

Two Talks on Burns

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I. Burns, Whitman, and the Nation of Song

'that man to man the world o'er / Shall brithers be for a' that'

The main claim I wish to make here is that Burns' great musical project – the gathering and writing of songs, most of them published anonymously in the multi-volume collections edited by Johnson and Thomson, *The Scots Musical Museum* and *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, others published anonymously, posthumously and more privately, as in the case of the *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* – (that all this) is also in fact a political project, involving the definition or redefinition of a 'Nation' as: a group of people who sing (or who are capable of singing) the same songs. These two points or projects – saving Scotland's national song heritage, and opening up or blasting away at the very idea of nationhood, as it would seem, in the face and name of a more universal brotherhood – would appear to be in contradiction: one an essentially nationalist endeavour, the other aimed at the negation of all that – and one (Song) generally a matter of merriment and conviviality, while the other (Nationhood) is a matter, generally, of assertion and division, of anxiety and often of violence. But the confusion – the apparent contradiction – is perhaps only a function of our having been schooled so effectively in the assumptions of Nation as a matter of political borders and governmental (generally bureaucratic) structures; the Nation-State model of the past several centuries. For Burns, though, perhaps this model does not prevail. For Burns, perhaps, there is no contradiction between Scotland and the World. (Or for that matter between himself and Scotland.)

A song sung together is in fact one type of representative government, or self-government, a way of delineating modes of social organisation, involving collaborations, dominations and subordinations of all kinds. So the notion of a Nation of Song is in the end perhaps not as

paradoxical as it may seem. What is important is to understand precisely how the conceptual framework of Song re-shapes our conception of Nation – how the whole question of Nation, nationhood, nationality, or national identity, is radically re-defined when we consider it to be something constituted by Singing.

One of the key issues involved here of course is the distinction or distinctions between oral / aural experience, on the one hand, and the experience of print media on the other. These distinctions have been much rehearsed and contested at least since Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) if not since Plato, and Derrida even appears to have demonstrated that the distinction doesn't exist at all, or at least that the claims made on its behalf are quite generally, in the vast majority of instances, altogether without true basis – a fetish of the 'always already lost origin'. Fair enough. In any event, I don't mean here to suggest the primacy or purity of orality, only to recognise a degree of difference. The distinction between oral and print transmission is palpable, and by understanding it we illuminate something at the centre of Burns' work, and at the centre of the idea of Nation as well.

Orality / Aurality – or what we might call Performativity (though editors, not to mention Microsoft Word, have asked me to change this word because they don't find it in their dictionaries) – is distinguished from print in a number of crucial ways. Tolerance for variation is certainly one of the attributes of Performative utterance, relative to print, as evinced by this very example – the word 'performativity' itself. On the other hand, the performative mode – devised as a kind of continuous present – is not nearly as well designed as print media are for argument by means of multiple examples or by reference to the works of others: Song, or voice, or the Performative works by a more immediate process, and seeks its approvals by other means. Song is an appeal not to support (by rational and persuasive means) so much as to surrender, to identification, to opening up and taking in – quite the model for 'the Nation'! Instead of sovereignty, borders and the ability to defend them, surrender! Opening up and Taking in I mean both literally and metaphorically, both taking a song into your lungs, your mouth, making its breath your own, while appealing to ears to take it in as well, and beyond that, with reference to our consciousness – maybe even more to the point our unconsciousness – opening up and taking in instead of marking limits and exclusions.

Now these matters are complicated, and I don't mean to handle them lightly. Even Nazis have their songs, and singing them marks a powerful bond, involving a surrender, too, to some conception of 'the People' – part imaginary construction, part intense yearning. Sometimes the Opening up and the Taking in serve nothing so much as the marking of limits and exclusions, and I don't mean to be naïve, Song can be as deadly as any ten-point plan. (Indeed Hitler's own work flourished in the oral mode, appealing not to rational support as to surrender, identification, willing

submission: such deep passivities and subjections can feed deep aggressions. But the 'Nation' in that case was not singing, itself, but [so to speak] being Sung to.)

