for roughly the same reasons as Cunningham, five verses of the song as he knew it. This additional material can be found in the song as it appears in his manuscript of bawdry preserved in the Houghton Library, Harvard, 'Secret Songs of Silence', and concludes the piece thus:⁶

Wou'd ye be on, young man, said I?
Fou fain, said he, fou fain, said he,
Wou'd ye be on, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, I trow.

I turn'd me roun', and he wan on,
And blythe was he, and blythe was he,
I turn'd me round', and he wan on,
And blythe was he, I trow.

He hadna been on a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, till sair grat he,
He hadna been on a little wee while,
Till sair grat he, I trow.

Wou'd ye be aff, young man, said I?
Fou fain quoth he, fou fain, quoth he,
Wou'd ye be aff, young man, said I?
Fou fain, quoth he, I trow.

Diel be aff gin e'er ye win,
Though sair grat he, though sair grat he,
Diel be aff gin e'er ye win,
Though sair greet ye, I trow.

To further complicate the issue, Buchan preserved another version of the song in his British Library manuscript under the title 'The Bridegroom

Greets, etc.⁷ This is shorter and quite different from the other and seems to add the extra dimension, suggested by Cunningham's text:

The bridegroom greets when the sun gaes down,
 The bridegroom greets when the sun gaes down;
 But by comes the bride wi' a blythe blinking e'e.
 Says — What aileth my dearest to mourn for me?
 The bridegroom greets, but it's nae for me,
 The bridegroom greets, but it's nae for me;
 It is about something we'll never agree,
 That fears the bridegroom to lie wi' me.

Johnny Gray spake up, a blythe man was he,
 Johnny Gray spake up, a blythe man was he;
 O bridegroom what will ye gie to me,
 To lie wi' the bonny bride for thee?
 O bonny John Gray will ye fee wi' me?
 O bonny John Gray will ye fee wi' me?
 Eleven marks it shall be your fee,
 Gin ye'll lie wi' the bride this night for me.

However, what I have not yet revealed is that Buchan did actually publish a version of this song, but it is not similar to *any* of the manuscript versions we have considered. It is entitled 'The Wee Bridalie':⁸

There was a little wee bridal,
 A bridal in Auchendown;
 And there was but a little gude meat,
 And as few folk did come.
 A black sheep's head in the pot,
 A sheep's head wanting the tongue;
 And O, said the silly bridegroom,
 Our meat will soon be done.

A wee ale in an anker,
 A wee sup ale in a tun;
 And O, said the silly bridegroom,
 I pray you leave me some.

When they had eaten and drunken,
 The pipes began to bum;
 And O, said the silly bridegroom,
 There's nane see me ly down;
 There's nane see me ly down,
 Amo' the sheets sae sma';
 The bride she's ly at the bed stock,
 And I'll ly niest the wa'.

Now this text is extremely puzzling because it is basically different from the other songs in the 'Bridegroom' canon in several ways. Firstly, the form is different; there is no progressive dialogue and no insistent refrain. In fact, in some ways the text resembles a pastiche of other types of folk song, assembled from stock phrases (although with great skill to give it a definite coherence). Secondly, the bride, who features actively in other versions, is here prominent by her absence. She appears merely as a threatening and inert physical presence in the second to last line — symbolically conjoined with the bed to illustrate her passive function in relation to the duty required of the silly bridegroom. In this case, in fact, the dialogue may be seen as between the bridegroom and the reader who, in a voyeuristic fashion, is complicit in his self-conscious shame, thus denying the message repeated as the central pivot of the last verse. Thirdly, the metaphoric function of the bridal feast to suggest — through the 'sheep's head' and the 'wee ale' — the bridegroom's incapacity, which is, perhaps, a more sophisticated form than found in other versions. These are distinctions which suggest that this specific text may be of pivotal importance to the 'Bridegroom' canon.

