ROBERT FERGUSSON:

THE DILEMMA OF THE POET IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTLAND

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by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This thesis is concerned with the English and Scots poems of Robert Fergusson. As a result of the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, Scotland found itself stripped of a vernacular literature and sovereign powers. The vernacular revival of the eighteenth century compensated for these losses to some extent, but a poet writing in Scotland at the time had to face problems and situations which his predecessors before 1603 had not known. The thesis analyses the problems and discusses how Fergusson overcame them.

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I would like to thank too the library of Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, for letting me have on extended loan for four months the Scottish Text Society Volumes of Fergusson which were the basis for my examination of Fergusson's poems.

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF FERGUSSON'S POETRY

"By far my elder brother in the Muses". So Robert Burns, in Verses Written under the Portrait of Fergusson the Poet, pays tribute to a poet who remains today almost unknown even among Scotsmen, and who has been overshadowed for two centuries by the mighty figures of Burns and Scott. Robert Louis Stevenson was not unaware of his own affinity with Fergusson and Burns in sharing the same Christian name and writing verses. Stevenson recognised the great debt which Burns owed to Fergusson's poetry, but he also had more personal remarks to make:

> Burns alone has been just to his promise: follow Burns, he knew best, he knew whence he drew fire - from the poor, white-faced, drunken vicious boy [Robert Fergusson] that raved himself to death in the Edinburgh madhouse. Surely there is more to be gleaned about Fergusson, and surely it is high time the task was set about... We are three Robins who have touched the Scots lyre this last century. Well the one [Burns] is the world's, he did it, he came off, he is forever: but I and the other [Fergusson] - ah! What bonds we have... the old Robin, who was before Burns and the flood, died in his acute, painful youth and left the models of the great things that were to come; I believe Fergusson lives in me.[1]

Who was this Robert Fergusson who could have such an influence on Burns and Stevenson, and yet be called a "drunken, vicious boy"?

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[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, in a letter to W. Graibe Angus, quoted by James B. Caird, "Fergusson and Stevenson", in Sydney Goodsir Smith, ed., Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774, p.112

I. The Life of Fergusson

Robert Fergusson was born in Edinburgh in 1750[2] of a respectable lower middle-class family. He was one of four children and was given as good an education as family circumstances would permit. For four years (1758-62) he attended the High School of Edinburgh and was awarded a scholarship which provided full maintenance for two more years at the Grammar School of Dundee and subsequently for four more years at the University of St. Andrews. Fergusson attended St. Andrews from 1764-68 and his days there were the happiest of his life, as we can see from the poems he wrote about the University and its personalities.[3] While he did not perform brilliantly as a scholar, there are various stories of his wild exploits as a student, including one which led to his expulsion, a step which was happily thwarted by the intercession of Dr. William Wilkie, Professor of Natural Philosophy. Wilkie took a keen interest in the young student and was not himself averse to poetry, as his Epigoniad reveals. Fortunately, this epic poem which Daiches describes as "unbelievable"

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[2] The fullest modern biography of Fergusson, from which most of the following facts are taken, is by Matthew P. McDiarmid, The Poems of Robert Fergusson, Vol. I. All subsequent quotations from Fergusson's poems are taken from his edition. James A. Roy, "Robert Fergusson and Eighteenth-Century Scotland", UTQ, XVII (1947-8), p.179, incorrectly states that Fergusson was born in 1751.

[3] E.g., Elegy, On the Death of Mr. David Gregory, late Professor of Mathematics in the University of St. Andrews; An Eclogue, To the Memory of Dr. William Wilkie, late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews; To the Principal and Professors of the University of St. Andrews, on their superb treat to Dr. Samuel Johnson; Elegy on John Hogg, late Porter to the University of St. Andrews.

and "downright bad"[4] had no influence on Fergusson, but Wilkie was the inspiration for one of Fergusson's few Scots pastoral poems, An Eclogue to the Memory of Dr. William Wilkie. Fergusson received a full classical education at St. Andrews and it is likely that he got his knowledge of Scots poetry from Wilkie.[5] When he left the University he had hoped that his well-to-do uncle, John Forbes, would help him to find suitable employment, but Forbes made no offers of assistance to the boy, and young Robert tramped the one hundred and fifty miles back to Edinburgh on foot. There he did some clerical work until he started as a clerk in the Commissary office. He was to hold no other post in his short life. The drudgery of the work was offset by the friends he made, and by his poetry. More than half of Fergusson's poems were written in English, and the first of these were conventional Augustan pastorals in the manner of Shenstone and Cunningham. The majority of his work in English and Scots appeared in The Weekly Magazine, which we will discuss later in this chapter, from February 1771 to December 1773. The poet was never physically strong and towards the end of 1773 he became ill and melancholy; although he was to recover a little in 1774, a fall from a staircase led to concussion and to the loss of his reason. He was removed to the Edinburgh madhouse and died in October 1774, at the age of 24.

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[4] Daiches, Robert Burns, pp.26 and 31

[5] Douglas Young, "The Making of a Poet; Some Notes on Fergusson's Educational Backgrounds", in Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774, p.82

2 The Language Situation in Eighteenth-Century Scotland

The fact that Fergusson wrote in both Scots and English calls for a brief examination of the status of the two languages as vehicles for poetry in his day. Until the sixteenth century Scots had been the language of Scotland, spoken in royal palace and humble cottage. Gaelic was also spoken, but the Gaelic tradition remains quite separate in Scottish literature and has no place in a discussion of Fergusson. Scots was a development of the language spoken in the area between the Humber and the Forth and came into contact with Gaelic, Norse and French. But while the Midland dialect of England became the sole literary language of England, and Northern and Southern dialects vanished almost entirely from English literature, the Northern dialect survived in Scotland. Though influenced by the English poetry of Chaucer and his followers, such poets as King James I, Henryson, Dunbar, Gavin Douglas and Sir David Lyndsay wrote and spoke in Scots, a language "enriched by the poets with a great variety of linguistic devices and inventions which had their own peculiarly Scottish relationship to their Latin and other sources".[6] There was no question of speaking in English and writing in Scots or vice-versa.

The events of 1603, however, changed all this. Elizabeth's death brought James VI to London as James I of

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[6] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p.19

England, thus uniting in one person the crowns of Elizabeth Tudor and her feared rival Mary Stuart. "The departure of James VI for England in 1603... meant the abrupt cessation of the court patronage of the arts in Scotland and the physical departure of poets and musicians as well as the rapidly increasing influence of the English language and English literature on the language and literature of Scotland."[7] Although this is generally cited as the major cause for the dearth of good Scottish literature in the seventeenth century, other reasons include the ascendancy of Knox and Calvinism in the second half of the sixteenth century, with their depreciation of poetry as "lewd" entertainment, and the influence of the English poetry of the Renaissance.[8]

It is interesting, therefore, to see how the major event in Scottish history in the eighteenth century, the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, impelled Scottish patriots to fill the gap in the nation's cultural life which the Union of the Crowns had done much to create. The Union of 1707 was bitterly opposed by many Scots, but welcomed by some, more especially those Whigs and friends of London who were businessmen and looked for increasing commercial gains as a result. It is true that the economy of Scotland was in bad shape around the turn of the century and the opening of the English colonial markets gave a great boost to the Scottish economy,

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[7] Daiches, ibid., p.11

[8] Maclaine, Robert Fergusson, p.17

especially in Glasgow.[9] But more conservative-minded Scots feared that a further loss of the nation's identity, already severely damaged since 1603, would result if the two nations were to become one. Their case was rejected by the events of 1707, but they were not left totally destitute. Two great institutions remained untouched, The Church and the legal system. Neither of these however, by their very nature, was in a position to help to restore a native tradition in literature.[10]

What had happened to the Scots language in the intervening hundred years? With the departure of the court in 1603 with its patronage and poets, and with the leading writers of the day like William Drummond writing in English, and George Buchanan's successors writing in Latin, Scots ceased to be a literary language in its own right. From being the language of the king and his Court, and of the poetry of the Scottish Chaucerians in the two hundred years before the Reformation, Scots had degenerated by the eighteenth century to a language which was seen as comic, rustic and provincial. It has never permanently improved its status since. Hume referred to Scots in 1757 as a "very corrupt dialect"[11] and we can see what a correspondent of The Weekly

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[9] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, pp.4-5

[10] Daiches, ibid., Chapter II

[11] David Hume to Gilbert Elliot, quoted by Daiches, ibid., p.20

Magazine thought about the status of the language from these remarks: "Though my heart beats as warm with a partiality for old Caledonia as that of any man, yet I cannot see any great diminution that its antient glory would suffer by giving up a dialect which we all disdain to write in, for a language, in point of beauty and energy, the first perhaps in the world."[12] So Scots had been superseded for many Scotsmen by English. It is true that writers among the literati-that body of cultured men in Edinburgh including Hume, Blair, Smith and Robertson who wrote in English and sought to make Scotland again into a great European nation-had Scotland's interests at heart, but they would not write in a language that was becoming a joke both north and south of the Border among certain sections of society. Smollett's Matthew Bramble declares in Humphry Clinker: "I think the Scots would do well, for their own sakes, to adopt the English idioms and pronunciation; those of them especially, who are resolved to push their fortunes in South-Britain - I know, by experience, how easily an Englishman is influenced by the ear, and how apt he is to laugh, when he hears his own language spoken with a foreign or provincial accent."[13] England was now South Britain and the literati made it clear that they were North Britons when they wrote in English. To reach a wide audience

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[12] Quoted by John W. Oliver,"Fergusson and 'Ruddiman's Magazine'", in Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774, p.95

[13] Smollett, Humphry Clinker, p.268

and to acquire a reputation beyond Scotland, a writer like Hume had to use either English or French, for both were "respectable" languages. Philosophy, history, criticism, rhetoric could hardly be written in Scots.

The result of this need to write in English meant that some Scots were often driven to writing in one language and speaking in another. Daiches sees here the symptoms of a 'dissociation of sensibility' in Scotland ." If you talk and, as it were, feel in Scots and think and write in standard English, then your Scots is likely to be sentimental and self-indulgent and your English is likely to be highly formal and in some degree de-natured."[14] Some judges like Lord Auchinleck, father of James Boswell, and Lord Braxfield made no attempt to speak English on the bench, unlike many of their legal colleagues, but Lord Kames would speak Scots at home and English on the bench.[15] Yet, if the literati sought a refined English and considered themselves literary men "they were cut off from the true sources of strength."[16] Speaking in another context, Daiches' words are nevertheless relevant: "One senses a lack of organic relation to rural society as a whole in much of this activity [Eighteenth-century gentleman farming], rather parallel to the position of the Edinburgh literati with reference to the deeper cultural traditions of

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[14] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p.21

[15] Daiches, ibid., p.65

[16] Daiches, ibid., p.77

Scotland."[17] How could a person have a place in the Scottish literary tradition if he were writing in a different language, in different forms, and on different subjects, from that tradition which had existed for many centuries, and whose roots were distinctly Scottish?

We have to ask ourselves what courses were open to anyone in Scotland who wished to put pen to paper. We may pass briefly over Latin and Gaelic as they do not directly concern us here. Latin had held great sway in Scotland throughout the Middle Ages right through the seventeenth century. But increasingly its influence was eroded although it continued to be spoken in schools and Universities. Some men in the eighteenth century still felt, however, that Scotland's best language for a national literature was Latin, for Buchanan had enjoyed an unrivalled European reputation as a Latinist.[18] This group devoted to Latin is headed by Thomas Ruddiman, whose knowledge of Latin was very extensive, but whose interests in the language were more as a grammarian. Ruddiman was a Scottish patriot and the works he edited in the eighteenth century included Buchanan's Opera Omnia and Douglas's translation of the Aeneid, but he was fighting a losing battle in so far as he believed Latin to be the language for a Scots literature. Gaelic could and did produce some genuine literature in the century, but it was cut off

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[17] Daiches, ibid., p.8

[18] D. Duncan, Thomas Ruddiman, p.19

from the body of lowland literature which we call "Scottish literature" both geographically and linguistically.

3 The Vernacular Revival

It is at this point that we must turn to that great movement in Scottish literature, the revival of vernacular poetry in the eighteenth century. By the "vernacular" we mean the Scots language as it was spoken and, more important, written in the eighteenth century. Why did it re-emerge after the dark days of the seventeenth century? As we have already suggested, the reasons have to do with questions of identity. With the events of 1603 and 1707, the Scots rightly felt that they were losing their identity as a separate nation. They retained their Church and their own legal system but political sovereignty had been signed away to London with the members elected to sit in a "British" Parliament. Daiches writes:

> There are two ways in which a baffled and frustrated nation can attempt to satisfy its injured pride. It can attempt to rediscover its own national traditions, and by reviving and developing them, find a satisfaction that will compensate for its political impotence; or, accepting the dominance of the culture of the country which has achieved political ascendancy over it, it can endeavour to beat that country at its own game and achieve distinction by any standard the dominant culture may evolve. Eighteenth-century Scotsmen chose both these ways.[19]

As a result, we have the vernacular revival side by side with the activity of the literati.

Although firmly committed to the vernacular, neither

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[19] Daiches, Robert Burns, pp.8-9

Ramsay, Fergusson nor Burns was able to remain unaffected by the English influences which were freely coming over the Border. Fergusson was the least influenced in the sense that his Scots poetry is generally free from Augustan traits, but the majority of his poems were written in English and appear conventional and stilted. Ramsay and Burns, besides writing poems in English, also made some of their Scots poems from a mould of English and Scots combined, a mixture apt to show the cultural confusion. This is the reason why Burns's The Cottar's Saturday Night is much inferior to Fergusson's The Farmer's Ingle. Both poems are on the subject of rural life, but Burns is sentimental and obviously Augustan in many of his lines. For Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns, it was now a choice between writing in English or in Scots. Ramsay was undoubtedly caught between the two worlds, but Fergusson, while using English to reflect a part of his personality, is quite unself-conscious about his use of Scots. It is generally agreed that Fergusson's was a purer Scots than Burns's[20] and his lack of condescension towards the language can be attributed to the assurance he derived from the fuller education he received at Edinburgh, Dundee and St. Andrews.

For the literati, there was no choice. English was the only language available to them if they were to be North Britons and Europeans. Daiches compares the interest of the vernacular poets with that of the literati: "The first group

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[20] Hugh MacDiarmid, "Direct Poetry and the Scottish Genius", in Robert Fergusson,1750-1774, p.61

[vernacular poets] wished to become Europeans by becoming genuinely Scottish again, the second group, abandoning peculiarly Scottish characteristics (such as the Scottish vernacular) as provincial and limiting their audience, wished to make the jump more directly."[21] Yet the literati were Scots patriots in their own way, making Edinburgh into "The Athens of the North", and an important cultural centre of the Enlightenment.

The vernacular poets chose to look into their past cultural heritage and from that, to restore a distinctive Scottish literature and create once again a liter ature out of the Scots language. To a large extent they succeeded. The year 1706 is important for it marks the publication of James Watson's A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems Both Ancient and Modern. This Collection, appearing significantly just prior to the Union of 1707 as if to illustrate the trend of the times, was the first of such Collections in the eighteenth century, both in England and Scotland. Watson's three volumes contain English and Scots poems and his evident pride in "our own native Scots Dialect", as he puts it in the Preface, "shows national pride transferred-for the first time, one might almost say, for well over a century-from the realms of politics and religion to that of literature."[22] In Watson's volumes we find many of

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[21] Daiches, Robert Burns, pp.24-5

[22] Daiches, ibid., p.10

the older poems of Scottish literature though the contents of the volumes did not go so far back as the Makars. Here is Christis Kirk on the Green, an important influence on Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns, the "flyting" poems, mock elegies like Habbie Simson, again of great importance to the vernacular poets.

Allan Ramsay (1684/5-1758) was historically the most important figure in the vernacular revival. He can be regarded as a literary busybody, enjoying the social life of the taverns in Edinburgh although drawn also towards the coffee houses of London, if not in person, at least in his imagination. But no one would under-estimate the work he did in promoting circulating-libraries in Edinburgh, and most important, his work as an editor. He was not a good textual editor for he would alter texts and add to them at will, but that he gathered them at all was a great achievement. Ramsay's first work as editor was to collect in four volumes "A mixed collection of old and new songs and ballads by authors living and dead, known and unknown, among which were many hitherto unprinted specimens of Scottish folk literature."[23] This Collection was The Tea-Table Miscellany (1724). The title suggests how Ramsay altered texts if necessary to suit the tastes of the day. 1724 also saw the publication of The Evergreen: A Collection of Scots Poems Wrote by the Ingenious before 1600. This was Ramsay's great service to Scottish

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[23] Daiches, ibid., p.17

literature, for by reprinting poems from the Bannatyne Manuscript of 1568, he introduced to the public the works of the Makars which had been accessible to only a very few during the seventeenth century. In his Preface Ramsay states: "Their Poetry is the Product of their Own Country, not pilfered and spoiled in the Transportation from Abroad: Their Images are native and their Landskips domestick; copied from thOse Fields and Meadows we every Day behold." Ramsay is not strictly accurate, for the Makars were influenced strongly by English and French models, but his patriotic intentions are quite clear. At last with the publications of Watson and Ramsay the vernacular was becoming respectable again, and Ramsay himself quite freely dabbled in poetry. Much of it was Augustan, or Anglo-Scots; but his important contribution as a poet was in those poems portraying life in Edinburgh or the local countryside. His poems in the Christis Kirk tradition and the Habbie tradition had a profound influence on Fergusson, as we shall see later, but Ramsay was, after all, working in a tradition already established in Scottish literature. As a "pioneer" he is best remembered for his work as a pastoral poet. He cannot rid himself entirely of Augustan influences, but his two pastoral elegies, Richy and Sandy, and Robert, Richy and Sandy, together with the pastoral drama The Gentle Shepherd, brought a degree of realism back into pastoral writing, providing also an appropriate setting for the Scottish vernacular. The stage was thus set for Fergusson and Burns. But although the

poems of the Makars had been made available to the eighteenth century, the forms which Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns adopted were generally those of eighteenth-century poetry or those of the Scottish folk tradition, like the Christis Kirk stave. There are no allegories or ballades, rondels or triolets in the work of the vernacular poets. The important link with the Makars is in the use of the vernacular as a respectable and serious vehicle for poetry.

It is worth remembering that while a patriotic intention is quite clear in the vernacular poets of the early eighteenth century, and while they may have been Jacobites, theirs is not the sentimental Jacobitism of the latter part of the century. It is a curious paradox in Scottish culture that while seventeenth-century Scotland had tended to reject the Stuart kings, by the eighteenth century the exiled Pretenders became a symbol for Scottish nationalism. The Old Pretender and his son Charles Edward Stuart emerged as the focus for national pride and patriotism: "It was only after the Stuarts were exiled that they became a romantic lost cause identified by much Scottish popular feeling with the lost glory and independence of the Scottish nation."[24] Ramsay and Fergusson were Jacobites, but for Fergusson the cause was already lost politically with Culloden in 1746, four years before his birth. Nevertheless, his expressions of regret at the decay of Holyrood Palace, the final home

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[24] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p.15

of the Stuarts as Kings of Scotland, show the elegiac movement getting under way. His Jacobite sentiments colour his attitude to the events of 1707.