I do mean to say that Song embodies certain principles of human interaction – and cultural transmission – which are not as readily managed in print. Collaboration is one of them – singing together is the natural state of singing, you might say, or at least music-making together a kind of default mode for music-making, whereas writing, even, generally, in collaboration, involves more intensive and extensive periods of individual work. The collaboration of Song is collaboration in-the-moment (rather than the temporal and spatial distances between production and reception of printed language). A related principle (and again, these are not principles agreed upon but observations of standard practice) is the principle of emotional presence (rather than executive distance): a piece of writing can be emotionally absent, and still highly effective, even praiseworthy, but no song could ever be. You could even say, perhaps, that Song is, structurally, a kind of anti-masculinist activity: emotional rather than rational, with its emotional valence set at cooperation rather than threat or defense – but this may not be the best way to pursue the issue, since conceptions of 'masculinist' and 'feminist', like conceptions of 'Nation', have been narrowed for us perhaps over-zealously.

Distinctions between Song and Text in comparison are fairly straightforward sensory affairs. Is Scotland a nation or not a nation? The question is debatable in 1604, 1708, or today, as is the question of what 'masculine' and 'feminine' might mean. But the difference between singing and reading (or writing) is not to be reasoned away, however large the degree of overlap in import and function of both activities. The British archaeologist Stephen Mithen, in his fascinating and highly entertaining book *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body*, talks about music-making as a kind of foundational, fundamental experience of 'shared emotional state' in the evolution of our genus (note: our genus, deeper even than species-being – talk about always already lost origins!).^[1] 'Trust in one's fellow music-makers,' Mithen claims, is the key to this shared condition – again, a kind of early political arrangement. Music develops as an organ for group adhesion and cohesion. Song in particular, as a combination of music's emotional modalities and the force of language (more rational, though not entirely rational), which equally powerfully underlies our experience of social relations and identification – Song would seem to be a powerful vessel and indeed engine of group recognition.

Merely considering these elementary principles of collaboration and emotional presence, along with a third signature, so to speak, of Song culture – anonymity (most of Burns' songs were unaccredited, just as the provenance of many of the songs he gathered from other sources is traditionally 'anonymous') – we can see already how a concept of Nation conceived in such terms would be ... unrecognisable. A kind of Utopian nation, is maybe the best way to think of it –

expressed not in the content of the songs (some of which, for instance from *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, can be quite brutal, not exactly dreams of perfection), but expressed, rather, in the very form of Song, as I have been trying to sketch it.

Walt Whitman, a more programmatic type of personality, addresses these matters perhaps more directly, although even Whitman, here, is less than explicit. Whitman recognises in Burns what we recognise in both Walt and Robbie: deep commitment to a radical democracy, and strong identification with Song as a medium. These commitments and identifications are linked in Whitman's work – 'Song of Myself' is itself, among other things, a great manifesto of radical democracy – and in his essay 'Robert Burns as Poet and Person' (collected among other places in the volume *Democratic Vistas*) we can see him reflecting on this same linkage in his Scottish brother. First of all, it is 'among singers' that Whitman considers Burns.^[2] (In his account of the means by which 'we know [Burns],' text per se is hardly a factor; instead, it is by means of 'recorded utterances, ... diligence of collections, personal songs, letters, [and] anecdotes.' Only almost as an afterthought, and vaguely, does he refer to 'the lines mainly by his own hand' – that is, Burns' hand, or Burns as poet rather than singer.)^[3] And if, for Whitman as for the tradition at large, 'song' is often a word meaning 'verse' generally, and the distinctions between the terms are differences of degree more than of kind, nevertheless, it does seem for Whitman (and to me) that the category of Song emphasises something latent in print poetry, but not always, shall we say, active. Burns is identified with that dimension of 'poesy' which print is not central to, and to which, indeed, print is not always friendly.

The songster Burns is also, for Whitman, a deeply political figure, although again, since we are talking about a radically democratic politics, the political figure to be cut here may not be the one we ordinarily recognise as such. He is not, so to speak, a public political figure but a private one, if such a thing is even possible – a kind of oxymoron under the sign, again, of Utopia. Burns is not, that is, a leader or a hero – or perhaps this is the wrong way to put it, better to say: he *is* a leader and a hero only to the extent that he is, in Whitman's words, 'an average sample', the 'essential type of so many thousands': he stands out, in other words, by disappearing. 'Without the race of which he is a distinct specimen, (and perhaps his poems),' Whitman adds, 'America and her powerful democracy could not exist today' (1882 when Whitman first published the piece), and: 'He was essentially a republican – would have been at home in the western United States, and probably become eminent there'.^[4] (Something you could say about Sarah Palin or George Bush, of course, too, though in a very different sense.) Burns provides the 'full and true portrait' that Whitman says 'is always what is wanted; veracity at every hazard'.^[5] (Indeed a kind of anti-Bush. I ask you to forgive the reference to my own national example, which indeed has been an egregious one; but you will all I expect be able to supply your own examples of less than

always veracious figures from your own political cultures.) 'Veracity' too, perhaps, is a salient value of Song: easier to fake it in print than in full throat.