One other fairly complete text begs consideration. It is preserved in Andrew Crawford's songbook, recently edited by Emily Lyle, under the title 'The Wooer Came to The Widow's Door', with a side note stating that 'John Smith got it at Galloway at Stranraer in his infancy'.⁹ It is clearly related to Buchan's longer text:

The wooer cam to the widow's dore
and fain was he
The wooer came to the widow's dore
And fain was he I's warran

Wooer, wooer, would ye be in
O aye que he quo he I's warran
She opened and let him in
And fain was he I's warran

So wooer wooer wad ye hae a seat
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
She gied him a seat and he sat down
And fain was he I's warran

It's wooar wooar wad ye hae meat
O aye quo he quo he I's warran
She gied him bred and cheese to eat
And fain and fain was he I's warran

Sae woar woar wad ye hae a bed
 O aye quo he quo he I's warran
 She gied him a bed and he lay down
 And fain and fain was he I's warran

She jumpit behind him on the wa
 And squeek cryed he I's warran
 So woor woor waddy be out
 O aye quo he quo he I's warran

She openit the dore and let him out
 And fain was he I's warran
 There being a hole afore the dore
 In fell he I's warran

Woor woor I doubt ye are faun
 O aye quo he quo he I's warran
 Deil may care if ye cum out
 Amen cryed he cryed he I's warran

Strangely enough, Emily Lyle notes a resemblance between the song and a fragment of a Manx song entitled 'Haink Soorecedyr Nish Gys Dorrys Ven Treoghe' ('A Wooer Came to the Widow's Door') collected by the Folk Song Society:¹⁰

Haink soorecedyr nish gys dorrys Ven treoghe,
 As 'Fait' veagh ecksh, as 'Fait' veagh aym,
 'Hi, ho, will you be on?
 I mean', said he, 'Ho, ho', said she,
 'Hi ho, will you be on? I mean', said he, 'I'm a true young man'
 (Came a wooer now to the door of the widow-woman,
 And would that he were hired to her and she to him, etc.)

Unfortunately, this is all that remains of a song that would seem to deserve a place in the 'Bridegroom' canon,¹¹ when compared with the first additional verse of the Buchan 'Secret Songs' version.

We can now see that, if we combine the first British Museum manuscript version with its expanded equivalent in the 'Secret Songs' manuscript (for convenience I have called this version Buchan SS, as opposed to the second British Museum manuscript version which I have called Buchan MS) we have eight distinct versions of 'The Bridegroom'. The comparative table I have constructed analyzes these variants with regard to four main groups of traits or elements of the story: the status of the male character, the occasion, the reasons given for the male character's crying, and the eventual conclusion to the story (see Figure 1). Of these,

COMPARATIVE TABLE

	MacBeath	Sharpe	Crawfurd	Manx	Buchan SS	Buchan AB	Buchan MS	Cunningham
1 STATUS		A		B C	A B	A	A	A
	(A) bridegroom (B) young man (C) wooer (D) weaver		C					
2 OCCASION	A	A	B	B	A	A	A	A?
	(A) wedding (B) wooing							
3 CRIES	B	B			A B C*	B? C	C	
	(A) to get in (B) for food, etc. (C) in/invited to bed		C					
4 CONCLUSION	A?		A B		A*			
	(A) cursed (B) thrown out (C) bribes other man						C C	C
	GASTRONOMY			IMPOTENCE				SUBSTITUTION

* not present in British Library MS version

Figure 1

only the alternatives offered for the second are, in fact, mutually exclusive. Each of these, it seems, can give us some insight into the analysis of this set of texts.

An examination of the first group of traits is revealing. Invariably the subject of the song is introduced as a bridegroom or wooer. (MacBeath's introduction of a weaver we can presume to be a personal and a topical addition.) Twice he is a young man but *never* an old man. Therefore, it is clear that the theme of impotence is not related to age and that, despite seeming initial similarities, the song is not a relative of such songs as 'John Anderson My Jo' or 'Duncan Macleerie' (both collected by Burns), which Gershon Legman classifies under the heading 'Darby & Joan', nor to the body of songs of the 'Greybeard' family, in which a young girl laments her marriage to an old man.¹²