4 Edinburgh in the Eighteenth Century

Edinburgh provides the backcloth to most of the events we have described and is the setting for Ramsay's and Fergusson's finest work. What was the physical condition of the city at this period? It is important to look into this, partly because of the atmosphere the city provided, and also because the year 1767 marked the beginning of a new phase in the evolution of the city. The life of the Scottish capital had for centuries flowed between Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood Palace. The long and steep street linking the two -the Royal Mile comprising the Canongate and High Street-was where most of the inhabitants lived and sold their wares. The street was very crowded and the citizens were crammed into tall buildings on either side of the street. But it was a community where everyone knew everyone else, where class distinctions were not so consistently maintained, where the humble and the well-to-do brushed up against each other in all spheres of life. It is this communal aspect of the capital city which has drawn John Speirs to observe: "As a Scots poet he [Fergusson] belonged to an Edinburgh which was still-despite the presence in it of that polite circle reflecting the rays of eighteenth-century rational enlightenment-thoroughly rural in character and speech, the town

focus of a wider agricultural community."[25] This comes out quite clearly in a poem like Hallow-Fair where the citizens of Edinburgh go out of town in winter to a fair and return to the protection of Auld Reikie-the affectionate name given to Edinburgh because of its chimney-pots and smoke. To them, the city did provide shelter and protection, and its unchanging nature added security to their lives. This was the Edinburgh of taverns and social life, where poetry was again something that men discussed and made part of their lives. "In respect of its homeliness and neighbourliness... Edinburgh in the 1760's was like a small market town of fifty years ago, but even more isolated, even more self-contained. People all knew each other by sight, and the presence of a stranger was the subject of general comment. There were great differences of wealth and clear distinctions of rank; but of the physical separation of social groups there was very little... All this gradually changed."[26]

While this change was certainly gradual, the accepted date for the beginning of the New Town is 1767. In 1752 a pamphlet was published in Edinburgh entitled Proposals for Carrying on Certain Public Works in the City of Edinburgh. These "Proposals" sought to create a capital for Scotland which would be beautiful as well as functional. They assert that, although Edinburgh has an excellent site by the river Forth, it is a confined city, overcrowded and unsuitable now

[25] John Speirs,"Tradition and Robert Fergusson", in Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774, pp.103-4

[26] A. J. Youngson,The Making of Classical Edinburgh,pp.235-6

to allow commerce and industry to flourish. "To enlarge and improve this city, to adorn it with public buildings, which may be a national benefit, and thereby to remove, at least in some degree, the inconveniences to which it has hitherto been liable, is the sole object of these proposals."[27] The "Proposals" note that there are now public-spirited men who are willing to finance public schemes to make Edinburgh attractive to the wealthy so that they would live there and make it a fine cultured city. "Let us improve and enlarge this city, and possibly the superior pleasures of London, which is at a distance, will be compensated, at least in some measure, by the moderate pleasures of Edinburgh, which is at home."[28] The undertaking is unashamedly national. The result over the next twenty years and more was the New Town of Edinburgh which many believe still to be "One of the most beautifully planned urban areas in Europe".[29] It was in 1767 that James Craig's plan for the New Town was adopted by the Edinburgh Town Council. His plan was in striking contrast to the maze of alleys and passageways in the Old Town. The New Town was to be ordered and elegant, reflecting the very finest in design and urban-planning in the eighteenth century. To the citizens of the High Street, with their close community

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[27] A. J. Youngson, ibid., pp.6-7

[28] A. J. Youngson, ibid., p.10

[29] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p.70

and their taverns, here was a threat to the unity of the Old Town. That unity did not vanish overnight, but slowly the old bonds became dissolved and the separation of the New Town and the Old Town would eventually reflect a more class-conscious society. As Youngson puts it: "Unity of social feeling was one of the most valuable heritages of old Edinburgh, and its disappearance was widely and properly lamented."[30]

Clearly the New Town appealed to the gentlemen of the Enlightenment who knew and admired the elegances of eighteenth-century England. This was the Heavenly City of Edinburgh Philosophers. "Ordered, elegant, rational, optimistic-these are terms which apply equally to Craig's plan and to the dominant thought in the Edinburgh of his time."[31] The literati were conscious of the need for an urban and metropolitan community, to get away from the more rural community of the capital as it had been before.

Where does Fergusson fit in here? He was undoubtedly the poet of the Old Town in the sense that his Edinburgh scenes are set either in the High Street or just outside the city where the citizens would hold their festivals and take their Sunday walks. He knew the Old Town and he loved its taverns and clubs. Fergusson belonged to the Cape Club, a club which had no social or professional barriers, unlike

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[30] A. J. Youngson, op.cit., p.256

[31] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p.71

some of the more select ones. His work during the day as a copying clerk might be dull, but he looked forward to finding an outlet for his high spirits in the Cape Club, and here he probably came nearest to achieving some kind of happiness- although it was an insecure happiness. The club's members all took titles: Fergusson was Sir Precentor, a reference to his fine singing voice. The members were given offices such as the Sovereign and the Councillors, and regalia was a part of all their trappings. Here were to be found poets, printers, painters, antiquaries. The club boasted among its members Alexander Runciman, the painter; Nasmyth, the painter of Burns's portrait; David Herd, the editor and collector of folk songs; James Cummyng, the antiquarian and Heraldic painter; and William Woods, the actor. "The Scots have never really been very good at class distinction (though some of the eighteenth-century clubs were preserves of the aristocracy), and the Cape Club was by no means either exclusive or unique."[32] In such an atmosphere Fergusson could come in contact with all manner of cultural trends.

But although his first love was the Old Town, it is interesting to find that in Auld Reikie he welcomes the New Town springing up beyond the Nor Loch which divided the old city from the site of the new one. We will study this in more detail in Chapter III. But there is no evidence that Fergusson and the literati had anything in common. Writing

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[32] Sydney Goodsir Smith,"Introductory", in Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774, p.23

in the vernacular he belonged to the tradition of Watson and Ramsay rather than that of Hume and Blair. Fergusson mocks the sentiment of the age where sentiment was paraded for its own sake, and his poem The Sow of Feeling, mocking Henry Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling, was not the best way to please the literati. In any case, Fergusson had no interest in them and they had no interest in him. Their adulation of Burns on his visit to Edinburgh in 1786 was not because he was a vernacular writer but because he seemed to confirm their speculations about the origins of poetry. They saw true poetry originating in a primitive environment where imagination was free and the sensibility untutored. Burns would often masquerade as "the Heaven-taught Ploughman", as Mackenzie had called him, and so play into the hands of such theorists. "Fergusson never came to terms with the literary establishment of the Scotland of his day, and Burns did so only by posing as a Heaven-taught Ploughman and at the cost of seeing his best and most characteristic work undervalued."[33]

We have already noted that most of Fergusson's poems were first published in Ruddiman's The Weekly Magazine. One might expect that this would be a common forum in which Fergusson and the literati could meet. The truth is, however, very different. The magazine was published by Thomas Ruddiman's nephew Walter. The conservative tradition

[33] Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p.92

of the Ruddiman Press was not such as to appeal to the literati. "This traditionalism becomes particularly marked in the 1740's and 1750's, when the Ruddimans showed no interest in the production of modern French, Italian and English classics of the kind that were issuing from the Urie and Foulis Presses at Glasgow, meeting the needs of a new kind of educated reader."[34] The Ruddimans were Tories and Jacobites and their Weekly Magazine had a wide circulation not confined to Edinburgh. "All that can be said is that where "Ruddiman's" went, Fergusson went, and that happened to be everywhere."[35] The magazine discussed politics, theology, literature, philosophy and education, and was a forum for public discussion of topical events and controversies.[36] It is misleading to suggest, however, that The Weekly Magazine was read by everyone. The literati would not be especially interested in a Ruddiman publication, nor did they interest themselves in the vernacular.[37] Not that The Weekly Magazine was a "vernacular magazine", for it printed Fergusson's English poems alongside his Scots poems, but the whole Ruddiman tradition was quite out of line with the European ideals of the Enlightenment. Daiches states categorically that the literati did not read The Weekly Magazine.[38] We can therefore assume with

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[34] D. Duncan, op.cit., p.83

[35] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, I, 43.

[36] John W. Oliver, op,cit., p.90

[37] D. Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830, pIII

[38] Daiches, Robert Burns, p.30

some accuracy that Fergusson's readers, his "public", were readers of The Weekly Magazine, Tories and conservative-minded Scots whose love of the past was reflected in their desire to feel a sense of continuity with that past. But like Fergusson himself, they had leanings towards Augustan poetry and would no doubt read Fergusson's English contributions as well. Fergusson's poems appear to have been very popular, for the Magazine prints contributed Epistles where Fergusson is hailed as another Ramsay: "Is Allan risen frae the deid/ Wha aft has tun'd the aiten reed."[39] But serious critics paid little heed to Fergusson even although his Poems of 1773 "enjoyed a moderate success".[40] This was the only collection of Fergusson's poems to appear in his lifetime, and it is interesting to note that it contains only nine Scots poems, and twenty-seven English poems.

Fergusson belongs to the conservative, Jacobite tradition, and he found his true medium as a Scots poet within that tradition. In older forms which he found in Watson's and Ramsay's Collections he discovered the materials with which to create his own kind of poetry.

5 Traditional Poetic Forms Used by Fergusson

We have seen the importance of Ramsay as collector and publisher in the historical development of Scottish literature, but he also made important contributions in his own right as a poet, particularly in the field of the pastoral.

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[39] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, II,69

[40] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, I,39

If we look briefly at the main literary traditions which Fergusson draws upon in his Scots poetry, the important link which Ramsay formed becomes quite clear.

Two of Fergusson's favourite traditions are appropriately Scots. One of the earliest that he uses is derived from Christis Kirk on the Green, an early sixteenth-century poem attributed to King James V. This poem, and a companion-piece entitled Peblis to the Play, provide a genre which develops continuously through Scottish literature until Burns and beyond. The genre is very far from the court tradition of the Makars for its basis is a celebration of rustic festivities and their attendant troubles. Christis Kirk on the Green shows a group of people on holiday; sometimes the people are individualised, sometimes they are simply "the people", whose ancestors have acted in this manner for generations. The poet gives a typical example of what happens on such occasions: he knows this is neither the first nor the last such occasion. A basic requirement of the genre is that drinking will lead to blows, and finally to full-scale "war" between the participants. The writing is always extremely vigorous and frank and there is much farcical humour, for it is never far from folk tradition. Its universality is seen in the type-characters which are easily recognisable; nevertheless, the coward who comes running out at the end and dares to hit only a woman, remains "Dic with ane aix", and the hero of the assembly remains Hunchon who get part of his thumb sliced off

in the battle. The tradition develops through the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the basic form is usually retained, but the subject-matter is often derived from other sources.[41]

Ramsay's discovery in Watson of the original poem and his inclusion of it in his Evergreen Collection prompted him to add two cantos: "Ambitious to imitate so great an original, I put a Stop to the War, called a Congress and made them sign a Peace, that the World might have their Picture in their more agreeable Hours of Drinking, Dancing and Singing."[42] Ramsay's cantos purport to continue the tradition, and in this note he obviously feels the vitality of the original as something worth continuing. In retaining the names and characters, and the general tone of frivolity, he succeeds. However, his cantos are written with much less dialect vocabulary and they lose the alliteration typical of the original and of the Makar tradition. In certain respects, then, Ramsay has the best of both worlds, for he keeps close links with the original, in form and subject-matter, and he makes it more easily available to his audience by dropping the archaisms and alliteration which a faithful continuation of the original would require.

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[41] E.g, Alexander Scott, The Justing and Debait Betwixt Adamson and Sym, shows the influence of Dunbar in the subject-matte

[42] The Works of Allan Ramsay, eds., Burns Martin and J. W. Oliver, I,66(from which all subsequent quotations from Ramsay are taken.)

One important factor about the tradition is the stanza form. Originally, it had ten lines, the penultimate line consisting of a short line of two or three syllables, the final one containing the refrain "At Chrystis Kirk on the Green". This stave is reminiscent of steps of old traditional dances: "Later it came to be traditionally regarded as the proper metre in which to depict popular amusements."[43] Ramsay reduced the last two lines and his ninth and final line is a short one,-generally, though not always, with the rhyme "day". Thus the original rhyming pattern ababababcd becomes in Ramsay's additions abababababc. Such is the state of the Christis Kirk tradition which Fergusson inherits.

The form most frequently used by Fergusson is the Habbie stanza, unjustly called the Burns stanza, for such a title tends to obscure the long history which the stanza enjoyed prior to Burns. Its simple six-line form has a rhyme pattern aaabab and is extremely flexible so that it can be employed for different kinds of verse, in contrast to the Christis Kirk stanza. The Habbie stanza's long life stretches from the troubadour lyrics of the twelfth century, through Lyndsay, to Sempill of Beltrees (c. 1590-1660). In his poem The Life and Death of Habbie Simson, Piper of Kilbarchan, important historically, Sempill's tone is one of regret for Habbie's death which signals the end of that past which he proceeds to celebrate, a past not unlike the scene celebrated in the Christis Kirk festivities, where Simson played at all the fairs and found himself involved in scrapes. The stanza

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[43] Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, p.115

relates what happened and then the last two lines tell of the changed situation:

> Now all such pastime's quite away
> Sen Habbie's dead. (Habbie Simson, ll.41-2)

The last line telling us that Habbie is dead forms the refrain. A development of the form is found in Hamilton of Gilbertfield's Last Dying Words of Bonny Heck, a famous greyhound. This poem extends the elegy to a poem of last words. Ramsay took up these two uses in his mock elegies on Lucky Wood and Maggie Johnston, and in Lucky Spense's Last Advice, poems which show Ramsay at his best and at his least condescending towards the Scots language as a literary vehicle.

The remaining traditions which Fergusson draws upon were not necessarily unknown to Scots writers, but they are derived more from the English literary tradition, in marked contrast to the Christis Kirk and Habbie traditions whose roots are deep in Scottish culture. Fergusson has only one example of the Spenserian stanza, but it is used in the important poem The Farmer's Ingle. The poem is reminiscent of Gray's Elegy, although the debt to Gray is more in subject-matter, particularly in the opening. One English poem in the Spenserian stanza which Fergusson would have known is Shenstone's The Schoolmistress. Shenstone's influence over the impressionable Fergusson generally helped to make his English poetry stilted and imitative in a style not suited to his talents and environment. In The Farmer's Ingle, however, the stanza derived from Shenstone is admirably

combined with a rich use of Scots. Shenstone's advertisement to his poem is interesting: "What particulars in Spenser were imagined most proper for the author's imitation on this occasion are, his language, his simplicity, his manner of description, and a peculiar tenderness of sentiment remarkable throughout his works."[44] In general terms this applies to Fergusson, though we will discover how Fergusson could only write a successful poem on rural life by making a marked departure from Shenstone's manner.

We have only one example of the loco-descriptive poetry in Fergusson's Scots poems, Auld Reikie, but the poem is important in any discussion of his work. It is a poem of city life, describing the scenes of Edinburgh, and is often grouped with Gay's Trivia where Gay describes "The Art of Walking the Streets of London". We shall look at both poems more closely in Chapter III, but it would be wrong to over-estimate the influence of Trivia on Auld Reikie, for the whole tone and attitude of Fergusson's poem is completely alien to Gay's. No doubt Trivia suggested that successful poetry could be made from the depiction of street scenes, and this led Fergusson to explore the potential offered by his native city.

Allan Maclaine believes that in two poems, The Mutual Complaint of the Plainstanes and Causey, and A Drink Eclogue, Fergusson was creating a new form.[45] But

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[44] Poetical Works of William Shenstone, Ed., Rev. George Gilfillan, p.262

[45] Maclaine, op.cit., p.78

these poems, together with To the Tronkirk Bell, have much in common with the tradition of vituperative "flyting" poetry which was very popular with the Makars. They can also be related to the eclogue genre. In the eighteenth century, the term "eclogue" was loosely used and one can say little more than that an eclogue was expected to be dramatic.[46] R. F. Jones discusses the dramatic nature of the majority of Virgil's eclogues and talks also about Allan Ramsay's pastorals which follow Virgil. He finds proof of the dramatic nature of eclogues in Ramsay's work, because some of Ramsay's pastorals form the opening scenes of his pastoral and romantic comedy The Gentle Shepherd. There is one other eclogue in Fergusson's poems, The Ghaists: A Kirkyard Eclogue. This is not a "flyting-eclogue", as Maclaine would term the other two poems, because both parties are basically in agreement and are condemning a mutual foe, but it remains in the eclogue genre because of the dramatic nature of the poem.

In his pastoral writing Fergusson's debt to Ramsay is quite clear, as we have already indicated. Ramsay's play The Gentle Shepherd has faults but it succeeds, on the whole, as a Scots pastoral romantic comedy, where the Scots setting and the Scots language mingle with the Augustan figure of Sir William Worthy and some typically eighteenth-century moral preoccupations. The play has the traditional laments

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[46] R. F. Jones, "Eclogue Types in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century", JEGP, XXIV (1925), 33-60

and dialogue between shepherds, but these are shepherds rather than literary swains, and the basic situation is made into a complete play by developing the typically pastoral opening into a plot which is viewed from various angles. Ramsay's combination of pastoral romance with local realism liberates the pastoral tradition from its Arcadian interests in the same way that his poems Richy and Sandy, and Robert, Richy and Sandy develop and liberate the pastoral elegy.

These two poems may constitute Ramsay's most significant legacy to Fergusson. In the one he places Steele and Pope in the pastoral situation in the guise of shepherds to lament the death of Addison. This may sound ludicrous but Ramsay achieves a measure of success:

> Hing down ye'r Heads ye Hills, greet out ye'r Springs.
> Upon ye'r Edge nae mair the Shepherd sings.
> (Richy and Sandy, ll.43-4)

This frank grief suits the situation as Ramsay combines the convention with a local realism in a Scots that is at once heartfelt and lacking in self-consciousness. The poem on the death of Prior, Robert, Richy and Sandy, is echoed by Fergusson in his pastoral eclogues, one to Dr. William Wilkie, the other entitled simply An Eclogue.

When we turn to the poems Ode to the Bee, Ode to the Gowdspink, and On Seeing A Butterfly in the Street, we are confronted with a new kind of poem. Odes are common enough in the eighteenth century in English poetry, even in Ramsay, but an ode to a fly or insect is quite unusual at this time, and Fergusson in this respect looks forward to the early

nineteenth century when the romantic poets would write their odes to skylarks and nightingales. Maclaine comments on Ode to the Bee that the poem, (and presumably the other two as well), "belongs to the well-established eighteenth-century English tradition of pastoral meditative poetry, a tradition which goes back to "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" of Milton and which exerted tremendous influence upon James Thomson's Seasons and Edward Young's Night Thoughts. In this type of poetry the philosophic, didactic poet finds "sermons in stones"; he describes some aspect of nature, and then draws from it some moral lesson for the guidance of man".[47] While Fergusson is clearly didactic, he is also making many comments about his own life, although these private sentiments are presented under the guise of public statements, as we shall see in Chapter III. Fergusson never becomes totally identified with the object on which he writes his ode, in contrast to Shelley and Keats, but Maclaine's statement does not take into account satisfactorily the very real personal feeling which Fergusson incorporates into these poems.

We find also certain other Scots poems which do not fall into any of these categories and traditions. We have two examples of the Epistle, so popular in the eighteenth century in England, and also in Scotland. Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns all wrote Epistles and Fergusson's are in the Habbie stanza after Ramsay's Epistles to Hamilton of Gilbertfield.

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[47] Maclaine, op.cit., p.86

There remain two poems in the Horatian tradition-Hame Content, a Satire and Horace Ode XI, Lib.I-and two comic addresses-To the Principal and Professors of the University of St. Andrews on their Superb Treat to Dr. Samuel Johnson and To My Auld Breeks. All four are written in octosyllabic couplets.

It is quite clear that Fergusson has a wide range of metres and stanza forms on which to draw in his Scots poetry. It is interesting that he was not averse to drawing upon English forms for Scots poetry and moulding from them his own distinctive style of poem. His English poems show less originality in copying the stock-in-trade of contemporary writers, but they cover a wide range of forms, including pastoral, ode, song, fable, epigram and burlesque heroics. It remains to be seen what Fergusson does with his inheritance.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE IN THE SCOTS POEMS

We have seen how Fergusson's poetry can be linked with past literary traditions. It would be wrong, however, to suppose that Fergusson merely imitates such conventions for their own sake. It becomes quite clear in a closer examination of his major Scots poems that while he writes within recognised literary traditions, his purpose is more than the desire to write good imitations. In the first group of poems to be discussed Fergusson's concern is to celebrate the continuity of life, and the literary forms and traditions with which he works are deliberately employed to emphasise this theme. Most of his work on this theme has particular reference to Scotland, its customs and literary conventions. A second group of poems will reveal Fergusson also as a man of the eighteenth century whose horizons do not end with the Border hills of Scotland, but who can view the continuing and universal traits of human nature and respond to them in his own personal manner. The fact that he uses a Scottish context in which to embody these ideas does not detract from his wider vision, but only makes the poems more meaningful to his Scottish audience. In all these poems we see Fergusson very much as the "public" poet.

Fergusson's main excursion into the Christis Kirk genre of poetry can be found in Hallow-Fair and Leith Races.