Burns does his work, in Whitman's words, 'through the years and under the circumstances of the British politics of that time',^[6] and although of course much has changed in the interval, it would seem to be the argument of Poets and Singers generally that certain elements of politics – that is, of human social power arrangements – remain quite constant. 'Nation' (like tribe or kingdom) is one of our paradigms of the constant: an arrangement between those governed and their governors. The Nation of Song, however, proposes not so much an arrangement but a form of membership in a body, all of whose parts are in communication with all. This is the idea of Nation transformed.

Whitman imagines such a nation in 'I Hear America Singing' (first published in 1860 under the heading of 'Chants Democratic'). He hears 'the varied carols' 'of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong', as for instance 'the carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam', or 'the boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck-hand singing on the steamboat deck', 'the wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning', or 'the delicious singing of the mother, ... or of the girl sewing or washing'.^[7] Although in each case here we can imagine the person literally singing as they work, Whitman makes it possible to imagine Singing in a figurative sense too: the work itself conceived as a kind of Song that he 'hears', a metaphor for natural expression, for self-creation, and harmonious action. 'Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else', Whitman says, 'Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs', but this vision of isolate individuals seemingly defined by their tasks is also a vision of the Nation singing – 'America singing' – a vision of the union of peoples.^[8] The union is figured in the song.

It is interesting to note that in his revisions of the order and contents of his *Leaves of Grass* over the years, Whitman moved this poem from 'Chants Democratic' to the 'Inscriptions' section of the work, as if acknowledging the distance of this print reflection from the live performance it makes record of.^[9] The Nation is a song, and the song remains ineffable, not to be fixed in its truest form by mere print – by ink and paper. Another of the 'Inscriptions' addresses these same subjects in particularly pithy form: 'Still though the one I sing, / (One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to Nationality, / I leave in him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection! O quenchless, indispensable fire!)'^[10] The Nation here is composed of sung selves, and as such, of contradictions; and it is subject to its own subjects, vulnerable to being decomposed, as it were, by the ones who make it up. Before it was an 'Inscription' this poem was the introduction to a series of 'Songs of Insurrection'.^[11]

This endlessly de- and re-composed Nation of Song for Whitman is called America, but America is a plastic entity that essentially means 'the people' of a universal brotherhood – at least in potential, if the songs are widely enough shared. (In this context, 'Auld Lang Syne' may be Burns' most revolutionary song.) Song is the voice of this 'nation', for Whitman, in part because Song embodies a kind of resistance to being fixed in its form and future, and Burns is one of the nation's chief prophets, because he plants himself, textually speaking, firmly in that mode, that is, in the anonymity and collectivity of Song. Burns you could say walks a kind of borderline between the textual and the oral; he is not Mrs Hogg complaining (famously) to Walter Scott that in collecting and printing her songs he'd ruined them forever, but he doesn't fully give himself over to print, either. He stands out, again, by disappearing into the collective anonymous, making a claim of the broadest possible identification.

The nation of song Burns imagines is imagined at a moment of cultural crisis, when definitions of 'the collective' are precisely what is at stake: a type of phoenix-nation, rising from the museum of one people to assume a broader conception of itself, indeed an endless one. This nation – this union or universal brotherhood – is at once a dream and a tangible fact. In the world it is a dream. In Song, for Burns (as for Whitman), it is fact.

II. A --- by any other name: Burns and BAUDY!

This talk grows out of a moment, when I first saw the conference invitation with its list of 'suggested topics' for papers and sessions, and at the bottom, as I remember it, one of the items was 'Burns and Pornography,' and I thought: 'well, that's not the right word for what Burns does'. So what *is* it that Burns does, with regard to what might be categorised as 'pornography'? And what might 'it' better or more appropriately be called? Or, another way to say the same thing, maybe: my title is 'A --- by any other name: Burns and BAUDY!' and my main subject here is what that 'blank' might stand for or mean. The 'blank' figures prominently in Burns' own work, and of course in eighteenth-century convention widely observed, when objectionable or otherwise over-charged words must be at once used and suppressed. 'L–d,' for instance, as in Burns' 'Epitaph for J. H. Writer in Ayr,' 'Here lies a Scots mile of a chiel, / If he's in heaven, L–d, fill him weel!,' where 'Lord' reads 'L dash d', blanking out the 'o r'.^[12] Or 'G–' in 'The Holy Fair' ('Should *Hornie*, as in ancient days, / 'Mang sons o' G– present him'), where words like 'd-mn-t--n' have all their vowels replaced by dashes, too, and where various preachers' names are blanked out as well (by rows of asterisks rather than 'blank' dashes).^[13] Kilmarnock appears here, too, as 'K*****ck'.^[14] And other names, like 'Aiken' in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night,' appearing as 'A****,' or all the recipients of the verse epistles, among many other examples, are scattered throughout his work,