To further elaborate from the table, we can see that the first two songs discussed, the MacBeath and Sharpe versions (we have already noted their similarity) are specific as regards the third group of traits — the only reason for the bridegroom's discomfort lies in his lack of suitable nourishment (for the time being, we will not consider Buchan AB). Therefore, these two songs constitute what I have called the Gastronomic Group. However, in the Crawford and the Buchan SS and Buchan AB versions (and, we presume, in the Manx which I have aligned with Crawford because of the obvious similarities, and also with Buchan for reasons previously noted) the reason for his discomfort lies in the invitation to bed. Thus these three versions can be termed the Impotence Group. Furthermore, in the Buchan MS and the Cunningham versions, the additional themes of a substitute lover, called upon to do the duty of the bridegroom is introduced. These constitute the Substitution Group.

If we accept this basic schema, then there are distinct ways of looking at the corpus of songs we have included here. It could be said that the Buchan SS version in the second group, being in some ways the most complete, provides a bridge between the three groups. It has a gastronomic constituent and, if we stretch our imagination, we could tack on a 'substitution' conclusion and, perhaps, construct a model narrative for the 'Bridegroom' canon. This, however, misses the point that these are different songs, with their own particular structure and flavour. But if we purely concern ourselves with narrative themes, I believe it is possible to postulate a linear progression from an assumed 'complete' Substitution version through an Impotence version in which the final drastic act is sublimated in favour of cursing or ejecting the bridegroom, to the

Gastronomic version in which all sexual references are sublimated in favour of perverse *gourmandise*. Of course, the immediate argument against this thesis comes in the form of the most enigmatic of the song texts we have considered, the Buchan AB text, which has passed into our elegant schema on the nod, as it were. The difficulty is that if we accept the imposition of the gastronomic type as a later substitution for the more sexually explicit version, then it is contrary to our theory to find this crucial early version in which gastronomy and impotence are linked not syntagmatically but paradigmatically in the use of the bridal feast, with the sheep's tongue and so on, as a rather obvious metaphor for the bridegroom's failings. We have two choices; we can either accept that the two themes were traditionally linked in this way and have somehow been dissociated through the travels of this song type, or we can, alternatively, postulate that the Buchan AB text is an anomaly, the work of *an individual intelligence*. Dare we suggest Buchan himself as the anonymous author who, we know, had already collected three separate fragments of the song at least, being aware, even as early as the early nineteenth century (shortly before Sharpe published his version), of the two distinct gastronomic and impotence types.

It goes without saying that we simply do not have enough information to opt conclusively for either proposition. However, in favour of the former we can cite the singularity of the Buchan AB version, the fact that many elements of the song are reminiscent of other pieces in Buchan's manuscripts, and the other distinct formal differences between that text and the others in the corpus discussed earlier. It could also be said that the theory of linear progression gains some credence if we consider historical preference — the pure fool or incompetent lover is a stock figure of early metrical tales and of jestbooks.¹³ In fact, the impotent bridegroom did feature in seventeenth-century broadside ballads, one example of which is preserved in the Lauriston Castle collection in the care of the National Library of Scotland, entitled 'An Excellent New Ballad: Concerning a Bridegroom and his Bride who were lately Married at *Borrowstounness* giving a full and true Account of their Behaviour, and of the Bridegrooms running away from the Bride the same Night, without Bedding with her'.¹⁴ Whilst on very much the same theme as the songs we have already discussed, this ballad is very different in structure and style (notably in its efforts to convince its audience of its authenticity), but it does seem to show the popularity of the impotent spouse. Similarly, the general idea of cuckoldry and substitute lovers and, especially, the notion of the cuckold

unwittingly assisting in his own downfall is a common ingredient of many folk tales, notably in the early Levantine tales which constitute, for example, the *Decameron*. Presumably, this notion was too alarming or *infra dignitatem* in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, in which the preference seems to have switched, in Freudian fashion, to the oral function. It is in this capacity that 'The Bridegroom' enters the singing tradition as a typically comic 'cornkister' or bothy ballad.