Hallow-Fair is an earlier poem and betrays more of the marks of its model. The specific occasion has changed to a fair celebrated near Edinburgh:

> At Hallowmas, whan nights grow lang,
> And starnies shine fu' clear,
> Whan fock, the nippin cald to bang,
> Their winter hap-warms wear. (ll.1-4)

Fergusson shows the continuous links with the past not only in his use of stanza from the Christis Kirk model but also in the whole tone of the poem-that this festival returns each year. He is not the sentimentalist who treats the occasion as something that has lost much of its former style, for he realises that the fair itself evolves throughout the ages, that the people adapt it according to their own needs and the needs of the day. It is seen, therefore, in all the freshness of a continuously developing family outing, where nothing is viewed nostalgically. A comparison with the original Christis Kirk poem shows that this particular gathering is not celebrating anything, but that this is a fair and a holiday where the people know what to expect and look forward to the day. There are, of course, two parties with different interests on such occasions-those who spend and lose money, those who make and steal money, and Fergusson vividly describes such occurrences as part of the annual scene. The poem has much less narrative and farce than its model, and indeed it would be unwise to look for close parallels between the two poems. What is valid, however, is the observation that the basis of Hallow-Fair is a festive occasion, giving rise to a descrip-

tion of social pleasure, and an opportunity for some narrative comedy towards the end.

Fergusson's starting-point in the poem is the description of a routine that occurs once a year, at Hallowmas. It is not a rigid routine, but the people know that when Hallowmas and the cold and starry nights arrive, it is time to go outside the city to the fair. In the opening stanzas Fergusson effectively shows this sense of routine which becomes almost a ritual. He begins with a more general description in setting the scene and proceeds to narrow this down in stanza two:

> Upo' the tap o' ilka lum
> The sun began to keek,
> And bad the trig made maidens come [smart
> A sightly joe to seek
> At Hallow-Fair (11.10-14)

It is time to prepare for Hallow-Fair, an event well-known to everyone (1.8), and one that is famous for "strapping dames and sturdy lads". The associations with Christis Kirk are evident in the preparations of the women to look their best to attract the men, but Fergusson is also well aware of the efforts to which the men resort to be attractive, in their turn, to the lasses:

> Here country John in bonnet blue,
> An' eke his Sunday's claise on,
> Rins after Meg wi' rokelay new, [cloak
> (11. 19-21)

The subsequent lines recall stanza three of Christis Kirk, where the girl rejects the suitor's advances. The fair, however, for Fergusson is more an opportunity for some vivid description of the sellers, their victims and the soldiers,

and in this respect differs from Christis Kirk. There was no point in Fergusson describing the occasion in any other way than as it actually was in his day, and faithful attention to the original was neither possible nor desirable. In using both the present tense and the future "he will", "she will", Fergusson, with justifiable confidence, can state what the people will do, for they are essentially the same folk who have gone to Hallow-Fair for generations, and past experience and a knowledge of human nature allows him to tell us what will happen and what people will say. Surely the Aberdeen cry (ll. 38ff) follows a predictable pattern from year to year.

The sixth stanza (ll. 46ff) is of particular interest because in it we can trace something of Fergusson's conception of his own role in the poem. He is the observer who has seen it all before and who finds something fresh each time; here we see him admonishing the wives as they "gang through the fair" to make their purchases cautiously. As an example to support his warning, we read:

> For fairn-year Meg Thamson got, [last-year
> Frae thir mischievous villains,
> A scaw'd bit o' a penny note,
> That lost a score o' shillins
> To her that day. (ll. 50-54)

Not only does this example provide a link with the past in declaring what had occurred, and give it greater authenticity in using a specific name: it also implies that despite his advice, such a pattern will occur again this year. It is

interesting to note that the poet as observer makes no obvious moral comment on such practices: he does not condone them, but they are part of the scene, and he has done his duty in warning people of the "wylie lowns". The eighth stanza is interesting for the lines:

> Then there's sic yellowchin and din, [screaming
> Wi' wives and wee-anes gablin (ll. 68-69)

The festive element has already been noticed, and here Fergusson shows how the fair is a family occasion when, for better or for worse, the children are brought along with their parents into the tent where the adults "bend the bicker"[9] amidst deafening noise. So the traditions of Hallow-Fair are passed from one generation to another.

Fergusson is not intent on showing only those aspects of Hallow-Fair which can be traced from year to year. He particularises certain points, not only recalling a similar mixture of the general and the particular in Christis Kirk, but also giving this fair some identity. The farcical line about Jock Bell and the slapstick routine accompanying it adopt the spirit of Christis Kirk, but the use of direct speech and the individual name makes it applicable also to this fair. Another means of achieving a sense both of the general and the particular is found in the repetition of "that day", "this day". This again echoes the refrain from Christis Kirk, but it has the effect also at one and the same time of referring to something that happens on that day, (that is, at every Hallow-Fair), and also of referring to that particular

Hallow-Fair day.

Before we leave Hallow-Fair, we must briefly take note of the second version of the poem, again entitled Hallow-Fair. This is a greatly inferior poem but easily recognisable as part of the Christis Kirk tradition, using the dactylic metre of The Blythesome Wedding, printed in Watson's Choice Collection. The Blythesome Wedding has a refrain and describes all the local characters by name who will attend the wedding and what they will eat. Fergusson's poem combines the narrative and farce of the Christis Kirk tradition with personal names from The Blythesome Wedding, but the result is a rather loose narrative. The writing remains as vigorous and energetic as Hallow-Fair itself, for example:

> Poor WATTIE he fell in the causie,
> And birs'd a' the bains in his skin. [bruised
> (ll. 30-1)

but it is nevertheless a regression towards the original poems and does not come over to us as spontaneously and authentically as Hallow-Fair. The juxtaposition of the two poems, however, serves to show that something fairly close to the originals cannot have the same impact as a poem which evolves from a tradition but which is also very much a product of its time and place.

The companion poem Leith Races comes later in Fergusson's career when he has more obviously liberated himself from the tradition. It too is a celebration of life on a particular occasion, but although Fergusson adopts

the general pattern of a festive gathering, he is well aware that he is not writing a poem of low-life, for as Smollett observes in Humphry Clinker: "I never saw such a concourse of genteel company at any races in England, as appeared on the course of Leith."[1] Smollett notes also the "multitude of all ranks, from the senator of justice to the lowest tradesman, mingled together in their shirts"[2] at a golf match held on the links. Much more attention is paid to matters of dress by all going to the races which points to the distinction between this poem and Hallow-Fair and Christis Kirk. Nevertheless, it is an annual routine which is uniquely Scottish and whose roots are deep in the traditions of social gatherings. If the poem is unfaithful to the Christis Kirk model in its mixture of a low and not-so-low society, it is also unfaithful in its emphasis more on description than farcical narrative. Among the chief merits of the poem are its vignettes of those at the races, especially the drinkers. The "browster wives", like their counterparts in Hallow-Fair, are out to make a killing and know that the men will drink anything if thirsty:

> For weel wat they a skin leal het
> For drinking needs nae hire;
> At drumbly gear they take nae pet; [impure
> Foul WATER slockens FIRE
> And drouth thir days. (11.104-8)

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[1] Smollett, Humphry Clinker, p.262

[2] Smollett, ibid., p.263

The phrase "for weel wat they", and the proverb, add to the sense of continuity, which the association with the Christis Kirk genre gives.

A striking feature of the poem is the introduction. McDiarmid traces a possible comparison with a poem by Dunbar[3] but this is no help to us. The key word is "musand", which we learn from Mirth's remarks to the poet. She wonders greatly at his musing alone while others are at the races, more especially "Ye wha hae sung o' Hallow-Fair" (l.12). She shakes the poet from his day-dreaming, but not before she has revealed herself as Mirth. The whole tone of her revelation (in stanza four) accords well with the folk-lore of Scotland, and it gives the land a particular identity in being called "The Land O' Cakes". That the poet goes on to celebrate Leith Races after she has urged him, the poet of Hallow-Fair to do so, is a significant point which will be discussed later.

One feature that immediately links these two poems with the Christis Kirk tradition is the stanza. We saw in Chapter I how Ramsay brought the original poem into prominence again and also added two cantos of his own. But Ramsay retained the basic stanza, although cutting out the penultimate short line. An examination of both of Fergusson's poems reveals that he has made important alterations to the stanza, but has kept it nevertheless distinctly in the

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[3] Dunbar, The Thrissil and the Rois, where May rouses the melancholy poet.

Christis Kirk pattern because of the refrain in the last line. Fergusson has made it ababcdcde, allowing greater flexibility. Burns too employs Fergusson's altered stanza in The Holy Fair, but his use of it is more effective than Fergusson's, (particularly Fergusson's stanzas in Hallow-Fair). Burns makes a more definite break between his first four lines abab and his last four cdcd. The effect of the last line is the same in both poets: it is a short line with heavy and longer emphasis on the syllables, in contrast to the speed and verve of the rest of the stanza, and has the effect also of making the penultimate line much longer, when the eighth and ninth lines have no break between them. If we take, as an example, lines from Hallow-Fair, we find:

> "A bowl o' punch, that like the sea
> "Will soum a lang dragoon [swim
> "Wi' ease this day." (ll. 61-3)

There is no break here, and the effect of this long final stretch is almost one of losing breath by the end, so the heavier emphasis in the last line signifies a slowing down, from breathlessness and exhaustion. The pause between stanzas allows for a deep breath and then back into the next fast-moving eight lines with a similar slowing down at the ninth (l.72). The effect of omitting the short ninth line of the original Christis Kirk stanza means that the last line of these later poems is slower and heavier in contrast to the bouncy refrain of "At Christis Kirk on the Grene", made possible by the short ninth line where energy is saved for

the final burst of the refrain. Both methods are equally effective.

What then are we to make of the first two stanzas of Leith Races? Instead of following the original Christis Kirk pattern or its later development, the pattern is ababbcbcd in the first stanza and ababacacd in the second stanza. I would contend that the only real justification for such a change is that the subject-matter of the opening stanza is not traditionally in the Christis Kirk genre, nor is the poet at this stage fully attuned to the festivities around him. A growing awareness of the world and of the races comes over him in the first two stanzas, so that by the third stanza, where the poet himself speaks, he is coming out of his reverie and will soon be the poet who also sings of Leith Races, in a more orthodox and consistent stanza.

It is clear, therefore, that Fergusson, and Burns after him, showed considerable independence while yet working within a recognisable tradition Both poets make their poems very much a product of their environment. In Leith Races we have a foreshadowing of the satire and typical attacks which Burns will use in The Holy Fair. The seventeenth stanza makes brief mention of the Lord Lyon keeping all the Whigs in order and here Fergusson makes a stab at the Whigs. The term refers more generally to the disturbers of the peace, and a Tory patriot like Fergusson uses it in a contemptuous tone.[4]

[4] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, II, 295

This reference to the ill-effects of the Union of 1707 is only made in passing, but the Union was a subject which meant much to Fergusson, just as the Presbyterian feuds preoccupied Burns but receive far greater prominence in his best work. While topical references have emerged in the later work, the spirit of holiday, of gaiety, of the people, remains unchanged essentially through the ages.

These two poems are more clearly in the Christis Kirk tradition than any other poems Fergusson wrote. This may be explained by the fact that the events in Hallow-Fair and Leith Races take place outside the city walls; yet the city and the country in these poems are really inseparable, for we read in Hallow-Fair:

> Whan Phoebus ligs in Thetis's lap
> Auld Reikie gies them shelter. (ll. 73-4)

They have returned to the protection of the city for an evening of social cheer. John Speirs points this out in his essay "Tradition and Robert Fergusson": ".....as a Scots poet he [Fergusson] belonged to an Edinburgh which was still... thoroughly rural in character and speech, the town focus of a wider agricultural community."[5] In these poems we see something of this, where the two communities come together. A celebration of town festivities in The Election, for example, does not mean that Fergusson is prevented from assimilating many of the Christis Kirk elements into it. It is wrong to

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[5] John Speirs, "Tradition and Robert Fergusson", in Sydney Goodsir Smith, ed., Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774, pp. 103-4

say that it is exactly in the tradition, but then none of Fergusson's Scots poems fall rigidly into any tradition. What Fergusson adopts in The Election is the basic stanza and also the festive occasion which the election of Deacons meant for trades folk.[6] But while the stanza is recognisably Christis Kirk in origin, it is interesting to note that its rhyming pattern ababacacd is only used once elsewhere in Fergusson, in stanza two of Leith Races. I can offer no reason for this except that Fergusson realises he is moving away further from the tradition, although the holiday atmosphere remains.

A closer examination of this wonderfully vivid poem shows how it is an event with its own ritual to which those privileged enough to attend look forward from one year to the next. We read in the opening "Summons":

> Rejoice, ye BURGHERS, ane an' a',
> Lang look't for's come at last;
> .....
> Now ye may clap your wings an' craw,
> And gayly busk ilk' feather, [dress
> For DEACON COCKS hae pass'd a law
> To rax an' weet your leather [stretch
> Wi' drink thir days.
>
> (ll. 1-2,5-9)

The exhortation to get dressed in finery, and the subsequent verses where the men call for all efforts to be concentrated in preparing their clothes, recall the preparations in Hallow-Fair and Leith Races, though here the purpose is not

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[6] The election celebrated by Fergusson was the first of a series to make up the full number of the Council. Trade Corporations submitted a "leet" of six candidates to the Council which reduced the number to three, "the short leet", on which the Corporation voted.

to attract a member of the opposite sex, but is rather one of self-respect and pride. It is soon apparent also that this is not a day of celebrations for all the community, men, women and children alike, but the prerogative of a few. Fergusson evokes an energetic sense of fun when he describes the wife mocking her husband's self-importance:

> "He's trig as ony muir-cock,
> "An' forth to mak a Deacon, lass;
> "He downa speak to poor fock
> Like us the day." (ll. 24-7)

She is fully aware of the importance of this one day in the year. The sense of continuity with the past, combined with a sense of the comic situation, is seen in stanza four:

> The COAT ben-by i' the kist-nook, [chest
> That's been this towmonth swarmin,
> Is brought yence mair thereout to look,
> To fleg awa ' the vermin. (ll. 28-31) [frighten

But such a special day is not only long-awaited for the festivities it will bring: it is also a day of rest from labours, from the ordinary grind of humble daily life. The cobler, for this day, is "pow o' WIT an' LAW" (l.41), and "Taunts at soals an' heels" (l.42). In the ensuing stanzas Fergusson makes no reference to the actual election, for this was merely the excuse for the celebration. In lines worthy of Burns, Fergusson captures the impatience of the men to get on with the drinking:

> The grace is said - it's no o'er lang;
> The claret reams in bells;
> Quod DEACON let the toast round gang,
> "Come, here's our NOBLE SEL'S
> WEEL MET the day. " (ll. 59-63)

The toast celebrates their meeting once again after a year. That the election of the Deacons was an important matter seems of little interest to the assembly. After all, says Cooper Will, he has not had so much to drink since Handsel-Teysday (the first Tuesday of the New Year). The farcical elements which we associate with the Christis Kirk tradition are more in evidence here than in Hallow-Fair or Leith Races, where men fall into the wrong bed by mistake. The events of the election day carry on to the next day as we can see in stanza twelve, where Fergusson points out the innocence of the night before. All is forgiven between husband and wife:

> While MEGG for drink her apron pawns,
> For a' the gude-man cow'd her
> Whan fu' last night. (ll. 106-8)

The Christis Kirk note of jollity is absent in the last verse. Here Fergusson is seemingly being comical in saying that the Deacons who drink too much are putting the first nails into their coffins, or becoming registered in death's "long leet". The term "leet" is put in comic contrast to the "leet" which the Deacons were drawing up for the Council which would in turn draw up a "short leet". In its place in the poem, the effect is mainly humorous, but the personal feeling and revulsion against drink in Fergusson's own mind serves as a dampening effect on the stanza. In The Election, Fergusson has seen how suitably the subject-matter lends itself to an association with the Christis Kirk tradition, and the result is very successful.

If he shows a development of the Christis Kirk tradition in The Election, an even greater and more interesting one is seen in The King's Birthday in Edinburgh. This poem is noted for its spirited description of the celebrations of the King's birthday by the citizens of Edinburgh. The king is George III, not only a symbol of the English rule, but himself hardly an Englishman. We can place this poem in the Christis Kirk tradition where the energy of the citizens is concerned, for Fergusson displays their reaction to the celebration, and the near farcical elements which we associate with this genre are very much in evidence. The quotation at the start from Drummond's Polemo-Middinia, "Oh! qualis hurly-burly fuit, si forte vidisses", also helps us to place this poem in the tradition, for Drummond's Scoto-Latin poem of the seventeenth century is associated with the genre.

However, an important element is changed: The King's Birthday is written in the Habbie stanza. There are various reasons for this, which help to shed light on the nature of the poem. In the first place, this poem has no connection with the country, so that the inseparableness of town and country which we noticed in Hallow-Fair and Leith Races has no place here. This suggests then that such a celebration did not have its roots deep in the traditions of the Scottish folk which the fairs had. It soon becomes apparent too in the poem that the day is not just one for the people, for we also find the city-fathers and the nobility present. Such a

mixture of stations in life was found in Leith Races, but the celebration of the birthday of the king of England was inimical to the Scottish patriots of the day, and for them it was no celebration. So the celebrating tradition of the Christis Kirk genre only applies to one side here, the upper classes, and not the people. This then may be one reason for the choice of the Habbie stanza. But the poem is also an attack. It is light-hearted and high-spirited, but Fergusson is so obviously on the side of the citizens of Edinburgh who throw dead cats in hostility, that he identifies himself with their attack. Fergusson in other poems too like Braid Claith, for example, uses the Habbie stanza for invective.

Nevertheless, if we look at the first stanza, even although the people are not celebrating something old and truly Scottish, it is a day which re-appears annually, and the citizens do not look forward to celebrating the event for its own sake only. Instead they look forward to it for the enjoyment of attacking "en masse" the city guard and other dignitaries who appear for this official occasion. The old tradition of a battle has developed into a battle against quite a different set of opponents. To continue the comedy which Fergusson always sees in the occasion, his comic address to the muse shows again his attitude towards the event. The opening lines with their epic and bardic associations:

> I SING the day sae aften sung,
> Wi' which our lugs hae yearly rung. (ll. 1-2)

contain the essential message of the opening of epic poetry. But while it sounds basically serious, Fergusson is deliberately playing on the humorous sound of the Scots language to make it sound frivolous. When he bids the muse be kind and drink from a whisky bottle rather than from Parnassus, and when he addresses her in lines like these:

> Begin then, dame, ye've drunk your fill,
> You wouldna hae the tither gill?
> You'll trust me, mair wou'd do you ill,
> And ding you doitet [make crazy
> (ll. 19-22)

it becomes clear that his whole purpose is to deflate the occasion by lowering the character of the hallowed muse herself into a Scots muse, inclined to drink. So the mock-epic opening shows his attitude towards the king and the event as something not worth the fuss, but having value only as an excuse to abuse the council and nobility. The contrast between Fergusson's attitude and the fulsome panegyrics which the poet-laureate of the day would produce on such occasions may be borne in mind.

A connection with comic elegy-and it must be remembered that comic elegies were written in the Habbie stanza-is provided by McDiarmid when he shows that the cannon Mons Meg was at this time in England.[7] The details are not important and Fergusson seizes on Meg not only as something of sheer physical power, but also as a patriotic symbol. This patriotic element is never far from our sight in this

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[7] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, II, 261

poem, and the eleventh stanza (ll. 61ff) requires some attention:

> O soldiers! for your ain dear sakes,
> For Scotland's, alias Land of Cakes,
> Gie not her bairns sic deadly pakes (ll.61-3) [blows

The second line sounds like a serious plea on behalf of Scotland whose identity has been gradually taken away from her, especially with the Union of 1707. The affectionate reference to Scotland as "the Land of Cakes", also found in Leith Races, gives the land he is describing some link with the past, and he pleads with the soldiers not to spill their blood. However, the phrase in line 61, "for your ain dear sakes", and the impact of the next stanza, where he describes the firecrackers being thrown at the opponents, bring out the comedy of the situation, for here is Fergusson saying they must not hit the populace, but he has no intention of dissuading the people from attacking the guard. The strong sense of comedy reaches almost macabre and grotesque proportions when Fergusson describes the dead cats being hurled at the opponents, and when he asks the muse to implore all "auld wives" not to let the cat out that day:

> If baudrins slip but to the door, [puss
> I fear, I fear,
> She'll no lang shank upon all-four
> This time o'year. (ll. 81-4)

The mock pity of line 82 evokes a false sensibility which Fergusson does not possess on this most public occasion. The concluding stanzas, where he places the muse again in a Scots setting among the "lambies" on "gowany braes", and the

"doggies", reveals that the celebration of the King's birthday itself is of no importance to him except as an occasion which gives rise to an attack, and to the descriptive technique so suited to the poet's talent. But the plea in stanza eleven cannot be taken entirely as a comic contrast to their own liberty to attack the pompous and dressed-up people with "clarty unctions": there is a strange note of patriotism here, of nostalgia, which Fergusson does not suppress, for it speaks for others as well.