blanked out in this fashion, whether the names are public or private in context.^[15] But the 'blank' figures still more extensively and centrally in the bawdy songs, like those collected in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, where we see it – that is, the 'blank' – spreading to virtually every part of speech, from the proper nouns already mentioned to common nouns (and I do mean common nouns) with a varied range of reference, to verbs (like 'f---g' and 'f---rted' – fucking and farted – not to mention 'r---ger' for 'roger', as when 'Latona's son' goes 'To r---ger Madame Thetis' in 'Ode to Spring'), and even to the adjectival: I'm thinking of 'd---n'd,' and also of 'Wry-c---d is she' (Wry-cunted) in 'O Saw Ye My Maggie?'^[16]

Perhaps the best place to start is with Burns' own framing of the other key term in the title of my talk, that is, 'BAUDY!' Here is his characterisation of the matter from his well-known letter to Robert Maxwell, in the revolutionary year of 1789:

Shall I write to you on Politics, or Religion, two master-subjects for your Sayers of nothing?... –I might write you on farming, on building, on marketing, on planning, &c., but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked & bedevil'd with the task of the superlatively Damn'd – MAKING ONE GUINEA DO THE BUSINESS OF THREE – that I detest, abhor and swoon at the very word, Business, though no less than four letters of my very short Surname are in it. –

Well, to make the matter short, I shall betake myself to a subject ever fertile of themes, a Subject, the turtle-feast of the Sons of Satan, and the delicious, secret Sugar-plumb of the Babes of Grace; a Subject sparkling with all the jewels that Wit can find in the mines of Genius, and pregnant with all the stores of Learning, from Moses & Confucius to Franklin & Priestly – in short, may it please Your Lordship, I intend to write BAUDY!^[17]

That last bit bears repeating: BAUDY is 'a subject ever fertile of themes, the turtle-feast of the Sons of Satan, and the delicious, secret Sugar-plumb of the Babes of Grace; a Subject sparkling with all the jewels that Wit can find in the mines of Genius, and pregnant with all the stores of Learning, from Moses & Confucius to Franklin & Priestly'. Even accounting for Burns' tongue being firmly at least halfway in cheek here, if this is Pornography, then Pornography is something like an area of Classical Studies or Philosophy, or a branch, perhaps, of Theology, uniting both sinners and holy folks, Sons of Satan and Babes of Grace, in one grand simultaneously dirty and purifying embrace. A Subject that is markedly *not* religion, politics, or business. A kind of 'blank' called BAUDY!

Burns writes this word in his letter to Maxwell all in caps with an exclamation point, spelling it B-A-U, as elsewhere (though sometimes 'b-a-w'). In a letter to Robert Cleghorn in 1793 – an even

scarier revolutionary year – he spells it thus too, B-A-U, but also writes it with its vowels blanked out, as in ‘B–dy-song’ and ‘B–dy’ (which really reinforces the sense of Bawdy as a synonym for Body. And in fact, most of the words blanked out in *The Merry Muses* are words for body parts, far outnumbering all proper nouns and verbs put together). The exclamation and the upper-case letters stress the corporeality of the term, as do the blanks – as if it were a word for something not quite fully conceivable in *language* – not located in a purely linguistic or semantic context, but in the *body*, a representation of something that cannot be represented, at least not without losing all the force and spirit and sensual engagement that makes it what it is: the body, I mean, and why we cherish it (when we don’t despise it). The closest we get to the unrepresented thing itself, that phantom presence.

So BAUDY is perhaps best thought of less as a form of representation (maybe that’s another meaning of the ‘blanks’) and more as an engagement to perform, its effects aimed not at constructing an image but at inviting an action – that is, Singing, and specifically Singing the Body, filling in the blanks with our own voices. And this is itself, perhaps, part of the political philosophy of BAUDY-Song, part of the lore and learning that BAUDY is said to be pregnant with.