When Peter Kennedy comments on the MacBeath version of the song that, 'this is a portrait of the weaver who is so worn out at his loom and set in habits that before he thinks of the charms of his new bride he calls out for his plate of porridge',¹⁵ his explanation falls short of the full story. Legman notes a joke that, strangely enough, seems to constitute the exact opposite of the bridegroom's dilemma: 'Groom to bride on the morning after the wedding night: "What would you like for breakfast?" "You know what I like". "Yes, but you've got to eat sometime!"'¹⁶ Tragically, as we know, not all honeymoons are quite like that!

Notes

¹ School of Scottish Studies tape SA 1960/109. The text is printed in *Tocher*, 12 (1973), 149–50. There is a recording of Jimmy MacBeath, *Wild Rover No More*, 12-inch L.P., 12T173, Topic, 1967. *Chapbook*, 3, 2 (no date), was a special issue devoted to MacBeath. The song was also sung by the noted source singer, Willie Mathieson, and can be found in his manuscript songbook.

² Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, *A Ballad Book* (the author, 1824; facsimile edition, Edinburgh: R. Syme and Son, 1883), pp. 23–24.

³ In fact, Cunningham used the tune as an idea for a sentimental song in R. H. Cromek, *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1810), pp. 50–52, 'A Weary Bodie's Blyth Whan the Sun Gangs Down'.

⁴ Allan Cunningham, *Songs of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Taylor, 1825), II, 125–27. Strangely, Patrick Buchan, Peter Buchan's eldest son and the only member of the family to share his father's interest in literature (only two of Buchan's ten children survived him) records the song in his manuscript songbook (Aberdeen University Library, MS 2303/7) with a note that seems to paraphrase Cunningham: 'What follows in the way of invitation from the bridesmaid and answer of the unfortunate wight I cannot quote without running the risk of being denominated a demoraliser.'

⁵ British Library, MSS ADD 29.408, 276–78.

⁶ Harvard MS 25241.9. This manuscript was purchased from Buchan's nephew, David Scott, on behalf of the library by Francis James Child.

⁷ British Library, MSS ADD 29.408, 379.

⁸ Peter Buchan, *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh: W. and P. Laing and G. Stevenson; Aberdeen: A. Brown; Glasgow: J. Wylie, and Robertson and Atkinson; Perth: D. Morison; London: J. Darling, 1828), I, 255–56.

⁹ *Andrew Crawford's Collection of Ballads and Songs*, edited by E. B. Lyle (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society), I, 188–89. Lyle notes (p. lii): 'John Smith . . . was a tailor, and he is described by Crawford as being "a very thirsty man". He came into Lochwinnoch from

Stranraer, and was married in Lochwinnoch on 23 February 1783 to Margaret Kirkwood, and had several children.'

¹⁰ *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, no. 28 (1924), 136-37. Notes (initialled A.G.G.) compare it to a variety of humorous courtship-dialogues. The comparison could be extended, of course, to relate the 'Bridegroom' canon to songs such as 'What is that at my Bower Door' or even the bawdy 'Barnacle Bill the Sailor'.

¹¹ There is no directly relevant motif in Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, revised edition [1955]), but the following are related: J1744.1 / Bridegroom does not know what to do on wedding night (India), K1371.5 / Man gets bridegroom drunk and enjoys the bride (Hawaii), K1844.3 / Groom deceives bride with substituted bedmate, K1915 / The false bridegroom (takes the place of the true bridegroom).

¹² See Gershon Legman, *Rationale of the Dirty Joke*, first series (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), II, 252. Of course, Buchan noted that the Buchan SS version was 'the original of "Old Robin Gray"' — a sentimental lyric credited to Lady Ann Barnard (1750-1807), daughter of the Earl of Balcarres.

¹³ Compare the folk tale type Aarne 1685 / The Foolish Bridegroom (who does not know how to perform sexual intercourse). See Legman, I, 129-32.

¹⁴ National Library of Scotland, Ry.III.a.10(9).

¹⁵ *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland*, edited by Peter Kennedy (London: Cassell, 1975), p. 479.