In The King's Birthday in Edinburgh, then, Fergusson continues to reveal the old Scottish love for a recurrent occasion, for a fight, for a public gathering, but as we have seen, the two sides here view the celebration in different lights. The poet makes his point not by celebrating a traditional event, but by showing the people gathering to protest against something which symbolises a real threat to the continuity of the old Scottish ways and culture.

Before we leave the celebrations of the city, we must look briefly at The Daft-Days, for this poem tells of the festivities between Christmas and New-Year, where a time-worn pattern is followed from year to year, but where the purpose is primarily one of renewal and refreshment for all. Once again, Fergusson provides a link with the past in his use of the Habbie stanza: once again he shows how these stanza forms must evolve and be adapted to new uses. The poem is one of Fergusson's earliest, and the first known use of the Habbie stanza in a poem which is neither a poem of

last words, nor an elegy. Fergusson has inverted the traditional use of the stanza for death and farewell into a stanza which describes a renewal and a looking forward to the future:

> Let mirth abound, let social cheer
> Invest the dawning of the year;
> Let blithesome innocence appear
> To crown our joy,
> Nor envy wi' sarcastic sneer
> Our bliss destroy. (ll. 55-60)

As with the other poems we have looked at in this chapter, the opening sets the scene for the celebration:

> Now mirk December's dowie face
> Glours our the rigs wi' sour grimace. (ll.1-2)

But this poem is not a celebration of Auld Reikie itself, and the capital is not mentioned by name until line 19, where it provides a shelter from the nipping winter. There is no mention here of women and scoundrels trying to make money out of the celebration from their customers. Instead, he exhorts them to throw away their sorrows and forget all quarrelling. Fergusson is only at the start of his career as a Scots poet and there is nothing complex or subtle about his writing. His patriotism is seen in banishing the "vile Italian tricks" (l.45) for " a canty highland reel" (l.50), yet he does not make the basis of this poem a patriotic appeal, but instead makes the appeal more universal, without removing it from its specific context as a celebration of the daft-days in Edinburgh.

The Farmer's Ingle is one of Fergusson's most significant poems. Its influence on Burns's The Cottar's Saturday Night is undoubtedly important and it is interesting to

notice that while Burns describes the cottar-folk on their Saturday evening of leisure and conviviality, Fergusson's poem is less festive in the sense that the routine he describes is a daily one, rather than a weekly or annual one. The poem, then, is not the description of a celebration, but is itself a celebration of a continuing pattern of life in the country, where the changes which inevitably affect a city earlier and more directly than the country are less apparent. Indeed, in essence there is little that has changed over the years, and Fergusson is careful to point this out. But he is not describing a scene which is totally out-of-date, and held up as an antique, as an incentive to nostalgia. He makes us feel how alive the people are, even if their routine has hardly changed, and the specifically eighteenth-century note comes from the poet himself in his description of the scene, and his care to point out the nature of what he is describing as an example to his readers, and as an explanation of the greatness and durability of the Scots character. The eighteenth-century elements in the poem place it on a more literary level. Firstly, we have the inclusion of a line such as line nine, "Being, my Muse, and chant in hamely strain", showing the delight of Fergusson and the age in opening with this classical exhortation. The second element is the verse form itself. As we saw in Chapter I, Fergusson's stanza is the only example of the Spenserian in his work, and it is probable that Shenstone's use of it inspired his own adoption

of the stanza. Thomson and Shenstone both used the stanza form in The Castle of Indolence and The Schoolmistress respectively, but their stanza is the true Spenserian, as is Burns's stanza-ababbcbcc. Fergusson, in contrast, alters the stanza to ababcdcdd, thereby making a greater break between the first four lines and the last five lines. The stanza has the merit of providing long lines where the pace is slow and unhurried, where the poet has time to dwell on his scene and give it his full concentration and attention. The associations with the other uses of the stanza no doubt helped to determine Fergusson's adoption of it for this poem. The Schoolmistress provides a portrait of humble life, of an ageless scene where children are instructed and reprimanded, where human sympathy is revealed, but it could never provide Fergusson with a close model for imitation, for its archaisms, classical allusions, inverted syntax, and remoteness from a realistic description of life have no place in The Farmer's Ingle. Although Fergusson's stance is that of the observer, like Shenstone's, nevertheless he is describing a life he has personally experienced, and one which many of his family knew. The scene to him is real and alive. His stanza has no part in the traditions of earlier Scottish literature, but his subject-matter and handling of the stanza point the way to Burns.

Fergusson adopts his usual technique in the first stanza in setting the scene with a temporal clause: all the circumstances are again ready for the routine return of the

farmer to his "ingle". The second stanza shows how he returns home after the hard day's work, in the wintry cold, knowing that "ilka turn is handled to his mind". His wife knows that her husband needs a wholesome meal, and a drink to refresh him. It is this sense of security, of an undying routine, which Fergusson relates, and he captures the simplicity of this ritual which is meaningful, and fully in accordance with the farmer's wishes: the farmer would not want it to be otherwise. Fergusson is proud of these Scots and holds them up as an example. Their honest fare recalls the poem on Dr. Johnson's visit to St. Andrews, where Fergusson obviously delights in disgusting Johnson with a description of Scots food, and is very far from pandering to Johnson's politer tastes as the Professors have done. He suggests that if Johnson does not eat the simple fare of the Scots then the loss is his.

In stanza five, Fergusson traces the sturdy and warlike progress of the Scots when faced with conquest by the Romans and Danes, and he shows how the men who overcame the invaders lived and were brought up in this simple style. It also provides a brief sentence on patriotism and shows the continuity of Scottish history back to time immemorial. In no way can we place The Farmer's Ingle in the Christis Kirk tradition, but it is interesting to notice in the sixth stanza how there are echoes of that tradition. Here we are told how the country-folk chat and exchange all the gossip in the evening:

'Bout kirk and market eke their tales gae on,
How Jock woo'd Jenny here to be his bride,
And there how Marion, for a bastard son,
Upo' the cutty-stool was forc'd to ride, [short
The waefu' scald o' our Mess John to bide. (11.50-4)

The individual names, the wooing, the public spectacle of Marion on the cutty-stool are a part of the life of the people, and we should notice once again that Fergusson has up-dated the gossip, so that it not only reflects continuity with the past, in the question of subject-matter, but also shows how life evolves. The references to Kirk and Mess John are only passing ones, but we remember how the Kirk forms one of Burns's main objects of attack and satire, and Fergusson's inclusion of it here is an appropriate reminder of the important role the church played in the lives of men at the time.

Fergusson placed much emphasis in stanzas seven, eight and nine, on the old grandmother and the children. The occasion is very much a family one, but here too we see three generations, the grandmother passing on tales and lore to her grandchildren, as men and women have done in the past. Fergusson's writing here is very moving as he dwells on these two generations where the children are in their first childhood and the grandmother in her second:

Frae gudame's mouth auld warld tale they hear,
O' Warlocks louping round the Wirrikow, [goblin
O' gaists that win in glen and kirk-yard drear,
Whilk touzles a' their tap, and gars them shak wi' fear.
(11.60-3)

Stanza eight is interesting because the poet is fully in sympathy with the old woman's tales to the children, with her

superstition and beliefs, yet he reveals himself as a man of the eighteenth century in showing that in the cold light of reason one cannot, of course, believe in such things. Gregory Smith has pointed out this contrast in the Scots character: "Does any other man combine so strangely the severe and tender in his character, or forego the victory of the most relentless logic at the sudden bidding of sentiment or superstition?"[8] It is fortunate and apt, however, that Fergusson does not remain on the side of reason for long. He himself does not mock the grandmother's beliefs, and exhorts others not to as well. Fergusson enjoys such tales and beliefs as part of the true folk-heritage of Scotland and he uses exactly the atmosphere he describes in lines 60-3 in poems like Ghaists and the Eclogue to Dr. William Wilkie. By allowing the light of reason to penetrate for a moment, Fergusson in a sense has the best of both worlds, indulging in romantic notions and dismissing them. But he is fully in sympathy with such tales and would do nothing to stop them. He dwells on the scene for his pleasure at seeing the old traditions and tales being handed down from one generation to another. At least this has not changed, and the stanzas show how reason is kept to a minimum. In any case, it was around this period, and even earlier, that romantic notions about Scotland were developing, and the vogue for romanticising Scotland can already be traced in the works of Collins

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[8] G. Gregory Smith, Scottish Literature, p. 20

and Smollett.[9] All this gave Scotland a sense of identity up to a point-Fergusson does not dissociate himself from this movement: he appears to encourage it warmly. The description of the grandmother handing her lore to the grandchildren is summed up expressively thus: "The mind's ay cradled whan the grave is near" (1.72), a generalisation such as the eighteenth century indulged in, and yet peculiarly apt in the context. The ninth stanza furthers the idea of continuity where the old woman makes clothes for the children and is very proud to see them wear them. As with stanza eight, the last line in stanza nine, "Careless tho' death shou'd make the feast her foy", is highly expressive, for the feast and the foy are almost made one, and the continuity of life, even although she were to die, is fully brought out. It is surely not mere coincidence that has caused Fergusson to dwell at some length on the grandmother. In her, he seesperhaps an example of the old Scots people who preceeded the Union of 1707 and were gradually dying out. But if so, there is no sense in which he sees the old virtues and folklore of the nation dying, and he gives this scene as a particular example of the continuity which the Union did not curtail, at least for the present. The remaining stanzas express the continuity of life's daily pattern, rather than the continuity of

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[9] E.g. Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, and Humphry Clinker, p.286: "Everything here is romantic beyong imagination. This country is justly stiled the Arcadia of Scotland".

superstitious beliefs which we saw in stanzas seven, eight, nine, and Fergusson rejoices that such routines do not pass. Even line 82 has words which give an impression of order and an unchanging pattern of life: "In its auld lerroch yet the deas remains". The dog and cat come to wag their tails and cast a grateful eye on the farmer if he feeds them. The homely scene would lose much of its meaning and impact if it were not a daily ritual, but it is a ritual which they all expect and take a part in. Gradually, as on every night, they grow weary, and even the fire and oil lamp "can only blink and bleer". They retire to bed "till wauken'd by the dawnings's ruddy glow". Such a reference to the morning and the start of the day's routine again neatly reminds us of the never-ending pattern which they all pursue.

The final stanza has a more general application, for it is addressed to the glory of Scotland. Fergusson is in a patriotic mood, but it is not blind patriotism. He shows what made Scotland great in the past and he shows how the qualities still survive: may Scotland have many peaceful hours. The virtues of honesty, industry and content are not peculiar to Scotland, but the context in which he places those virtues, and the superstitions and beliefs, together with the personal experience and language embodied in the poem, make it essentially a product of Scotland. It is in such a poem as The Farmer's Ingle that Fergusson reveals his great pride in his country's heritage: his sympathy and common-sense combine to make the poem one of his most

appealing and enduring.

It has become evident that Fergusson, while very much a Scot, is also a man of the eighteenth century, with a wider vision than one might expect. His vision does not deal only in Scotland's links with the past and the pattern of continuity in her festivals, and in the daily routine, as seen in The Farmer's Ingle. The process of life as something continuous is also seen in certain other poems where Fergusson's main purpose and starting-point is not a description of a recurrent festival or fair, or daily routine, to illustrate continuity, but where he intends to show the continuity of human nature, its follies and trials. In all the poems to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter the context is Scottish, but less exclusively than in Hallow-Fair and Leith Races. To make them more meaningful and applicable to his fellow-Scots, he places them in a Scots setting. This allows him scope to revel in his portrayal of his fellow-countrymen as examples. Continuity is also seen in his use of literary forms, for all of the poems discussed have links with past Scottish literature.

Braid Claith is a short poem written in the Habbie stanza. As with the Daft-Days and The King's Birthday, so too here Fergusson reveals a new use for the stanza. We linked this poem with The King's Birthday because both contain satire or attack. What is notable about Braid Claith is the refrain, a feature found in the original Habbie stanza and one which Fergusson will find very much suited to his purposes. Des-

pite the Scottish context, Fergusson is attacking the old folly of placing a value on an exterior, and deducing quite wrongly the worth of the internal man by his external appearance, possessions, connections. The method of attack here is more sophisticated than that used in The King's Birthday where Fergusson is quite blatantly one of the crowd against the authorities. Here, to put across what he is saying, he ironically adopts the attitude which he is in fact attacking, so that on the face of it he agrees with those who believe one is worth nothing without clothes made of "gude Braid Claith".

The opening lines:

> Ye wha are fain to hae your name
> Wrote in the bonny book of fame. (11.1-2)

denote the more general approach which he is going to adopt in this poem. The language he uses in line eleven, for example, neatly points out the nature of Braid Claith-"the shell fu' braw" means what it says. It is a shell placed over one's real self as a protection from scrutiny or attack. The meaning is clearly the opposite of what appears. In his generalisations, in line thirteen, for example:"Waesuck for him wha has na fek o't", or lines like these:"Wooers shou'd ay their travel spare / Without Braid Claith"(11.41-42), he makes his pronouncements sound authoritative: in the first one he feigns pity for the person who does not know what to do. But we know that his intention is again quite different: a man is not, at least in Fergusson's eye, a gowk just because

he is not fashionably and expensively dressed. His stanzas (four and five) on the barber who disdains on Sunday to have anything to do with what he regards as mundane work, recall The Election. Here Fergusson satirises such attitudes, where men really believe that clothes can make them different from what basically they are. In The Election the note of censure and attack was absent because there the coblers and the barbers were only day-dreaming one day a year they could dissociate themselves from their humdrum daily routine. They never really believed that clothes made any important difference. Here Fergusson thinks otherwise, and censures those who do put a value on exteriors, for this barber walks "wi' a gawsy air". Besides attacking the belief in external worth in general terms, Fergusson also brings in universally recognisable figures to further his purpose. The seventh stanza introduces the familiar knight-gallant who wants to impress his lady by his external appearance, to make her think him handsome and brave. The words which the poet uses convey this familiar pose:

> He maunna care for being seen
> Before he sheath
> His body in a scabbard clean
> O'gude Braid Claith. (11.33-6)

The words "sheath" and "scabbard" are associated with the old warriors, but the true epic heroes had internal worth as well and did not rely on mere externals as their literary descendants have done. Not only does he attack the man's point of view, but the woman too is attacked. If the man is

not properly dressed in gude Braid Claith she will "But crook her bonny mou fu' sair". The juxtaposition of the lady's assumed superiority beside the phrase "her bonny mou" immediately deflates her pride, for "mou" hardly fits the context of the courtly tradition which is being implied here.[10] The last verse contains unfortunate rhymes: perhaps Fergusson was deliberately trying to make it sound funny to deflate further pride, for Newton and Shakespeare did not need to worry about their appearance or such trivial matters. But the stanza does not come off too successfully although the reader understands what Fergusson is doing. We noted at the beginning that the refrain is taken over from the original Habbie poem. It becomes the chief weapon of Fergusson's irony, repeatedly driving his attack home.

The meaning of Caller Water, like Braid Claith, is not restricted to a Scottish context, but in both poems Fergusson's use of Scots and his inclusion of several place-names localise the poems to make his original readers realise that he is addressing them. Caller Water is also written in the Habbie stanza, and is a poem extolling the virtues of water, fresh and pure, compared to alcohol, but its more general underlying meaning is much like that of Braid Claith, that we should value something that is simple and good in itself, rather than show a preference for something which seems from the outside to be good. In contrast, though, Fergusson's attitude is what it professes to be: he openly defies the doctors' drugs

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[10] Maclaine, Robert Fergusson, p.57

and the "clarty masquerade" (again using effective juxta-positions) which people rely on to improve their health and looks. The main point is again one which applies through the ages-that simplicity should be upheld, and "masquerade" and other follies rejected. The opening stanzas (one to four) illustrate this continuous process. Fergusson traced the line of pure water-drinking from Adam in the Garden of Eden to the Flood, but since then, he points out, men drink wine and bards become mad with Bacchus's praise. The May-day superstition (l.79 ff) is appropriate because it enlivens the theme with a piece of local colour, and also stresses continuity with past traditions and folk-lore.

The Drink Eclogue is not just another poem dealing with the continuing follies of human beings. It is true that this forms the basis of it, but it is also interesting more especially from a personal point of view where Fergusson is concerned. It can be linked to earlier Scottish literature as a development of the "flyting" tradition mentioned in Chapter I. The poem is in the form of a dialogue where brandy and whisky hurl abuse at each other, and each represents a figure familiar in literature. The quarrel starts when the brandy declares itself superior to the whisky: brandy bases its argument on the fact that those who drink brandy are from a higher station than those who drink whisky. Again, it is a question of deluding oneself by external considerations. The brandy, as we soon see in lines 41 ff, is the typical braggart, whose words recall

Harapha's in Samson Agonistes;

> Gif honour wad but lat, a CHALLENGE shou'd
> Twin ye o' Highland TONGUE and Highland BLUDE;
> Wi' cairds like thee I scorn to file my thumb,
> For gentle spirits gentle breeding doom. (11. 41-4)

In fact, the brandy is the weaker against the more virile and strong whisky, but adopts the seemingly firmer stance. We reach something much more serious when each relates the bad effects the other has on its customers. The brandy blames whisky for making people sell all they have to procure it:

> For love to you, there's mony a tenant gaes
> Bare-ars'd and barefoot o'er the Highland braes:
> .....
> For you o'er ear' the ox his fate partakes,
> And fa's a victim to the bludey aix. (11.71-2,77-8)

But the brandy fails to see the adverse effects it has on its own clients, and the whisky is not slow to point them out:

> I'm no frae Turkey, Italy or France;
> For now our Gentles gabbs are grown sae nice,
> At thee they toot, an' never speer my price: [drink:ask
> Witness - for thee they hight their tenants rent,
> And fill their lands wi' poortith, discontent;
> Gar them o'er seas for cheaper mailins hunt, [farm
> An' leave their ain as bare's the Cairn-o'-Mount.
> (11.62-8)

Besides showing the ill-effects of brandy, whisky also plays the role of the patriot in deriding those who are taken in by something because it is "better" for being foreign-simply another example of delusion.

There is some evidence of subjectivity in Fergusson's writing here. The poem belongs to the end of his career when he was turning in remorse against drink. The passages about the ill-effects of alcohol must have meant a great deal to

him personally. He describes the hardships and torments which people suffer and he must include himself. The "flyting" tradition of the poem helps to relieve it of total seriousness: nevertheless, the old maxim that the line between comedy and tragedy is very narrow applies here. The "Moralitas" which forms the landlady's lines makes it clear that the whisky and brandy are basically the same, both in their nature and in their effect on others. The importance which they give themselves is answered when we see how she regards them as much the same, for there is little to distinguish them. The poem is an attack on false pride and blindness, but the landlady's words weigh more against the brandy for basing its sense of superiority on social prestige.

In short, then, Fergusson never fails to see how Scots people are like everyone else in their follies, prejudices, illusions, and assumptions; and in showing them up where they fail, and in associating them with literary types, he shows that they continue man's basic weaknesses, in their own particular way. This is why Fergusson places his examples in the Scotland of his day. The fact that he makes his people stand for mankind in general shows that his outlook was not clouded by narrow provincial ideas. Patriot he undoubtedly was, for he wrote much of his best work deliberately to celebrate the continuity of Scottish life and festivals, but he was also the man of the eighteenth century who could make a distinction between what was valuable in nationalism and what was merely limiting.

CHAPTER III

CHANGE IN THE SCOTS POEMS

In Chapter II we saw Fergusson as the poet celebrating the continuity of life. Not only did he show the customs and festivals of his own Scotland indissolubly linked to their past, but as a man of the eighteenth century he was also aware of the continuity of human nature. The Fergusson of these poems spoke to a public of whom he was conscious, and who required such poems at this stage in Scottish history and literature, for a sense of continuity with the past, expressed in traditional forms, gave them an awareness of a cultural identity. Very rarely did we hear a more personal utterance in them, though it was not unknown now and again. But it would be wrong to think that Fergusson could only write poetry which was essentially public, which celebrated life's continuity as though nothing could ever happen to disrupt that continuity. Were he known only for those poems there would be no suggestion of a more complex figure. Fergusson, however, was very much aware of the consequences of 1603 and 1707.