¹⁶ Legman, II, 106.

The Devil and the Feathery Wife

IAN SPRING

THE tale of *The Devil and the Feathery Wife* is a relatively well-known folktale type recorded by Aarne/Thompson as AT 1091, *Who Can Bring an Unheard-of Riding Horse*,¹ with a listing of seventeen different national origins. It also features in Stith Thompson's *Motif Index* as K216.2 *Bringing the devil an unknown animal* —'The man sends his naked wife on all fours in tar and feathers. The Devil has never seen such an animal.'² It is not noted in either source as existing in an English version. However, a version of this story can be found in the form of a song collected by the Aberdeenshire ballad collector Peter Buchan at the beginning of last century and preserved in a fascinating holograph collection of (mostly) sexual songs entitled *Secret Songs of Silence* now in the possession of the Houghton Library, Harvard, for which it was purchased by Professor Francis James Child.³ The song is entitled *The Dei'l And the Feathery Wife (sic)*:

By a' the plagues that's on the earth,
And ever Man Befall,
Hunger and a scolding wife,
They are the worst of all.
In our town there lived
A man of mean degree,
And these two plagues him troubled much,
The worst of luck had he.

As he was in the forest once,
Betwixt hope and despair
The devil he started from a bush,
And stood before him there.
O what's the matter, the diel he said,
Ye look sae discontent,
Sure ye want money to buy some bread,
Or pay some landlord's rent?

Deed, kind sir, ye read me right,
The Cause of my disease;
Tell me your name, kind sir, said he,
O tell me't if you please.
My name is Duncan, said the diel,
I unto thee do tell;
Although that I be wandering here,
My dwelling is in hell.

What will ye gie, the diel he said,
I'll end all you debate,
Ye shall hae meal an' cattle eneuch,
And never want of meat.
I've naething to gie, the poor man said,
Nae thing under my hand,
But any thing that I can do,
Shall be at your command.

I'll make a bargain with you then,
 A bargain sure to stand,
 Ye'll bring me a beast at seven year's end,
 I cannot tell its name.
 But if the beast I name aright,
 (Mark well what I you tell)
 Then ye must go with me, he said
 Directly down to hell.

The poor man then went home again,
 Turn'd rich in each degree,
 And all his neighbours wonder's much,
 Sae poor's he used to be.
 When seven years were come and gane,
 And all full gone and spent,
 The poor man full of sorrow grew,
 And sorely did Lament.

O what's the matter? his wife did say,
 Ye look sae discontent,
 Sure ye hae got some whore wi' bairn,
 And seems for to repent.
 Indeed, kind wife, ye wrong me much,
 It's not so, I declare,
 I've made a bargain wi' the diel,
 It puts me in despair.

I've made a bargain with him then,
 A bargain sure to stand,
 To bring him a beast at seven year's end,
 He cannot tell its name.
 And if he name the beast aright,
 (Mark well what I do tell),
 Then I must go with him, forthwith,
 Directly down to hell.

Never mind it husband now, she says,
 You cattle feed and keep,
 For women's wit is very good,
 Sometimes in present need.
 Get me bird lime here, she says,
 Lay it upon the floor,
 Stark naked I will strip mysell,
 Anoint my body o'er.

Then get to me a tub of feathers,
 And set them me beside,
 And I will tumble o'er in it,
 Till not a spot be freed.
 When she had tumbled o'er in it,
 Frae her neck unto heel,
 Then merry said he, ye're a strange beast,
 You look just like the diel.

Then tie a string about me neck,
 And lead me to that place,
 And I will keep you frae the diel,
 If I am granted grace.
 When in the sight o' the diel he came,
 He looked brazen bold,
 Merry, quoth he, strange is your beast,
 Your bargain seems to hold.

How many more hae ye o' them?
 How many o' this kind?
 I hae seven more o' these beasts,
 That in this world do run.
 If ye've seven more o' these beasts,
 That in this world ye tell,
 Ye fairly hae defeat me now,
 And a' the diels in hell.