As we saw in Chapter I, the Union of the Crowns in 1603 had been the starting-point for the decline of Scots as a literary language, and it was not until Ramsay that a real vernacular revival occurred. The Union of the Crowns is a convenient date but one which was over a hundred and

fifty years past when Fergusson was writing. A much nearer date for his generation was the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 when political sovereignty was terminated for Scotland as a separate nation. The consequences of this Union are more Fergusson's concern in his poetry.

Having seen Fergusson celebrate the continuity of life in the first poems we studied, we can expect him to grieve at the break in continuity in 1707. We find him in a patriotic mood in several poems,but they require closer study to determine exactly what Fergusson was saying. Three important ones in this connection are Hame Content: A Satire;Elegy on the Death of Scots Music; The Ghaists: A Kirkyard Eclogue.

Hame Content is written in octosyllabic couplets, and can be placed in the Horatian tradition. In it we see Fergusson as the country philosopher who begins with general considerations about mankind's vices and follies, and proceeds to narrow this down to a Scottish context. Fergusson discusses the virtues of content in the country, away from the snares of the city:

> May I lie streekit at my ease,
> Beneath the caller shady trees,
> (Far frae the din o' Borrowstown,)
> Whan water plays the haughs bedown. (11.19-22)

He will give thanks to the Gods for "health eneugh, and blyth content" (1.30), and asks why man lays up treasure for himself, when all is vanity. It is from line 61 that we see Fergusson discussing change. For the most part, the poem has implied the virtues of resting content with what we have, and has made

no call for change. But when he discusses those "daft chiels" who gallop off to the Continent, he launches into a passage about those who are not content with home.

The transition is neatly effected at line 61 after Fergusson has said that we cannot keep money for ever. He shows us those who wish to spend, and although the language he uses to describe the "daft chiel" is very vivid and fast-moving at this point, his real meaning lies deeper than the words themselves might suggest on the surface:

> Awa drives he like huntit de'il,
> And scarce tholes TIME to cool his wheel, [allows
> Till he's Lord kens how far away. (11.63-5)

Not only does the chiel go off in a hurry, but by inference he is trying to run away from time, from his own transient nature as a human being. In the passages describing the Grand Tour in Europe, Fergusson sounds very much like a narrow-minded Scots patriot who talks foolishly and without experience, declaring anything in Scotland must be better than anything abroad. He suggests that the Tiber and the Arno are only lifeless pools: how can they compare with the Tweed? Their shores may have vines and myrtles as shelters for the flocks, but:

> Like ours, they canna warm the heart
> Wi' simple, saft, bewitching art. (11.87-8)

In Scotland there are more melodious sounds for it is a poetic land. Were Fergusson to mean all this seriously then his status as an intelligent poet would be very insecure. But here he is only reacting in an extreme manner on behalf of

Scotland, and more generally home, (no matter where), in contrast to the "daft chiels" who are going to the other extreme about the beauties and advantages of Europe. If we look more closely we soon see that Fergusson is concerned with something at once more general and more fundamental about human nature. It is not that he is against Europe, but he is fighting the attitude expressed in 1.68,"For far aff FOWLS hae FEATHERS fair". Fergusson is not against a change of scenery and does not mean seriously what he said about the Arno and the Tiber. He is against those who think change in itself must be good, and his image of the far-off fowls having better feathers sums up this idea very neatly. When we are in a rational mood, as Fergusson is, we agree with him. Yet it is very human to believe that change must be better. We can connect here what Fergusson says about change, and his subsequent lines where he prefers the Scottish to the Italian songs, with what he expresses in other poems we have seen, like The Daft-Days, "And banish vile Italian tricks / From out your quorum," (11.45-6). In lines 101 ff of Hame Content, Fergusson talks of the "simple garb o' Nature here", compared with the disguise of the Roman songs. While the belief in the simplicity of Scots poetry and song can be justified, Fergusson does not mean that therefore the Italian and Roman poetry is artificial: as a poet writing in the Horatian tradition, this would be an extreme position. He is only warning others

against assuming that it is better because it is foreign. In this sense it has the "disguise" of being foreign. The conclusion of the poem turns the last paragraph into a lament for Hamilton of Bangour who wrote The Braes of Yarrow. But is it a lament for Hamilton specifically, or is Hamilton merely a representative of something more general? From the evidence of the rest of the poem, Fergusson is mourning the passing of another link with thepast, with a writer who wrote about Scotland. The expression of the gradual erosion of a Scottish culture provides a convenient link with The Elegy on the Death of Scots Music.

The Elegy is written in Habbie stanzas as befits anything purporting to be an elegy. But elegies are usually for particular people, and this cannot be said with complete accuracy about Fergusson's poem. The poem is only the third which Fergusson wrote in Scots and his voice is public. The traditional refrain of the Habbie stanza is maintained here to good effect. The refrain that music is dead is varied, but the point of it is kept up all the way through like the repetition of a dirge. The opening two stanzas are simple, but Fergusson's contrast between the past and the present is brought out in his use of tenses. He employs the past tense for the first four lines (stanza one) and the first five (stanza two), and the refrain in the present comes as a quiet conclusion, "But now she's dead" (l.12). From the third stanza to the sixth, the poet uses the present to lament what is now no more. There are clear echoes of the pastoral elegy in stanza three where

he calls upon the nymphs and Naiads, and all nature, to mourn the death of Scots music. The true pastoral elegy grieves for the passing of a particular person who is often a poet. Here Fergusson personifies Scots Music into an individual who has died and taken all her fine poetry and song with her. He moves through the different kinds of music, "the chaunter" or "aiten straw" (l.23), the lilting and the chanting in the countryside (ll.26,29), and the bagpipes (l.31).

Turning in line 37 to the words "Macgibbon's gane: Ah! waes my heart!", we have again the formula for the traditional pastoral elegy. Fergusson turns from a lament for music to a lament for Macgibbon, "But now he's dead". When we realise that Macgibbon died when Fergusson was six years old in 1756, and that Macgibbon was leader of the Gentlemen's Concert in Edinburgh which played a great deal of Italian music, it is clear that Fergusson's praise is not personal. Macgibbon did, however, publish three collections of Scots tunes, and McDiarmid suggests: "His Scots Tunes made him a convenient representative of the tradition".[1] This is precisely what Fergusson does in Hame Content when he introduces Hamilton of Bangour. These names lend a more particular note to what Fergusson is saying, and reveal his fondness for the general and the particular-here expressing the general through the particular-as we have seen already.

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[1] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, II, 257

It also accords with the tradition of the Habbie elegy. The familiar note reappears in stanza nine:

> Now foreign sonnets bear the gree, [prize
> And crabbit queer variety . . . . .
> Of sound fresh sprung frae Italy,
> A bastard breed!
> Unlike that saft-tongu'd melody
> Which now lies dead. (11.49-54)

We are not, however, prepared for the final stanza. In an elegy the poet usually laments what is dead, and may express his hopes for the immortality of the deceased. But the last stanza of this elegy turns from mourning into a battle-cry for the restoration of Scots Music, and this sudden new tone leads to a powerful climax. Fergusson hails Scotland as the land that could overcome the Roman swords, and asks her sons to speed to battle to fight to restore what is dead. This warlike note was made in passing in line 35 when he says we never hear the warlike hum of the music of the bagpipes for it is now dead. Here, in the final stanza, the "warlike hum" that was dead in line 35 is now to be revived. An interesting link with the ninth and the last stanzas is that in stanza nine Fergusson was against the infiltration of the Italian music into Scotland, for it was destroying native talent and growth. So just as their ancestors fought for their independence against the Roman invaders with some success, so too their descendents should in their turn fight off this new Italian threat to the independence of the Scots nation and its culture. The concluding stanza rings out its cry in fighting language to

inspire the audience for whom Fergusson knew he was writing.

We will never find Fergusson more fervently patriotic. Here he dramatises a change which has occurred, and his battle-cry is a plea to restore the native Scots music which is being threatened. He knows that the language and the poetry of Scotland are especially susceptible to the new influences, the English language and Italian music. If these influences continue to infiltrate the native traditions, the link with the past suffers a severe set-back. Is it possible that Fergusson is talking at the same time about Scots music in particular and also about something more fundamental? The tone of Hame Content would suggest that he is concerned with people's attitudes towards change, attitudes which he believes are misguided. A clue to The Elegy can be found in Fashion. A Poem, published only a week before The Elegy (in February 1772) and written in English. The subject of the English poem has universal significance, and deals with an old idea:

> Nature! to thee alone, not Fashion's pomp,
> Does beauty owe her all-commanding eye. (11.51-2)

-the problem of the truth of nature and the disguise of art or change when wrongly used. Again Fergusson is in public voice, moralising against the false lure of "civilization" for it leads to the "folly and dull effeminacy" (1.71) which ultimately destroyed Rome. His conclusion is, therefore:

> How many foreign weeds their heads have rear'd
> In thy fair garden? Hasten 'ere their strength
> And baneful vegetation taint the soil,
> To root out rank disease, which soon must spread,
> If no bless'd antidote will purge away
> Fashion's proud minions from our sea-girt isle. (ll.79-84)

Fergusson seeks "to root out rank disease". He wishes the old strength of Scotland's cultural independence to be maintained, but this does not deny that it must evolve. These two poems (Hame Content and The Elegy) have shown a more fundamental concern with change, adapted to a particular Scottish context. Fergusson never denies that change occurs and he does not seek to close his eyes blindly to the realities of the situation and turn the clock back to 1707 as if nothing had happened. He recognises change and lives with it, but he looks at the case on its own merits, and believes that the change in this case was too abrupt and one for which the people of Scotland were not prepared. He wishes to emphasise the older Scottish culture so that the people do not lose it entirely. The assertion that Scots music is dead in 1772 was an exaggeration, but one that was necessary to put over the point that Scottish culture would be dead in time if its natural growth were denied.

This desire to keep the spirit of the old days is brought out in another public and patriotic poem lamenting the Union of 1707: The Ghaists: A Kirkyard Eclogue. This poem openly names the Union as a bad day for Scotland. The details of the occasion which gave rise to the poem are not important, and the main point is that the endowments of

George Herriot and George Watson for schools in Edinburgh were threatened, in that the government, now centred entirely in London, sought to pass a bill whereby the trustees of the endowments would invest all the money in a public government fund, and an annuity from the fund would be paid to supply the funds for the schools. What is therefore at stake is Scotland's independence once again. This is nothing abstract, for here we have a very real example of the erosion of the rights of the Scots to continue to determine matters which had been under their jurisdiction for centuries. Such a topical subject could have been made into a poem which was of no interest to anyone except those actually alive at the time; Fergusson could have made it so full of superficial abuse and satire against England as to become tiresome. We must not overlook the fact that this is a "party" poem. Fergusson is taking an anti-Whig line, and prefers matters to be left as they are, so that Scotsmen can continue to administer these charities. But while the party politics of the Whigs and the Tories may have been the inspiration for the poem, it is also concerned with the more fundamental questions again of the independence of Scotland and its independent spirit: "He looks back regretfully on the old days of sturdy Scottish virtue and heroic independence; and, like Burns, he voices with sharp-edged satire his resentment of the Union as a betrayal of national honor and integrity."[2]

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[2] Maclaine, Robert Fergusson, p.99

Fergusson moulds all these elements into a fine poem by the form and setting which he uses to bind it together and provide a framework. The eerie opening conveys an atmosphere in which the ghosts can truly evoke something of the grandeur of bygone days. The loneliness and the age of the ghosts are well emphasised at the beginning by such words as "antient", "grave", "langspun day", "lanely tombs". The supernatural develops through Watson's description, for "bogles and spectres" in the very depths of night drag off skulls and legs" amang the hamlocks wild". There are many echoes of Shakespeare, as in:

> Now whan the dawning's near, whan cock maun craw,
> And wi' his angry bougil gar's withdraw. [cock-crow
> (11.15-6)

Fergusson achieves something of the old ballad atmosphere particularly in his use of bird imagery, which also provides good images of the government in London preying on the Scots:

> While owlets round the craigs at noon-tide flee,
> And bludey bawks sit singand on the tree. [bats
> (11.27-8)

"Nature has chang'd her course" and all has become unnatural.

The lament for the old Scotland begins:

> Ah, CALEDON! the land I yence held dear,
> Sair mane mak I for thy destruction near. (11.29-30)

Herriot laments the passing of the Stuart Scotland he knew, and sees now that his towers are sunk, his lands are barren, and all must fade. The less emotional and more reasonable voice of Watson takes over, declaring that Herriot is inaccurate, for his towers still stand. The reply by Herriot is Fergusson's

most explicit comment on the Union:

> Think na I vent my well-a-day in vain,
> Kent ye the cause, ye sure wad join my mane.
> Black be the day that e'er to England's ground
> Scotland was eikit by the UNION's bond. (11.55-8) [added

Watson's statement that Herriot's buildings still stand is disregarded by Herriot, for it is not the physical state of the legacy that Herriot is interested in, nor the physical state of Scotland. The old buildings still stand, so that in this respect nothing has changed. But it is the spirit of independence, of strength, which prevailed in the old days, which is fast disappearing. Just as Fergusson, by implication, knows Scots music is not dead, so too here he does not make a statement to the effect that Caledonia's destruction is complete: he says that it is near (1.30). The ghosts, who are linked with the old days, (although there was a hundred years between the original Herriot and Watson), can therefore compare the times, and they are shocked by the spirit of this age, by its government. In a biting attack on the English king and his corrupt government (11.79ff), Fergusson through Watson declares "the crown wad never spier the price o'sin"(1.89), but it is disrupting the work of charitable institutions from which many well-educated and fine men emerged. Here we see again the bird imagery, as Watson describes the government's false sense of priorities and how it affects a man:

> His geer maun a' be scattered by the claws [goods
> O' ruthless, ravenous and harpy laws. (11.93-4)

The measures that Watson proposes in order to maintain independence are extreme, but they reveal a determination not to allow the upright and stalwart Scottish spirit to be broken by infiltration from England. The poet never forgets, however, that this is a poem, and he concludes with lines effectively bringing us back to the original atmosphere. The ghosts will put the turf above their heads till night, and then go off to see Sir George Mackenzie[3] who will give legal advice on the problem. It is interesting that the poem comes to no real conclusion or resolution of the problem. Fergusson has stated through Herriot that the old spirit is fast disappearing; he needs to say no more.

We may sum up at this point and say that while Fergusson obviously sees the disadvantages of the changes brought about by the Union, he does not deny the actual situation and advocate a return to pre-1603 or pre-1707 days in all respects. Change is a fact of life and he recognises this, but he dislikes the attitude that change itself must be good, and he is alarmed at the gradual change of values, from the old sterling qualities to superficial ones. With specific reference to Scotland's culture, he is wary of its erosion and loss of independence which is symptomatic of the loss of the old Scots spirit of integrity, candour, simplicity. In these poems he expresses public sentiments and his public

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[3] Sir George MacKenzie (1636-91) was remembered by Fergusson as the opponent of Charles II's proposal of 1669 to unite the two kingdoms and as the author of The Defence of the Antiquity of the Royal Line of Scotland (1685).

listens eagerly to what he has to say about change.

Auld Reikie is Fergusson's longest poem and a central one in any discussion of his work. It was published in 1773 and was intended as the first canto of a much longer poem, though only our version of 368 lines survives. Auld Reikie is a poem whose subject is unquestionably Edinburgh, Fergusson's beloved city, beloved both as a home and as a capital. The poem is a series of scenes describing a variety of aspects of city life, but it is often compared to Gay's Trivia, for Gay took London as his subject, and it is likely that Fergusson, who knew Gay's work, was inspired by Trivia to make Edinburgh the subject of a poem. Here and there we find similarities between the two, but the spirit of Auld Reikie is entirely different from that of Trivia. Gay's subtitle is "The Art of Walking the Streets of London", and as this suggests, it is full of what to do and what not do do. Gay walks among the markets, and among the less respectable areas of the city, but it is always as one who is visiting. He does not belong there, and it is difficult to feel that this is his city, that he is a part of it, or particularly proud of it. Gay's poem is typically eighteenth century in its address to the muse, in its moralising, in its classical allusions, and in its digressions. By his advice Gay makes it clear that he is writing for the upper middle-class, and they cannot indulge wholeheartedly in the life of the city, for they must avoid certain areas because of the danger to their clothes. When he has the opportunity to write the kind of

description that we have from Fergusson in Leith Races, for example discussing the market on the frozen Thames, Book II, he makes no real use of it. This is the type of occasion in which Fergusson could show the community spirit of Edinburgh, but the London that Gay was describing had grown into something much bigger than Edinburgh. In any case, Gay has no interest in community gatherings in the poem and has no desire to seem a part of them. All he does is to introduce classical similes and tell a woeful tale. Only in the division of day and night, and in their patriotic intentions, do we see similarities between Gay and Fergusson.

Auld Reikie is the best Scots town he knows and this is the source of Fergusson's inspiration. We remember how he talks about the social cheer of the city in other poems, in which Auld Reikie itself was not the starting-point, as in The Daft-Days. Here Edinburgh is his subject. When the summer is over and it is winter again, it is time to go back to Reikie's shelter. Fergusson talks of Edinburgh through other seasons of the year, but it is the protection and security which it provides during the winter which he and the people celebrate. They know it will be there for them, and the old life of the taverns will carry on as before. In his first series of vignettes, he describes the morning, the afternoon and the evening. Here there is none of Gay's condescension or caution. The old routine goes on day after day and Fergusson, as Allan Maclaine has pointed out, is fully aware of the more squalid aspects of the city. Fergusson is not

idealising and omitting anything which may seem to spoil the city he describes. He enjoys its contrasts, its strange old beauty, and its squalor.[4] He is not slow to point out the faults of those he describes, especially the gossips who have nothing better to do than pass comments on others.

It is,however, the night time which Fergusson loves and knows best of all. Then he could forget all his cares and enjoy the society of his friends in the Cape Club. In his description of night (11.67ff) he makes it into a ritual:

> Now Night, that's cunzied chief for Fun, [recognised
> Is wi' her usual Rites begun;
> Thro' ilka Gate the Torches blaze,
> And Globes send out their blinking Rays. (11.67-70)

The word "cunzied" shows how night is set apart for merry-making, and Fergusson describes this ritual which happens every evening with a freshness which would suggest that it never becomes stale or tedious. The blazing torches add to the festive atmosphere. It is now that the sinners and the cheats come out to the street, for they know human nature, they know human ways, and they know what people will do and what they want. He moralises, but his source is a natural part of the scene and is not imposed on it. The universal braggart and the universal fop are always a target for Fergusson's satire, as we see in the passage beginning "Frae joyous tavern, reeling drunk" (11.99ff), and his use of contrast is brought out again where he compares the fop and his pretension with his lying drunk in the gutter, a figure of degradation:

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[4] Maclaine, "Robert Fergusson's Auld Reikie and the Poetry of City Life", Studies in Scottish Literature, I (1963), 104

Ah, Legs! in vain the Silk-worm there
Display'd to View her eidant Care. (11.127-8) [busy

The obvious moral behind these lines is not imposed but flows naturally from the description of the fop. The repetition of "now" in lines 131, 135, 143, again gives the sense of a routine which is followed night after night, and to which Fergusson looks forward as a means of getting away from his dull routine as a clerk, and from life's cares. It is in this spirit that he welcomes the relief provided by the Cape Club. In other passages Fergusson tells of the markets and their smells, and revels in the fact that the place is so unclean. Long has it been so, long may it continue, he seems to say.

These vignettes clearly show that Fergusson is again portraying the continuity of life. But if this poem were just another of Fergusson's public poems in which he celebrates life's continuity it would have no place in this chapter. Fergusson is celebrating Auld Reikie which is a different thing from celebrating the continuing pattern of life in Auld Reikie, although this is a part of his purpose. Auld Reikie is an important poem for this study because of its combination of two elements, change and continuity. Hame Content and The Elegy on the Death of Scots Music both looked at change and continuity, but these two ideas receive more detailed and more complex treatment in Auld Reikie. Here Fergusson is not only the poet who talks about and illustrates continuity, and who needs the continuing security and stabil-

ising effect of the Cape Club for himself; he is also the poet who withdraws from the crowd at line 259 ff. If we go further back to lines 237 ff. he shows how people "change their faces wi' their clo'es" (l.234), and is against the gloom that people cast over their faces just because they think they should look mournful on a Sunday. He then proceeds to talk of the people on their Sunday afternoon outings in fine clothes. There is none of the satire of Braid Claith, but there is a humorous touch where he says the ladies may pull their "bongrace" (a large bonnet) over their faces, although they are not so worried about covering their legs. In these lines he is the public poet who discusses the society around him, and who is a part of that society. Now in ll.259ff. he wants to leave the "dandring cits" who wander about only for the purpose of being seen:

> Let me to ARTHUR'S SEAT pursue,
> Whare bonny Pastures meet the View;
> And mony a Wild-lorn scene accrues,
> Befitting WILLIE SHAKESPEARE'S Muse. (ll.263-6).

He would like Fancy to join him there, but if it rained, he would go down to Holyrood, he would stray, "And gie to musing a' the day" (l.274). Here is the Fergusson whom we met very briefly at the start of Leith Races, who had been "musand" then, and who, as the bard of Hallow-Fair, was expected to go along to the Races and be sociable there. Now he is publicly rejecting the crowd, something he does not do in Leith Races, to muse all day. Admittedly he muses over something dear to the Scots people-the glorious days of the

Stuarts. He feels the dignity of the old nation has gone and the thistles grow wild in the old palace. The interesting use of the thistle, the national emblem of Scotland, must be intended to show that the spirit of the past is not totally dead, but no one really cares about the past. In the ensuing passage, he talks about debtors getting away "Frae the Din/ That rings Auld Reikie's waas within." There they have no fear of being seen and they have peace. Fergusson shares this desire for peace away from the hurly-burly of the life of the High Street: he wants to "breathe the Bliss of open sky". The poem has changed to a more personal note and this is maintained when Fergusson speaks of George Drummond, the former Lord Provost of Edinburgh, in glowing terms. He praises Drummond's "reign" as administrator, civic head and benefactor. But then we read:

> By thee AULD REIKIE thrave, and grew
> Delightfu' to her Childers View:
> Nae mair shall GLASGOW Striplings threap [insist on
> Their City's Beauty and its Shape,
> While our New City spreads around
> Her bonny Wings on Fairy Ground. (11.323-8)

Here Fergusson talks of the expansion of the capital by the building of the New Town across the Nor Loch, the first time we come across such a reference in his work. We have seen Fergusson the public poet singing the praises of city life but only the life of the High street: he loved its conviviality and its enclosed nature because it provided security both for himself and for the public for whom he wrote in those poems. If they moved away it was to the country, as in Leith Races and Hallow-Fair, and they could return to the city at night.

Why then does Fergusson praise Drummond's support for the New Town? An expansion of Edinburgh would scatter the people, the classes would no longer remain mixed in the old High Street, the security of the small city would become less apparent in a bigger town, if it did not vanish altogether. Is Fergusson aligning himself with the literati and the philosophers who found the plan for the New Town so reasonable and so ordered? There is no reason to see Fergusson actively supporting the literati or the idea of the New Town, but the tone of lines 325-8 is rather one of pride in it. Fergusson no doubt realised, as the "Proposals" for the New Town had suggested[5], that the capital city of Scotland, if it were to flourish as a capital and play host to many visitors and distinguished men and women, would have to grow and become worthy of its role. In the gracious new town arising beyond the Nor Loch Fergusson saw a development which would become the glory of Scotland and eighteenth-century town-planning.

If this, then, is Fergusson's motive for praising Drummond, how are we to reconcile it with his desire for security which life in the Old Town gave to himself and to his fellow-citizens? Such praise shows that Fergusson is one step ahead of his readers, for he realises that the coming of the New Town is an inevitable factor in the evolution of Edinburgh as the capital of Scotland, and the building of the

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[5] A. J. Youngson, The Making of Classical Edinburgh, Chapter I, cited in Chapter I of this thesis.

New Town is a symptom of the general transience and change which affects all men. Life is never static, and for better or for worse, Fergusson sees that the security of the small area which had formed the capital city for countless years is on the point of disintegrating, even if the Old Town itself survives physically. Fergusson's own daily life and his evenings of social pleasure at the Cape Club will be threatened eventually by these developments, but he accepts the inevitable. We have seen how he has retired to ponder by himself, but his own acceptance of the inevitable may not be so easy for others. Nevertheless, as the public poet, he takes a positive view of the situation and looks for the advantages of such an enterprise. He foresees the great asset the New Town will be to the dignity of Scotland, for Edinburgh will be on a level with London and will be a worthy capital city. At the same time, the Old Town will not be destroyed but will lie alongside the New Town as a symbol of the continuity of the past, and as a symbol of the reconciliation of the past and the future. His appeal is national-Scotland's glorious past will not fade and he sees "the glorious possibilities in the New Town, including the prospect of Edinburgh's becomingaserious rival in beauty to the charming little cathedral city of Glasgow."[6]

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[6] John W. Oliver, "Fergusson and "Ruddiman's Magazine"", in Sydney Goodsir Smith, ed., Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774 p.86

We have observed that the New Town for Fergusson is a symbol of the passing of the old life. In his Scots and English poetry he is aware of the inevitability of change. We have seen in Chapter II how many of his Scottish poems celebrate life's continuing pattern from year to year, and this brings us to an important aspect of the poet's personality. In the life of the Cape Club he looks for security, for the assurance that he can return there every evening, for in the merriment of the Club's activities he can forget his own melancholy feelings about life and the transience of all things human. In the regalia and the pseudonyms of the Club he can forget he is plain Mr. Fergusson, the clerk. He tells us in his English poems, (for he is more open about his personal feelings in English), that he drinks to drive away his cares; but we are told too that the happiness which he finds in the Cape Club is only transient and has no lasting basis:

> Now from the oozing caves he flies,
> And to the city's tumults hies,
> Thinking to frolick life away,
> Be ever chearful, ever gay:
> But tho' enwrapt in noise and smoke,
> They ne'er can heal his peace when broke.
> (Ode to Horror, 11.37-42)

In these more private and rational poems he is well aware of the delusiveness of wine, but he returns to it each evening. It is interesting to find in Auld Reikie that Fergusson juxtaposes a passage about the Cape Club (11.153-60) with a passage about death and the ephemeral nature of man. He turns from "Mirth, Music, Porter" (1.157) to a "dismal grim" group:

Says Death, They'r mine, a dowy Crew,
To me they'll quickly pay their last Adieu. (11.165-6)

He describes (11. 179ff) how in the morning we are cheerful and do not think death can harm us. But when one sees a corpse "Soon, soon will this his Mirth controul/ And send Damnation to his Soul." The "dead-deal" is "an awful shape" and the "niest Dead-deal may be ours." These two scenes, the Cape Club and the horrors of death, sum up the extremes which we find in Fergusson. We must not forget that the mirth and joy which he finds in Auld Reikie give way in his next poem, A Tavern Elegy, (written in English) to feelings of melancholy and the wish "To be for ever number'd with the dead" (A Tavern Elegy, 1.42).

Fergusson feels transience personally, but he is a man of the eighteenth century and he is a Scot. The poets of the eighteenth century were concerned more with man in society and man as a social being. They did not lack feeling but the expression of personal feeling was played down. In many respects, this is also a Scots characteristic. Fergusson, as we have seen, is very much the public poet when he writes in Scots, speaking to an audience and writing in a vernacular and in literary forms which link the audience with their past cultural heritage. How does he reconcile his personal statements of transience with this need to speak to his audience as a Scotsman and as a patriot, more especially since he is unwilling to speak personally in Scots in any case?

He chooses Scots for many of his statements because he had found it to be the best medium for expressing what he wanted to say: he spoke and "felt" in Scots, and wrote in it. But there are also national reasons for writing in Scots-the vernacular revival must continue and a poem in Scots would contribute to this revival and make Scots a language of some standing. Combined with the vernacular, he embodies the ideas in Scots forms (with the exception of the Odes), so that poems like To My Auld Breeks, An Eclogue to Dr. William Wilkie, and the two Elegies, to David Gregory and John Hogg, fall into a tradition in Scottish literature. To My Auld Breeks belongs to the class of comic addresses found in Dunbar, for example, and in Burns later on[7]. The Eclogue belongs to a more recent tradition, the pastorals of Allan Ramsay, and the elegies belong to the Habbie Simson tradition, not only in form but also in subject-matter. We have said that the Odes do not conform to any Scottish tradition. But as we saw in Chapter I, they are unique also in the English tradition. They can be aligned with a Scottish tradition only by their use of the vernacular, and with English chiefly by their moralising.

Fergusson writes in these forms and in Scots so that he can express his thoughts both publicly and privately. His readers would recognise his purpose of restoring a national literature and giving the nation a cultural identity

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[7] Dunbar, "Schir, lett it nevir in toun be tald"; Burns's The Auld Farmer's New Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie.

to off-set the political identity which was lost in 1707. He also meets their wish to make Scotland a European nation by being genuinely Scottish again.[8] At the same time, these forms provide a cover for Fergusson's own feelings so that he can express them without making the poems into personal statements. To My Auld Breeks is a particularly good example, as we shall see, but in the other poems as well, the tradition which Fergusson works in detracts from the more personal statements in them, so that the readers do not need to see them as very private poems. Nevertheless, Maclaine's statement about the Odes is relevant to all the poems we are about to discuss: "We are struck by the fact that whatever freshness or merit these pieces [Odes] contain seems to result from their personal quality, their relevance to Fergusson's own experience. In all three, there are strong suggestions that Fergusson chose to write on these subjects not from a blind desire to follow poetic conventions of his day, but becuase he was driven to do so through an emotional reaction to his own difficult and discouraging situation in life."[9]

In Auld Reikie we have found a mixture of public and private feelings, but it must not be thought that all the poems written after Auld Reikie show this trend. Some of those we are to discuss (on Gregory and Wilkie) preceed Auld Reikie, and the remainder follow it. It is true as a general remark that Fergusson's poems become increasingly more personal and more applicable to his own situation, but

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[8] Daiches, Robert Burns, pp. 24-5

[9] Maclaine, Robert Fergusson, p. 115

Leith Races comes after Auld Reikie, and we saw there how Fergusson's attempts to "muse" were suppressed by the demands placed on him to be the public poet. This shows that in his Scots verse Fergusson is never fully able to leave off this public voice. When Fergusson talks about the changes created by the Union, he talks to the public who agree with his belief in the dangers created by 1707. In certain of his moods he is with them. But there is also the Fergusson who talks about a change he feels very personally. He must incorporate these feelings in a form which gives expression to them without letting them predominate.

To study in closer detail this universal change, this transience which Fergusson feels himself and sees around him, we must discuss Ode to the Bee and Ode to the Gowdspink; On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street; To My Auld Breeks; Eclogue to the Memory of Doctor William Wilkie; and The Elegy on John Hogg. The poem On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street can be grouped with the Odes, To the Bee and To the Gowdspink, for in all three Fergusson takes as the starting-point of his poem an insect or a bird on which to hang a moral. As we have already seen, these Odes and the Butterfly poem, are unusual at this time both in English and Scottish poetry, and they look forward to the treatment which the Romantic poets gave the ode as a vehicle for personal expression. Fergusson is not a romantic in the sense that he allows himself to become totally identified with the bird or the insect he writes about, nor are the poems entirely poems of personal

feeling and flight. In all three, we have examples of Fergusson making the ode a means for both public and private sentiment. It is quite easy to read them and think of them as expounding views on industry, the dangers of external trappings, or liberty, for in their public context this is what they describe, and as such are applicable to Fergusson's audience as well as to himself. That this is the more dominant impression after reading the poems shows how Fergusson is unwilling to become totally subjective in Scots. But underlying the poems we also find Fergusson's own personal expression of his feelings.

In The Ode to the Bee, Fergusson's opening exhortation to the herds to sing and welcome the bee shows him in lyrical vein, suitable for the semi-personal tone of the poem. The poem praises the industry of the bee, and shows it as an example to man to prepare for the winter of his life. All good things and all good times pass, and we must store up treasure and memories for later days. Fergusson is not, of course, advocating that we store up nothing but money, although man should have enough for content and comfort. But that he is against the useless hoarding of money is seen in Hame Content. Between lines 53 and 60 in Hame Content he makes it quite clear that he argues this from his belief in man's transience as an individual:

> O think that EILD, wi' wyly fitt, [old age
> Is wearing nearer bit by bit,
> Gin yence he claws you wi' his paw,
> What's siller for? (11.55-8)

It is less at this point and more towards the end of the Ode that we hear Fergusson himself speaking, for there, in the

last two paragraphs, we find him in total sympathy and understanding with the bee, where he offers protection to the bee to continue to work and sing like himself. Both supply their needs from the bounty of nature and Fergusson's consolation as a poet is "That lyart time can ne'er impair" the garlands that he makes from nature. We see, then, the poet showing the need for industry and an awareness of the transience of the individual. What emerges from the conclusion, however, is a belief in the ultimate immortality of the poet's gift to men.

The Ode to the Bee does not combine these personal and public feelings so well as does On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street. Here Fergusson makes effective use of the old technique of contrast, for he seeks to deflate the butterfly's pride. The opening paragraph draws the contrast between the "daft gowk", the foolishness of the insect for giving itself false notions of its real station in life, and its true nature as a worm. In the public context it is again clear what Fergusson is saying to his audience-that the trappings of civilization are only a delusion. He compares the insect to the country laird who comes to the town to learn good breeding and who rises above his station. Fergusson mocks the country laird and those like him for priding themselves that they are superior just because they are "buskit Belles and Beaus", and line 13 applies equally to the human and the butterfly context, for they mock their own fellow creatures "whase weird is still

to creep". The exclamation "alas!" is wonderfully ironic in the context, and the line about crooking their mouth reminds us of the lady who will "crook her bonny mou fu' sair" in Braid Claith (l.39). Both poems attack the value placed on externals. Fergusson never allows the butterfly, or men in general, to forget "their m ither worm."

But although the tone of the first eighteen lines tells against the butterfly, it is at line 19, and the lines following, that we find the poet's sympathy changing. On the surface, the poem is still attacking the butterfly's pretentiousness, but if we recall other lines in Fergusson's writing about transience, such as those already quoted from The Ode to Horror, then this passage takes on a greater personal meaning:

> Kind NATURE lent but for a day
> Her wings to make ye sprush and gay;
> In her habuliments a while
> Ye may your former sel' beguile,
> And ding awa' the vexing thought [drive
> Of hourly dwining into nought, [declining
> By beenging to your foppish brithers, [cringeing
> Black CORBIES dress'd in PEACOCKS feathers. (11.19-26)

Once again, these lines could be taken only on the obvious level, where Fergusson is the public and moral poet warning us that all these trappings merely delude us from the truth, and act as a temporary remover of our ills. But we know enough from Fergusson's own life and from the evidence of his poetry to see how the passage also refers to Fergusson's own position and life. It is usually in his English poems, as we have already seen, that we find him as the more sober and reasonable poet, conscious of the transience of insecure

happiness. The same may be said here: we recall Fergusson's evenings in the Cape Club, when they wined and dined themselves, when they sang and assumed false guises; this allowed him for a few hours to forget his drudgery in the clerk's office. Here, in line 22, Fergusson says "Ye may your former sel' beguile". In the context of the butterfly, it refers to the butterfly as a worm, or his former life as a caterpillar; but in the context of Fergusson's own life, it would refer to his life as the clerk; this would constitute his "former life" and also the life he would return to in the morning after he has spent the evening in the Club with a mixed body of painters, musicians, poets and printers. But there are phrases which show Fergusson's awareness of the transience of this ill-founded happiness, and of the individual man's transient nature: "Kind nature lent but for a day" (l.19), and in line 21 we read that "for a while" we may "beguile" ourselves. The word "beguile" recalls his use of "delusive" in The Tavern Elegy. In line 24 we are "hourly dwining into nought", a line loaded with gloom and helplessness. As he goes on to show, all the trappings are of no avail when reality strikes us, when evenings bring gloom and angry showers. The public context remains clear, but on the personal level, it shows that Fergusson is fully aware that when he is faced with the truth, he suffers and cannot fend it off with any more delusion. The gaiety of the Cape Club is transient and unreal in the long term.

Thus the poet who decried the butterfly's pretentiousness and who addressed it as a "daft gowk" in the first line has, after the important third paragraph, come round to a more sympathetic view, for he realises that despite his moralising, and despite the fact that men, including himself, in their more reasonable moments, realise the folly of trying to pretend that all is well, yet we all persist in cheating ourselves, perhaps in a desperate attempt to use anything to cover up and obliterate what really is. So Fergusson's advice is to see ourselves as we really are. The passage beginning at line 47 emphasises life's cruelty:

> The fury's glancing frae her ein
> Wad rug your wings o' siller sheen [tear
> .....
> Then a' your bonny sprainges wad fall,
> An' you a WORM be left to crawl. (ll. 53-4,57-8)

The delusion is stripped from us roughly and forcibly, and we are shown up to be what we are-worms who can only crawl.

The Ode to the Gowdspink is a more public poem and the theme of liberty is well deployed through the use of the goldfinch as the central symbol. But Fergusson also builds up a picture of the beauty of the goldfinch, both as a piece of description for its own sake, and also as an integral par t of the structure of the poem. The gowdspink comes in new attire, and nature has lavished all her art and bounty on making the bird a beautiful thing. We need no longer seek the beauty of the rose or that of thewallflower, for we have the goldfinch. Then at line 21 comes the change, as Fergusson

pities mankind and the bird, whose fine dresses cannot cover its want of peace of mind. So it is that the finery of the goldfinch attracts wicked men to ensnare it in a cage. Fergusson says that just as the goldfinch's liberty is transient, for it is caught, so too is the liberty of men in general, for they allow themselves to be the slave of trappings which delude them into a false sense of security, which is groundless: "The brawest drest want peace of mind" (1.22), and the next two lines illustrate how it is better to be free and know our true nature and station in life, rather than to change it all for something which appears to be better:

> While he that gangs wi' ragged coat
> Is weil contentit wi' his lot. - (11.23-4)

The unchanging state of liberty is what Fergusson seeks, but he knows in his own life he cannot find it completely, for he allows himself to be deceived, and so the process changes again, for this insecure and false happiness which the "braw dress" gives him produces melancholy. Fergusson himself is not free from these contrary states of mind, but in his more sober moments he sees how he has dropped the bondage of alcohol and delusion, only to become enslaved again later on. The bird that Fergusson shows struggling in the cage to find again the liberty she has lost, is also the poet struggling with an awareness that he is trapped and that he cannot find the kind of liberty he seeks. He curses fortune for her wiles, for ensnaring us away from true liberty. He hates "her syren smiles" and realises that a life without liberty

is the "essence of a paltry bubble"--the happiness he has found is insecure and will burst.

We turn now to a very important poem in the context of Fergusson's personal feelings on transience--To My Auld Breeks. This poem can be classified as a comic address where a person addresses something dear to him which is not human. So we see Burns's farmer addressing his old mare[10], and here Fergusson addresses his old trousers. He opens in a curt manner: "Now gae your wa's", and realises that he and the old trousers must part, even although it is hard for them to do so. He makes the opening applicable to the writers and bards who are loath to part with something old. In a passage that flows naturally from the subject of the poem, the discarding of his old trousers, Fergusson shows how, when we value something we have had for a long time, and when we need it, then we repair it time and again to get some use from it. So we repair our trousers, put in new stitches and patch holes to keep out the winter's anger. It is when Fergusson draws his analogy with a doctor's prescription that we realise once again that the poem can be read on two levels. As we fill ourselves with doctor's drugs "Thinking to tack the tither year / To life" (ll.13-4), so we repair our trousers to prolong their lives. Fergusson is saying that we desperately seek to prolong our lives, trying to stop the inevitable process of decay and transience leading to death. Fergusson

[10] Burns, poem cited above, p. 90

shows the desperation, how it is a "weary wight" who tries anything. The use of "thinking" in line 13 points again to the delusions which we have that we will be able to stop time's slow march, and look "haill an' fier" again. But the natural process must eventually triumph:

> Till at the lang-run death dirks in,
> To birze his saul ayont his skin. (11.15-6) [squeeze

The cruel and unfeeling process of death spares none, but Fergusson shows in these lines how it releases our souls from our bodies. The immortal soul is thus liberated from the transient body which encloses it. It is clear, then, that the auld breeks become a symbol for the body and this transient life. They are expendable, they decay and must eventually be cast away for ever.