Surprisingly, in fact, another Scottish version of this folktale has been recorded from oral tradition much more recently, in the form of a piece of recited verse collected in Shetland in 1955 from Kitty Nicolson of Yell and preserved in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies under the title *Gudeman, Gudeman, What Aileth Thee?*²⁴

Gudeman, Gudeman, What aileth thee?
 You look sae discontent.
 Ye don't hae money to buy breid,
 Or pay the landlord's rent?
 Yes, I hae money tae buy breid,
 The rent is not yet due,
 And yet but there's an awful tale,
 That I maun tell to you.
 For years we hae'd plenty loaves,
 Yes, everything had we,
 Where it came frae thou never asked,
 And I never said to thee,
 But him that's keepit wis sae braw,
 The night is takin' me awa',
 Unless I can bring tae him,
 A beast he cannae name,
 If I bring that he'll let me clear,
 And I can bide at hame.
 The gudewife she stoored at the fire,
 And then she raise wi' speed,
 Wemen's work is very good,
 In times o' present need.
 Bring me here a barrel o' tar,
 And set it doon by me,
 An' I'll anoint mysell in it,
 An' nought but that be free,
 An' bring me here a tub o' feathers,
 I'll anoint my body ower,
 And I will keep thee frae the deil,
 If God will give me poo'er,
 An' tie something aboot my airm,
 An' lead me tae the place,
 And I will keep thee from the devil,

If Gude will gie me grace,
 He showed to him the long hair of her head,
 And he told him it was her tail,
 He turned to him her other part,
 And told him it was her face,
 She's awfy cheeks and (...)
 Besides they're wondrous grim,
 She has but one eye in her head,
 And it is very dim.
 Gang hame, gang hame, the deil he said,
 Its name I cannae tell,
 But enough to frighten me and mair,
 Than a' the deils in hell.

Obviously, this is a tale around the popular and common theme of outwitting a rather (in this case) hapless devil who, having performed his Mephistophelean function of procuring a soul in exchange for worldly gear, has to forego the bargain because he, literally, cannot tell an arse from an elbow! In fact, the two pieces are largely similar, suggesting a common origin. However, the anal reference in the Shetland version, absent from Buchan's song, draws a parallel with another song from *Secret Songs* along the same lines, entitled *The Baker O' The Town O' Ayr*, a version of AT 1133 *Making the Ogre Strong by Castration*. The relevant motif is K241 *The castration bargain: wife sent—'the trickster castrates the dupe and is to come the next day and be castrated himself. He sends his wife as a substitute.'* This is the tale told by Rabelais (IV,47), *The Devil of Popfigland*, in which the devil, having challenged the husband to a 'scratching match,' is put to flight when the wife displays the large 'wound' he has given her between the legs with, supposedly, his little finger.⁶

A Baker in the town o' Ayr,
 Fal la leary,
 Went out to hold his weekly fair,
 Fal la leary,
 His bread to sell, his flour to buy,
 Fal la leary,
 He met a devil by the way,
 Fal la leary.

O baker, baker, what means that?
 What makes your grey horse sae fast?
 Says he, I'll tell you what it means,
 Yestreen frae him I took the stanes.

If this be true ye tell to me,
 Ye'll lay me down, and sae geld me,
 The baker lighted frae his horse,
 It was to geld this wicked corse.

The knife was sharp, an' it gaed in,
 And took frae him baith cod an' stane,
 Now sin' that ye hae gelded me,
 This day-month ye'se gelded be.

But that day-month his wife arise
 An' she put on the baker's claes,
 An' she is to the town o' Ayr,
 For to hold her weekly fair.

Her bread to sell, her flour to buy,
 She met the devil by the way,
 O baker, baker, what means that?
 O what makes your black face sae fat?

Says she, I'll tell you what it means,
 Frae mysell I took the stanes,
 Gin that be true that ye tell me,
 Had up your doup that I may see.

She quickly lighted frae her horse,
 And she held up her naked arse,
 Then Nickie said, I hae nae doubt,
 But ye are gelded out an' out.