But in the third and subsequent paragraphs Fergusson continues to write on this double level. When saying that he cared for the trousers as long as they were lined with silver, and must now reject them, he may be criticising those who drop their friends when they see they have become destitute. Such a theme he follows in The Decay of Friendship. But his point is that the basic things which constitute life are now no longer any use to him; the body which the trousers represent can not furnish him with anything further on which he can live. We have to separate in such lines the humorous elements from the serious and personal ones. We must separate them in our own minds so that we can be clear about them, but the poet has combined them so that the humour and the

seriousness are ultimately inseparable. The one enhances the other in both directions. So the lines may read like a comic passage on the poverty of the poet; but they also tell that life is not able to furnish him with what he needs for his poetry now. His experiences which he has stored are not inspiring him. In affectionate lines beginning at line 37 he recalls their life together, the days when both were young, and he misses such days. In very figurative language, Fergusson shows how apt is his choice of subject, for it is effective both as a symbol and as a real pair of trousers. Together they have "speel'd the braes o' rime" (l.40), where he shows how in his life he has written poetry; but on the other level, he means simply that he climbed over the hills with this pair of trousers on him. At that stage questions of money did not worry him. Here is Fergusson in nostalgic mood, looking back to a happy time that is gone for ever, and he suggests that it was genuinely happy.

The transience of life, which is the starting-point for the poem, and which has been clear all the way through, is now quite openly stated, and we see again how insecure happiness, the kind he sought, could never be fully satisfying: he recalls to the trousers how he was gay and cheerful with his friends and his drink, "nor thought that sorrow there could kyth" (l.50):

> But the niest mament this was lost,
> Like gowan in December's frost. (ll.51-2)

It is no use asking a tailor to mend the clothes,

or finding a doctor to prolong his life, much as he would like to, for "Sic transit gloria mundi." At last he has realised the truth. But Fergusson was fully aware of transience in other poems and then wrote again about the pleasures of drinking. Yet increasingly the truth did register with him. What is the point of his closing paragraphs in To My Auld Breeks, where he suggests where the breeks can go? It is again partly for the sake of humour, but suggests that when a bard grows prosperous then the breeks should:

> Glowr in his face, like spectre gaunt,
> Remind him o' his former want,
> To cow his daffin and his pleasure, [merriment
> And gar him live within the measure. (11.73-6)

Fergusson wants us to realise our mortality: so "the tiny servant" would whisper to King Philip that he too was a MAN. The poem succeeds very adequately purely as a comic address, and in so doing, Fergusson speaks to his audience without making them think too seriously about their own mortality. But it also helps him towards finding a form in which to be both the public and the private poet, to speak about a matter of general concern, and yet one with particular reference to himself. The poem is effective on the level of humour, and also when the two levels are seen together. It does not work as a purely personal poem for this is not Fergusson's intention: his audience is not prepared for private poetry and Fergusson hesitates to lay bare his own feelings completely. But neither is it a public poem.

To conclude this discussion, we will look at the poems written after the deaths of William Wilkie and John Hogg, both, it is interesting to note, men connected with Fergusson's days as a student at the University of St. Andrews. We might expect that Fergusson would see their deaths as an opportunity for further discussion on the transience of life. Up to a point he does, but the poems offer more than this. The poem on Wilkie is called An Eclogue to the Memory of Dr. William Wilkie, late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews. The important word to notice is "eclogue". This puts it into the pastoral tradition, and as we saw in Chapter I it was no doubt influenced by Ramsay's two pastorals Richy and Sandy, and Robert, Richy and Sandy. Fergusson was very friendly with Wilkie who took an interest in the young student, and invited him to his farm in Fife in the summer to do copying work for him. The pastoral form is therefore particularly appropriate here, for Wilkie was a farmer and would go out with Fergusson among the animals and the hills. It is noticeable too in the poem that, while it is not a strict pastoral elegy, it has many of its features. Another link may be found in that the most famous pastoral elegies were written by one poet about another: Wilkie's claim to poetry lies in his Epigoniad. While Ramsay may have liberated the whole pastoral tradition, giving it a reality and vigour which it had not experienced for some time, nevertheless he was only imagining himself in the position of Pope and Steele when mourning Addison in Richy and Sandy.

He did not have the personal experience of Addison which Fergusson enjoyed with Wilkie. Fergusson's poem is a personal one and we feel his sense of loss, but as with all of Fergusson's Scots poetry, he can never wholly give himself up to a subjective treatment of his feelings and emotions. The eclogue form which he uses here, therefore, acts as a shield over his personal feelings, so that the reader need not think that Fergusson, the poet and student, is Geordie. Having chosen such a form, a very public one in this case, Fergusson makes it into an effective pastoral, and the pastoral elegy features do not dominate the poem. The reply to Geordie's moan that all eyes must be filled with sorrow comes from Davie whose position is the same as the reader's. He knows no reason for the grief of his fellow shepherd. All seems to be in order to him, and the harvest has been safely gathered. We learn from Geordie that such mundane cares do not concern him when Wilkie is dead. He does not use the elegy formula that Wilkie is dead, nor does he cast Wilkie as a pagan figure, an Adonis or a Thyrsis. But his sense of loss is felt and he realises that the old days are now forever past:

> Crosses like thae, or lake o' warld's gear,
> Are naething whan we tyne a friend that's dear.
> Ah! waes me for you, Willy! Mony a day
> Did I wi' you on yon broom-thackit brae [broom-covered
> Hound aff my sheep, an' lat them careless gang
> To harken to your cheery tale or sang. (11.27-32)

What makes the grief for Wilkie's death so poignant is the nightmare and the reaction of the dog. Geordie has dreamt

of Wilkie's wraith and the dog howled and barked all night and crept to the shepherd "in an unco fright". We feel sympathy for the dog when Geordie calls it "my poor doggie". In this way, the poet is able to arouse feeling through the use of the dog. This is not sentimental and the passage is treated naturally and sympathetically, and yet in the supernatural manner that we have seen in other poems. The pastoral elegy tradition is at its most obvious in Davie's speech when he bids farewell to all cheerfulness: all merriment and fun must be changed now, and the boughs, and the yews and the rosemary must be placed with tears on the bier. In true elegiac form the accomplishments of the man are remembered and praised, and again we have the supernatural reminder, for Wilkie was reputed to have second sight, as all the grannies would tell their gossips. Wilkie is gone; the man is dead; but his fame will not die, and his tomb will be as famous as the Mantuan swain Virgil's. This conclusion, then, reminds us of that of The Ode to the Bee: that while each man dies, the glory and the gift of the poet live on immortally. This is Fergusson's consolation, that despite the transience of the man, all will not die.

It is interesting to compare The Elegy on John Hogg with the poem on Wilkie. The form which Fergusson uses for his poem on Wilkie's death requires a dramatic element, which is provided by the dialogue of the two shepherds. Nevertheless, we feel in it Fergusson's sense of loss. In The Elegy on

John Hogg, late Porter to the University of St. Andrews, we are less aware of Fergusson's sense of loss at the death of Hogg himself, so much as an awareness that he sees Hogg's death as the passing of a link with the life he enjoyed at the university as a student, a time which has gone for ever. The other St. Andrews elegy which Fergusson wrote was the one on Mr. David Gregory, another Professor. But Fergusson never knew the man personally, so far as is known, since Gregory had retired before Fergusson was enrolled as a student, and the poem is one of public grief, where Fergusson speaks for the student body. Writing of Hogg, however, he is more personal and the poem is not so much an elegy for Hogg as a poem of nostalgia and an elegy for his own days as a student. Fergusson's direct opening address to Death suggests the directness of Donne, and the imagery is used consistently: "stang", "pricket", "clout". These words suggest the savagery of Death's selection of Hogg. Although Hogg was a strict disciplinarian, standing up for the authority of the university, and although Fergusson found himself in many scrapes with authority, this does not hinder his praise of Hogg, and his happy memories of past days. The imagery of the opening stanzas re-appears again when Fergusson talks of Hogg's voice and words which "brodit like a wumill" (l.35) to get him out of bed in the morning. As death stung Hogg, so Hogg goaded the student. He remembers Hogg the Presbyterian who "gar'd ilk sinner sigh an'groan/ And fear hell's flame." (ll.47-8).

This nostalgia and the sense of loss of former happiness have been noticed by Maclaine: "Well might he [Fergusson] look back on those carefree college days as the happiest time of his life, for he was in fact destined never again to "sit ha'f sae saft"."[11] All this becomes more apparent as the poem increases, especially from l.61. Fergusson recalls how the students with glee would go to the porter's lodge to heat their cold shins in winter time. He tells the red-gowned students to say if they have ever known such happy days, days "sae blyth, sae daft":

> You'll ne'er again in life's career
> Sit ha'f sae saft. (ll.71-2)

he warns them. When Fergusson talks about Hogg's virtues and his more hostile characteristics, it is only because it does himself some good, because mentioning Hogg and his ways puts him in nostalgic mood again. But when he says that the students will never know days "sae saft", he is in the position of Gray when looking at Eton College. Now the poets have experience behind them and life's path is difficult and joys give place to sorrows. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise", and Fergusson, as Gray, would not want such bliss to be destroyed. In its way it is a genuine happiness, for the years were happy, but Fergusson cannot find any true security after his student days. The poem, then, is an elegy, but Hogg is more the starting-point for the real subject-happiness of days gone for ever-and his death is another link

[11] Maclaine, Robert Fergusson, p. 127

with the past which death has cut.

Although we can say that Hogg's death is not mourned so much as the death and the passing of the old days, it provides once again a suitable cover for Fergusson's more personal feelings expressed in the elegy. In all the poems in which we see Fergusson aware of the transience of the life of the individual human being, he never lets his personal view come over too clearly. We can read the poems as public statements, or as public statements with personal undertones. Fergusson as the poet of change, then, is required to split his personality much more than in his public poems. In those, he speaks for the people and they want to hear him. When he talks about change they will hear his voice as the Scots patriot lamenting the consequences of the Unions for Scottish culture, but they are far less prepared to hear him speak as a poet who talks of the transience of their own world in the High Street, which is a symptom of the transience which faces every individual human being in general. Fergusson feels this transience very personally, and so as a poet of the eighteenth century whose personal feelings should be subordinated to more public ones, but not suppressed, he covers his own feelings by using these public forms of ode, eclogue and comic address. The eighteenth century also saw the transition to a more personal mode of expression, and Fergusson's odes take part in this contemporary development. But personal feeling must be reconciled with the poet speaking

publicly to his audience. In the next chapter we will see how Fergusson reacts to English as his means of expression, both publicly and privately.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENGLISH POEMS

In discussing the Scots poems in Chapters II and III we observed from time to time that light could be cast on some of them by the poems which Fergusson wrote in English. Fergusson wrote more than half of his poems in English and we must study them to see why he chose another language and tradition, and to discover what he could write in English that he could not or would not write in Scots.

We have noticed in Fergusson's Scots poems that they are either public or personal and that when he writes about his own personal feelings he adopts a form to cover these private sentiments. In his earliest English poems, Fergusson wished to draw the attention of the critics:"One can only say of such verse that it was the correct recommendation to fashionable taste, and might introduce him to the serious notice of the critics".[1] These poems are mostly pastorals or exercises in mock heroics and burlesque, and Fergusson shows himself to be bound by the conventions of each genre with the result that the subjects and the phraseology show little originality. A comparison between Pastorals I,II,III

[1] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, I, 29.

and The Decay of Friendship, a Pastoral Elegy, and a Scots pastoral, An Eclogue, will show how the Scots tradition and language are more suited to Fergusson as a writer of the pastoral.

Fergusson was greatly influenced by Shenstone and Gay in his English pastorals. The pastoral tradition may always have dealt with shepherds tending their flocks, but in the course of the Augustan period it had become as artificial as it could be. The controversy between Pope and Ambrose Philips had provoked Gay to write his Shepherd's Week where he had attempted to mock the realistic approach. But his efforts unwittingly led to a preference for more realism in the pastoral. In Fergusson's English pastorals he makes some effort to give realistic settings and characters, but his eye is firmly fixed on the English tradition rather than on the Scottish pastoral of Allan Ramsay.

Pastoral I, Morning, shows two shepherds bringing out their flocks, the rising of the sun over the land and the dew-drops on the bushes (ll.19-20), the flowing, murmuring "neighbouring rill" (l.23). The poem is loaded with very conventional adjectives used with nouns: phrases such as "verdant field", "piping swain", "lowing oxen", "balmy breezes" are typical of pastoral poetry, and the "verdant field" and the "lowing" of oxen and herds are repeated. In

addition to this poetic language demanded by the genre we find the traditional deities, Ceres, Pan and Apollo, and the Dog-star Syrius raging at noon. The poem is formal in arrangement and is highly ordered and controlled. It is enclosed by a brief description of the time of day by one of the shepherds instead of the narrator, and from ll.19-66 the arrangement of stanzas follows a distinct pattern. There are two describing the sunshine and the water in the early morning, which are succeeded by three stanzas on the iniquities of city life and the contentment of the country. These, in turn, give way to two stanzas describing the bounties of nature and the "propitious" smiling of the seasons. The invocation to the three deities takes up three stanzas, and the final pair of stanzas before the conclusion tells us of the animals. A clear stanza pattern 2-3-2-3-2 emerges.

This order and control does not prevent the poet from giving touches of realism to the poem. We know that the setting is Scotland because we read:

> Behold Edina's lofty turrets rise,
> Her structures fair adorn the eastern skies;
> As Pentland cliffs o'er top yon distant plain,
> So she the cities on our north domain. (ll.27-30)

But despite the references to Edinburgh, it is Edinburgh seen through Augustan eyes. She is not Auld Reikie but Edina. There is no sense of the squalor and the beauty of the capital, but instead "Her structures fair adorn the eastern skies".

We read in the next stanzas that the shepherds prefer "The homely cottage, and the wither'd tree" (l.33), together with content and peace, and we see convention triumphing. Fergusson may have remembered what Ramsay did in The Gentle Shepherd to give the Scottish scene a place in pastoral poetry, but the classical ideal of the contentment of the country is his interest here and Edinburgh is added in an attempt to give some local colour and realism to the poem. The capital is not there for its own sake. Any merit the poem may derive from its local setting is destroyed by the poet's failure to follow it up with a Scottish landscape. The mixture of Scottish place-names with conventional gods and phrases like "mantling ivy", "warbling note", "bubbling fountains" is incongruous. This is the danger if pastoral poetry is given a location. Ramsay's The Gentle Shepherd is more successful because his language suits his setting. Fergusson, however, mixes the two traditions, the English and the Scots, entirely unsuccessfully. But despite this defect, the attempts at realism should not be dismissed, for the shepherds are aware of the harshness and cruelty of winter, a favourite theme in Scottish literature since the days of the Makars:

> No cutting blasts have hurt my tender dams,
> Nor hoary frosts destroy'd my infant lambs. (ll.45-6)

When we turn to Noon we find another pair of shepherds. But they too dwell on a conventional theme of pas-

toral poetry; one of the shepherds tells the other of his loved one who is much wealthier than himself, who lost all his corn and flocks when the Tay overflowed its banks. Once again, a brief piece of scene-setting is incorporated into the language of "cooling riv'let","twining bower" and "tuneful reed". Fergusson shows how he has mixed the elements of the poem, as he did in the first pastoral, for at line 23 we read of "the Anglian plain":

> Where civil discord and sedition reign.
> There Scotia's sons in odious light appear,
> Tho' we for them have wav'd the hostile spear:
> For them my sire, enwrapp'd in curdled gore,
> Breath'd his last moments on a foreign shore. (11.24-8)

This has no place in the theme of the poem, and only shows how Fergusson is susceptible to the need for realism and local colour. However, he has not yet learned to combine realism and theme harmoniously and the poem suffers from these diffuse elements. This does not mean, however, that there is no order or arrangement in the writing. As we saw in the first pastoral, the poem is controlled in structure but it is loose thematically, thrown together with diverse elements which Fergusson felt he should put in.

The final poem of the group, Night, is the most successful thematically. Fergusson does not keep rigidly to his theme, but his praise of the Creator does proceed naturally from the wonder of the shepherds gazing at the stars. With

the exception of Cynthia we have no classical figures, nor is there any attempt at nationalism, as in Noon, or at giving the setting a particular context. The poem relies very heavily on the English poetry of the period. There are clear echoes of Gray, Thomson, and Pope. When we read of the wonder and praise of the Creator, we are reminded of Thomson, just as we are reminded of Pope and other eighteenth-century writers in the declaration that man is the Creator's chief care, and all animals work for man's advancement. The most interesting feature of the poem is the reference to the shepherds returning home:

> The weary ploughman flies the waving fields,
> To taste what fare his humble cottage yields. (ll.5-6)

There are echoes of Gray's Elegy, but the lines also look forward to the opening of The Farmer's Ingle, and the concluding lines on sleep in Night remind us of the same theme at the end of that poem. We have already seen what Fergusson does there to liberate himself successfully from the Augustan tradition in a way in which Burns failed in The Cottar's Saturday Night. While the situation, then, is the same, Fergusson at this stage chooses the English tradition, for all serious poetry fared better in English. His mind changed and in The Farmer's Ingle we see him writing about something he knew and experienced, where the Scots language was a more appropriate medium. There the lines flow from his pen, but

in these pastorals the effect of the lines is very stilted and each line reads as a separate unit.

In The Decay of Friendship: A Pastoral Elegy we find the same theme of content in the country, expressed in the Horatian manner. This poem is not a pastoral elegy in the sense that "Lycidas" is, but it expresses the friendship which the poet has lost. It was originally thought by David Irving that the poem was written after Fergusson had been unsuccessful in his visit to his uncle to ask him to use his influence in finding a position for his nephew[2]. This theory has been discredited, but it is interesting that the poem could have been inspired by a personal rebuff. We can learn something of the writer's personality from the poem but we cannot say that the "I" in question is Fergusson himself. There is too much that is conventional for us to connect the poem entirely with Fergusson's own feelings and position. The poet tells us of the former days, when his cottage was sheltered and surrounded by moss and ivy. All were free to roam where they pleased and he enjoyed the company of the swains and the singing of Strephon:

> My clust'ring grape compens'd their magic skill,
> The bowl capacious swell'd in purple tide. (11.25-6)

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2 THE POEMS OF ROBERT FERGUSSON, II, 252.

The Horatian influence is quite evident in such lines. Now that these "sportive hours are fled", he is led to general considerations about the decay of friendship, about ingratitude and solitude. He shows how the birds sing merrily during summer but disappear when summer turns to winter, and he compares this with his own position. This preoccupation with abstractions, with the general and the universal, is one of the most noticeable features of Fergusson's English poetry, and indeed of the English poetry which had an influence on him. The eighteenth century is full of Odes to pity, adversity, hope, fear, fortune, seeking to rise above a concern with the particular to something concerning all mankind. When he writes in this style, it is in striking contrast to the interest in the particular which we find in his Scots poems and in Scottish literature in general. We noticed that some of the Scots poems had general considerations as well, but no one would deny the importance of realistic detail in Fergusson's Scots poems.

Turning away for a moment to the Scots poems, we find quite a different conception of the pastoral in An Eclogue. This poem is one of the few country poems Fergusson wrote in Scots and it forms a very happy companion to The Farmer's Ingle. Both are completely successful. It has many of the attributes of the classical pastoral, not only in

the setting by the narrator at the start and the dialogue between two shepherds, but also in the theme which is a complaint of ill-treatment at the hands of a woman. While the poem is firmly in the classical tradition, it is also in the Scottish tradition of the pastoral established by Ramsay. The language is appropriate to the station in life of the shepherds, for it is just in this way that they would discuss such questions. The poet's eye is always open for realistic detail.

The concern for realism becomes apparent in the opening where we read that Willie and Sandie thought they had done enough work and so sit down; they are weary and lean up against a tree and talk. The directness of the Scots language allows for no digressions or circumlocutions, and we hear immediately that all is not well at home with Sandie. The language of the two shepherds is openly frank, and a sense of trust is built up by Willie:

> Heh! Sandie, lad, what dool's come owr ye now,
> That you to whistle ne'er will crook your mou. (11.25-6)

The insertion of "lad" helps to build up this trust between the two. Nothing is allowed to come between them and such straight-forward and affectionate talk allows Sandie to open his mind. In his confession that his marriage is giving trouble, Sandie shows himself peculiarly Scottish in sugges-

ting a supernatural explanation. In the other country poem, The Farmer's Ingle, we noticed a similar preoccupation on the part of the old grandmother and the children. Sandie's words fit perfectly to the theme and the context:

> Sin that I thrave sae ill, in troth I fancy,
> Some fiend or fairy, nae sae very chancy,
> Has driven me by pauky wiles uncommon,
> To wed this flyting fury of a woman. (11.31-4)

In other lines we also come across a reference to the "flyting" of the woman, and we realise that here again we have something which Scottish literature has made its own. The "flyting" tradition of hurling abuse does not provide the form of this poem, but it suggests that the wife has the attributes of a "flyting fury", and the poem has further links with medieval Scottish literature in being directed against women in true medieval style. We are reminded likewise of Dunbar's poem The Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo in which three women meet and decry their husbands. Here the situation is much the same, except that we have two men talking instead of the women. Willie's advice to Sandie not to worry about his wife and ignore her follows similar advice in The Gentle Shepherd (Ii,11.103ff). The imagery is vivid and appropriate and is again taken from winter. As Sandie gains confidence in talking to Willie, we learn more of his predicament. He portrays for us life at home and the

setting is exactly the same as that in The Farmer's Ingle[3]. Here, however, the situation is quite different. In no sense is "ilka turn handled to his mind" (Farmer's Ingle, 1.16). Sandie is losing money, for the cows run about knocking over their milk, and his wife "seenil lays her hand upon a turn" (1.63). He had hoped she would spin a plaid for him, since their money is scarce and these things cost money, but "She has na ca'ad about a wheel the year" (1.72). The desperate situation gets worse as she goes off to Edinburgh to buy tea, and waste money on such extravagance. Willie's outburst about tea may seem comic to us but it was considered a luxury at the time and a symbol of luxurious civilization. Sandie's speech from line 89 makes excellent use of the winter scene once again, in the tradition of the Makars. Fergusson combines humour and pathos as he describes Sandie going home:

> Whan ilka herd for cauld his fingers rubbs,
> An' cakes o' ice are seen upo' the dubbs. [puddles
>
> (11.89-90)

He hopes when he sees the smoke rising from his chimney to warm himself by the fire. But such expectations are short-lived for as soon as he puts his nose around the door, he finds his wife "with her gimmers" sitting round the fire:

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[3]It must be remembered that The Farmer's Ingle is a later poem (May 1773)

Crammin their gabbies wi' her nicest bits,
While the gudeman out-by maun fill his crap [stomach
Frae the milk coggie, or the parritch cap. [wooden dish
(11.98-100)

The realism which is found throughout the poem remains till the very end. Willie first of all considers whether there is work to be done, and when he finds it is near the end of May and there is not much work on hand, he then can advise Sandy to consult the Laird, "For he's a man weel vers'd in a' the laws" (1.109). This recourse to the laird for advice is a neat Scottish touch, showing the old feudal system still at work. The poem ends on an excellent note of defiance: they will send a message to the "thrawart dame" to say that Sandie is going to eat with Willie.

The pastoral is a very happy combination of elements. We find the language to be appropriate to the speakers and the setting, and the Scottish context allows Fergusson to dwell on particular scenes, to tell his tale in a language in which he felt at home. The theme of the poem has its roots deep in Scottish culture in the literary traditions which it draws upon, and also in the interest in the supernatural and the folk-lore. In writing about something particular, which allows for realism and humour, and which is not incongruous, we see how Fergusson has found his medium.

This is not a provincial or parochial poem; the form is adapted to Scotland but its roots belong to European culture as well as to Scottish culture and go back to the earliest pastorals. Here the pastoral is seen in its original state: humble but realistic. This is the pastoral appropriate to Fergusson's experience and to his skill with the Scots language as a means of expressing a humble and a particular situation. He is at ease in this kind of pastoral poetry away from the abstractions of his earlier work in English. It is significant that he writes no more pastorals in English with the exception of the pastoral elegy To the Memory of John Cunningham in 1773.

If we turn to a burlesque poem like Good Eating, we find Fergusson being humorous and making fun of the grand manner in a way we associate with John Philips's The Splendid Shilling. The poem suffers because again Fergusson cannot liberate himself from convention. The English tradition determines Fergusson's language and style in contrast to the Scots tradition which he can master much more skilfully. But we should not forget that it is quite in order for a Scots poet to mock the pomposity of the English grand manner. Fergusson is good at finding such pompous phrases as "Root Hibernian or plumb-pudding rare", and he adds inversions and vocatives, classical allusions and "thee" and "thou" to

create an artificial and grand manner. The poem, like most of his English ones, suffers from a diffuseness both in subject-matter and structure. The blank verse does not require the discipline of the Habbie or the Christis Kirk stanzas. We hear of the guests awaiting with "whetted instruments" to cut the beef, but Fergusson then draws an analogy with something general:

> So fares it with the man, whose powerful pelf
> Once could command respect. Caress'd by all,
> His bounties were as lavish as the hand
> Of yellow Ceres, till his stores decay'd. (ll. 44-7)

However, it is interesting that in a later English poem like Good Eating, Fergusson, for a brief moment, adds more personal comments although the public form which he has adopted for the poem conceals these private preoccupations. At line 98 Fergusson leaves the city to get away from its clamour and we are reminded of a similar passage in Auld Reikie where Fergusson contemplates by himself; towards the end of the poem he talks about the evils of intemperance in the city in winter. He has now become more specific, for we learn that he is discussing life in Edinburgh ("Edina"), and the references to intemperance have a personal note to them.

In Good Eating, we see Fergusson's wish to contemplate alone, and in this connection we should look at Fergusson's choice of English for meditation. The Scottish poetry which Fergusson knew was largely social and public in character, and

the resources of the Scots tongue had been used chiefly for humorous and satiric purposes. It was the language of vigorous common speech but not of philosophic contemplation or argument. Fergusson's attempts to reason closely in Scots in the Odes and the Butterfly poem are, therefore, of pioneering significance, though it is noteworthy that the forms used in these pieces are distinctively English. In English, Fergusson is contemplative both in town and country poems and his viewpoint is objective and reasonable. In The Town and Country Contrasted there is the desire to be "From noisy bustle, from contention free" (l.I), and Fergusson renounces the conventional pastoral setting for a more realistic one:

> Not like swain Tityrus, or the bards of old,
> Under a beechen, venerable shade;
> But on a furzy heath, where blooming broom,
> And thorny whins the spacious plains adorn. (ll.3-6)

Unfortunately, he does not adhere to this, for we are soon back for a brief moment to "Dame Aurora" rising "from her purple bed", but there is an attempt to integrate English convention with Scottish realism. He portrays Edinburgh as a city of filth and noise, infested with bugs; where "ling'ring sickness held his feeble court" (1.30) and "Death, grim Death" watched the people "with all his ghastly train"(l 32). He will prefer the country to "the city's jarring noise". In

this poem we see Fergusson's awareness of the squalor and the filth of Edinburgh - he makes no attempt to idealise Auld Reikie. In Auld Reikie, we saw Fergusson's enjoyment of the capital in all its various aspects and his wish too for contemplation. How can we reconcile this wish for contemplation with his delight in the city?

We noted in Chapter III that A Tavern Elegy followed immediately after Auld Reikie and showed Fergusson's awareness of the delusiveness of the social life he enjoyed in the city. We saw how Fergusson was now the reasonable man, contemplating the evening's events. The hectic social life which he has been caught up in has ended and he is left alone to contemplate it. This is a time for reflection, and as so often happens, the poet goes from the heights of merry-making to the depths of despair, gloom and melancholy. There is no indication that he refers to Auld Reikie here but coming after Auld Reikie itself, we read it as a personal statement. The use of English for contemplation and reason and illumination is in marked contrast to the spirited Scots verse of Auld Reikie and other poems where he describes the life of the taverns. The mirth was indeed "delusive" and it has fled. In the second line he neatly portrays both states of mind: "The fancy'd pleasure! paradise divine!". He realizes the pleasure was "fancy'd", but at the same time he expresses what he felt at the time, it was "paradise divine!". Now

the night and silence have succeeded the noise and he has become quieter again: "The erring tides of passion rage no more". Here is Fergusson the eighteenth-century poet understanding now how raging passion is foolish erring: man requires self-control. In the third stanza we hear why he indulged in wine - it "Could ev'ry human misery subdue" and the hours that were hateful to him in his more sober and reasonable moods (as now) turned to sportive joy. As we have already seen, Fergusson realised that the foundation for such pleasure is very insecure and fleeting. Yet he is "attracted by the magic of the bowl", by music. It is as though he were grasping at anything that would enable him to forget himself in a state of euphoria. It is at line 21 that he balances reason with disorder. Social pleasure is not condemned in itself:

> These are the joys that virtue must approve,
> While reason shines with majesty divine. (ll.21-2)

He does not want sad excess to combine against the soul, as he puts it, but this has just occurred. He sees the evils of wine and compares them to a will o' the wisp, deceiving us and harming us, leading to vice and violence. By the last two stanzas we see gloom and melancholy have come over him and he wishes to be"number'd with the dead" instead of bearing the misery now that all his friends have left the tavern. Here is Fergusson back in real life, as it were.

The life of the Cape Club with all its ritual and fancy dress does not last indefinitely, for every night it comes to a halt, and in the cold light of morning the poet has to face up to life's realities again. However, although Fergusson does not mention it because he is dealing not with one occasion but with something more general, the life of the club is revived again each evening. In such a state as we now find him, he is fully aware of the insecurity of such a life even if during the hours that the club meets he can give himself and his mind over to pleasures and not care about the future.

Before we leave these poems of reason and reflection, we should look very briefly at a Song which Fergusson wrote for the Cape Club. Though its members were Scots, the songs Sir Precentor wrote for it are in English. Having noted that Fergusson's English poetry tends to be reflective and sober, in reaction against the delusive happiness of the tavern, we may wonder how he will handle an English drinking-song. The Song sung to the tune "Lumps of Pudding" is interesting for it shows the transition from the sober clerk to the euphoric Knight Precentor of the club. He is becoming light-headed and forces himself and others to drink more: "Keep it up, boys". He sees the folly of thinking and drugs himself consciously into a stupor: "Away with dull

thinking - 'tis madness to think". In the second stanza he orders the vile clock to be silenced for it rings the hours away. Is the clock his friend the Tron-kirk Bell which he abused in another Scots poem but with no hint that its tick meant the passing of time? By the third stanza we hear how he has worked himself into his frenzied state:

> How all things dance round me!-'tis life, tho' my boys:
> Of drinking and spewing how great are the joys! (ll.II-2)

This is continued until the last lines:

> The pleasure of drinking you're sure must be grand,
> When I'm neither able to think, speak, nor stand.
> (ll.15-6)

We have already suspected that Fergusson drank in an effort to numb his sorrows and thoughts about life and the future. What shocks us in a song like this is the conscious effort he is making to become frenzied.

In his English poems Fergusson began by writing conventional pastorals so as to establish some reputation for himself as a serious poet. But the readers of The Weekly Magazine did not take any real interest in Fergusson until The Daft-Days was published. Nevertheless, he continued to write many more English poems, including A Tavern Elegy. We have seen there that Fergusson turned to English for contemplation, as he does in other poems, so that while he may have no real audience for these poems, he himself feels the desire

to write them. This is true especially of a group of poems published in 1779 called Posthumous Pieces. It is unfortunate that they cannot be dated but it is likely that all of them, (with the exception of the translation of Horace Ode XI,Lib I), were written around the same time since the style and sentiments are similar; they are probably his last poems, foreshadowing the madness which finally overtook him. These poems consist of Odes, To Disappointment and To Horror, a poem On Night, and Job, Chap. III, Paraphrased. Earlier in Fergusson's career he had written Ode to Hope and Ode to Pity. These odes are all in the style of Collins and the Wartons, concerned with abstractions, as their titles indicate. They reveal, nevertheless, personal feeling which is hard to discover in the other English poems of the earlier period.

In Ode to Hope we find Fergusson looking to Hope for her influencing power: he wishes to drive away "Gloomy featur'd black despair" with all its "frantic furies". Hope can penetrate anywhere:

> What cave so dark, with gloom so drear,
> So black with horror, dead with fear! (ll.27-8)

Despite all the horrors, the poet feels that he can trust in hope to remove the ills. His optimism at this stage in his life is in contrast to the Posthumous Pieces. In Ode to Pity we find a familiar theme which his readers would already know from The Town and Country Contrasted. From line 19 we read

of death, of this "black and iron age" of vice and demons. He sees life as a "vain parade" which will soon be over and all will be forgotten, for men are wicked now and despise love and innocence.

The horror and gloom which Fergusson expresses in these earlier odes come into greater prominence in the Posthumous Pieces, which seem to reflect a state of manic depression, a sense of uselessness and nihilism, with recurring imagery of darkness. In Ode to Disappointment we find the least concentration of gloom and despair, but nevertheless the poet feels haunted: "Horrors, Hell, and Furies reign". We find him aware of his former delusion in the fourth stanza:

> The passions, at thy urgent call,
> Our reasons and our sense inthrall
> In frenzy's fetters strong. (11.19-21)

In the closing stanza he talks of hope which rises from earth to the skies above. We are reminded of the earlier Ode to Hope, but here Fergusson talks about hope more impersonally and with less conviction. The final optimism strikes one as a despairing gesture.

Ode to Horror follows the epode, strophe and antistrophe pattern. The poet rejects all attempts to lift his depression; neither the cock-crow in the morning nor the rising sun provide any release: "The gloom of night will still preside" (1.23). In line 25 ff, we read about his

efforts to drug himself, "to lull his woe and care" (l.30), a theme by now very familiar to us in his poetry. But the awareness of delusion in A Tavern Elegy proves mild in comparison with what follows:

> Yet wretched still, for when no more
> The gods their opiate balsam pour,
> Ah, me! he starts, and views again
> The Lybian monster prance along the plain. (ll.33-6)

The passage which was quoted in Chapter III follows. The poet looks to the city to "frolick life away", but the city gives him no comfort and he goes again to the country - the situation in The Town and Country Contrasted. In the last line of the strophe we can sense Fergusson's real position: "He constant hunts, but never finds his rest" (l.48). He looks for industry and content as the only possible answer in life to his problems.

In the final poems On Night and the Paraphrase from Job, the darkness and despair find no relief and Fergusson builds up words in line after line to suggest darkness, nightmare and horror. In the Paraphrase, closely modelled on Job, he draws a contrast between light and darkness. Light is a symbol of life, of the life he wishes he had never experienced; he wants the darkness of the grave where "The weary find their lasting peace" (l.34). Man's days are darkness and he needs no light. It is interesting to note that towards the end of

his Paraphrase, Fergusson liberates himself a little from the original. In Job we read:

> For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters.
> For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.
> I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came. (verses 24-6)

In Fergusson's final lines we find:

> For 'ere the morn return'd my sighing came,
> My mourning pour'd out as the mountain stream;
> Wild visag'd fear, with sorrow-mingled eye,
> And wan destruction piteous star'd me nigh;
> For though nor rest nor safety blest my soul,
> New trouble came, new darkness, new controul. (ll.49-54)

In these lines his depression is reflected with haunting clarity. They show again how an impersonal form - in this case translation - could be used to disguise and so warrant the expression of urgent personal feeling.

We know that the poem To My Auld Breeks in which we found a strong preoccupation with transience was published late in 1773. It is significant that Fergusson's final treatment of this theme in Scots should have been written as a comic address to a pair of old trousers. He could not have used Scots for these more solemn and personal utterances which we find in many of his English poems.

CONCLUSION

It has been the aim of this thesis to examine the difficulties facing the poet at a critical period in Scottish cultural history, and to consider how far Robert Fergusson was successful in overcoming them.

In Chapter I, we saw that a revival of the vernacular in the eighteenth century provided one means of re-asserting the sense of national identity which had been eroded by the events of 1603 and 1707. Focussing their attention on areas of the national life unaffected by the Union, traditionally-minded Scots attempted to resurrect their vernacular literature which had remained in the doldrums during most of the seventeenth century. But the vernacular poets had major problems to face. In the first place, the Scots language since 1603 had lost its status as a literary language and its popular associations made it seem unsuitable for "serious" poetry. In the second place, for better or for worse, English influences were becoming increasingly prevalent in Scotland.

Chapter II showed how Fergusson wrote much of his poetry in response to the unspoken needs and expectations of his public. But that poetry was affected by the problems mentioned. Fergusson and his patriotic readers recognised the need to re-establish a cultural identity for Scotland, and it was in this spirit that he celebrated the continuity

of Scottish life, its fairs and festivals and other permanent or recurring features of the Scottish scene. We detected a slight problem in Leith Races when Fergusson found a conflict between his wish for personal reflection and his public's demands on him as their bard, but this was easily resolved. The second part of the Chapter showed that the influences of English literature of the period, with its emphasis on man in society, and its preference for the general over the particular, were apparent in Fergusson's work. Here too he could successfully overcome any conflict which might arise between his wish to please his readers and his susceptibility to English influences by placing these poems inaspecifically Scottish context.

In Chapter III, the problems were more marked. While Fergusson and his audience are in agreement over the dangers and changes caused by the Union of 1707, he is unable to remain their poet all the time, and a conflict between the wishes of the public and his own inclinations was seen in Auld Reikie and in the poems concerning the transience of life. But while there may have been conflict in Fergusson's mind about what form he should adopt in these more personal poems, there is no evidence of conflict in the finished product. Fergusson is able again to reconcile the wishes of the public for poetry which enhances the nation's cultural identity with poetry which enables him to express his own point of view. The language question posed no problems in Chapter II, because the vernacular was appropriate to the forms and subjects

he chose, but in Chapter III we noticed how his more personal statements tended to be written in English, or in Scots under cover of English forms.

Chapter Iv examined Fergusson's attempts to use English as an outlet for self-expression. The English literary tradition, unlike the Scots, offered many examples of contemplative and reflective poetry and there was nothing incongruous in Fergusson's choice of English for poetry of this kind. While he found English useful for his purpose, the fact that he had to resort to it illustrates the cultural dichotomy of his age. Scottish writers of the eighteenth century had to make a conscious choice between Scots and English, both of which were potentially limiting. Fergusson found an answer to the problem of reconciling public and private expression in the two ways we have seen. Though a patriot, he was not so narrow-minded as to reject everything offered by England. (His fondness for the theatre, where mostly English and foreign plays were seen, illustrates this.)

Fergusson, on the whole preferred to separate his English and his Scots poetry, though his blending of the two languages in individual poems is an intricate and important subject which would require to be treated in another dissertation. We must not forget that although he tended to use English for reflective purposes, we can also learn much about his personality from the Scots poems. In poems like the Odes and To My Auld Breeks we saw how he talked specifically about his own feelings and in other poems like

The Daft-Days and The Farmer's Ingle, which appear more objective, his personality comes through just as strongly. Scots was, after all, his first language and his most fluent work is written in it. It enabled him to be direct, and gave colour and immediacy to his descriptions. His mastery of the language was such that it is in the Scots poems that we can recognise his authentic voice.

It would be wrong, however, to place too much emphasis on self-expression in Fergusson's work. Neither the old Scots tradition, nor contemporary assumptions about poetry in England encouraged him in that direction, and there is no justification for supposing that he felt any need to be more personal than he allowed himself to be. He was only 24 years old when he died, but he had produced a number of very fine poems in which form and language were harmonised with subject-matter, and no trace of conflict appears in his poems between what he wanted to say and the way in which circumstances compelled him to say it. We might expect the work of a poet cut off so early in life to be fragmentary, but in Fergusson's poems we find a whole experience. He had begun as a conventional writer but by the end had won control of his medium, at least in Scots, and applied it to a remarkably wide range of subject-matter.

His Scots poems were well received by his contemporaries. Compliments were showered on him, and in 1772 F. J. Guion called Fergusson "The LAUREAT of their CITY!" [Edinburgh][1].

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[1] The Poems of Robert Fergusson, I,32

In this stanza from an Epistle to R. Fergusson by Andrew Gray, we can see the appeal which his poetry had to his fellow-Scots:

> Ye've English plain enough nae doubt,
> And Latin too, but ye do suit
> Your lines, to fock that's out about
> 'Mang hills and braes:
> This is the thing that gars me shout
> Sae loud your praise. (11.19-24)

Primarily, however, our interest in Fergusson is not as the Laureate of Edinburgh, nor even as a more universal spokesman, but as a young poet who faced exceptional problems in writing poetry in Scotland in the eighteenth century, and who overcame them in the space of a very short life. Burns himself pays a fitting farewell to Fergusson:

> This humble tribute with a tear he gives,
> A brother Bard, who can no more bestow:
> But dear to fame thy Song immortal lives,
> A nobler monument than Art can show. (11.9-12)[2]

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[2] Inscription on the Tombstone

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