Her horse she mounted wi' a start,
 An' play'd the devil wi'a fart,
 Then he cried out, O fye for fye,
 Another hole broke out, forbye.

Now, obviously, this song gains its comic impetus from the reader's share in the complicity between man and wife who demonstrate both connubial understanding and (in the case of the wife) self-sacrifice in order to succeed in their ploy together to defeat the third party, the devil. That the devil is successfully foiled and made the fool of this escapade is emphasised by the long-established, basic, and still established in folk speech, insult at the end of the song in which the wife, exuberantly, shows the devil her arse (or her genitalia—as suggested by 'another hole'—which suggests a link with the widespread traditional belief in the apotropaic power of genital display). However, although this reading can be applied to the *Feathery Wife*, certain details, notably the emphasis on the 'plague of the scolding wife' in the Buchan version, may suggest an alternative reading. In order to emphasise this point I would like to draw attention to a version of this tale that is still performed in the oral tradition in this country. This is *The Devil and the Feathery Wife* as sung and recorded by the English folksinger Martin Carthy. This version is, in fact, simply a derivation of the Buchan version slightly altered, colloquialised, and set to tune by the great collector of English folksong, Bert Lloyd. Martin Carthy sings it, with concertina accompaniment on the record, in the highly stylised 'buttonholing' tradition of English comic songs.⁶

Now there was an old farmer lived over the hill,
 And a poor old fellow they say.
 He was plagued by rather a scolding wife,
 The worst of fortune and hay,
 And as he cut wood in the forest one day,
 Between dark doom and despair,
 The devil himself he jumped out of a bush,
 And he stood before him there.

What is the matter? the devil he cried,
 You look so discontent,
 Haven't you got any money to buy your food,
 Or to pay your land or rent.
 What would you give me? the devil he cried,
 If I should end your debate,
 And I gave you money and beer enough,
 So you'd never more want for meat.

But I've nothing to give you, the old man cried,
 I've nothing right here to my hand,
 But if you would do what you say for me,
 I'd be at your command.
 Right then, I'll make you a bargain, the devil he cried,
 It's a bargain you just couldn't miss,
 You bring me a beast at seven year's end,
 I've got to say what it is
 But if that beast I name aright,
 You mark what I do tell,
 You've got to come along with me,
 For to view the ovens of hell.

So the old man prospered and prospered well,
 It was all gained and spent,
 Until he came to the end of seven long years,
 Sorely he did lament.
 O what is the matter? his wife she cried,
 You look so discontent,
 Sure you've got some silly young girl with child,
 Making you sore lament.

No, I made a bargain with the devil, he cried,
 It was a bargain I just couldn't miss,
 I've got to bring him a beast at seven years' end,
 He's got to say what it is,
 But if that beast he names aright,
 You mark what I do tell,
 I've got to toddle along with him,
 To view the ovens of hell.

Oh, never you worry, his wife she cries,
 For your cattle, your keep, or your feed,
 For the wit of a woman it comes in handy,
 Sometimes in an hour of need.
 Go and fetch me the droppings from all of our chickens,
 And spread them all over the floor,
 Stark naked I will strip myself,
 And I'll roll in it over and o'er.

And fetch me the basket of feathers, she cried,
 Of the beast we had for our tea,
 And I'll roll and I'll roll all over in them,
 Until never an inch be free.
 So she rolled and she rolled in feathers and droppings,
 From her head down to her navel,
 By Christ, he says, what a horrible sight,
 You look far worse than the devil.

When the devil himself came in,
 He began for to steam and to hiss,
 By Christ, he said, what an awful sight,
 I'm damned if I know what it is.
 So he started to shake and he started to quake,
 Saying, have you any more of these at home?
 Yes, he cries, I've got seven more,
 That in my forest do roam.
 If you've got seven more of these beasts,
 That in your forest do well,
 I'll be as good as my bargain and I'm off home,
 For she's worse than the demons of hell.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work, entirely written by my own hand, and that any opinions expressed are my own unless otherwise acknowledged.

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Ian Spring.