BAUDY in other words is a branch of Song, for Burns, and perhaps in a certain sense the most eminent or purest branch, the place where Song most directly and completely makes its claim on the Body that sustains it, singing. Almost anything you could say about Song in general would apply to Baudy-Song as well. But not everything you can say about Baudy-Song would you say about Song generally.

There’s another dimension of the ‘blank’ that is BAUDY, and that is that it pertains to a broader set of Burn’s concerns with questions of Scottish identity and the Scottish nation, indeed concerns not only of Burns but of Scottish literature generally, such as the question of what to call things, or the constructedness of all answers to such questions, which is to say the politically and culturally charged nature of all such questions and all possible answers – as to What to Call Things. Scotland in a particular way is a kind of blank, that is, a type of the unwritten writ large; W. N. Herbert’s work, for one example on the contemporary scene, explores this dimension of Scottish cultural consciousness, worrying and savoring that porous border, as in his poem ‘The Laurelude’, but this is a central concern of MacDiarmid’s, too – writing the unwritten Scotland – and of Burns’ as well, not to mention John Barbour’s in the fourteenth century. (When Edwin Muir calls Scotland a ‘Nothing’ with ‘a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it’, he is making a different kind of argument, positing an obstacle where I am arguing an opportunity.)^[18] The way we frame these matters now, we would call this a matter of postcolonial identity narrative: the Scottish self and society has been unwritten, that is, folded into the British (with the problematic way the British has of morphing into the English) which at the same time provokes a kind of assertion of the

Scottish – as in the work of Allan Ramsay, say, or in Burns’ own song-gathering. The blanking-out of Scottishness (used and suppressed at once) in this context becomes a kind of insight, pointing to the hidden identity of *all* nations, selves, societies, the constructedness of them all, the non-inevitability of them all. The blank – like postcolonial identity – is a great de-stabiliser, a kind of great leveler. Like Baudy is.

This is all admittedly a long way to go from ‘---’ (blank), or from arse, cunt, cock and ballocks – but this is part of Burns’ great genius, that sense he has and imparts of the elemental and transient mundane (of abiding truths for good or ill), which is also a kind of philosophical reflection on the standing and nature of mankind, and on the nations of mankind. Not so far from Moses and Confucius after all, even if he works in quite a different key. The fundamental functions of the body – the ‘things’ that are specifically left out of ordinary ‘polite’ discourse, and normally left to the specialists (the doctors and the pornographers) – are central to Burns’ overall subject. These fundamental functions, like the body parts involved in some of them, speak to our being in the grip of forces beyond us – and yet forces that define us, too, if not exclusively at least centrally. This is a kind of politics in itself, perhaps a kind of cosmic politics, the heel under which we are all ground. That it can feel good sometimes, and even be a source of joy (and even a kind of spiritual ecstasy) and humour, is only a kind of bonus, a great unexpected gift of nature; that nobody can escape – can escape shit (another word blanked out in *The Merry Muses*), or the deep shaking of sexual impulse, can escape the flesh, or death in the end – this is the important part.

The politics of Baudy situates itself underneath all other politics: Scots and English, in fact everyone on earth, all share *these* lords and devils. In this way, at least, Baudy is a deeply subversive mode of literary action, even if in other ways it is quite utterly conventional and in some ways not subversive at all but right at the heart of patriarchal power-politics: a very voice of oppression. As leveler, Baudy blanks out distinctions: a man’s a man for a’ that.

I don’t mean to suggest here that when Burns writes songs with Baudy gaps and dashes in them he means to say that sex is a metaphor for Scotland – or vice versa – in its indeterminability, in its openness as a sign and its power as a suppressed truth to overturn all conventional orders. (Microsoft Word tells me that ‘indeterminability’ is not a word, but I will leave it for that very reason. You can say things that you’re not allowed to write.) And I don’t mean to say that Burns writes BAUDY! as a postcolonial (or colonial) subject looking to define his postcolonial identity – although he *is* a postcolonial (or colonial) subject writing BAUDY. I do mean that when Burns addresses questions of Scottish national identity, and when Burns writes BAUDY, in either case he has in mind a species of Otherness, something at once unspoken and irrefutable, something that will not be refused regardless of the constraints upon it, and that he approaches both

subjects – Scotland, and the Body – as performance projects, not to be described or defined so much as embodied, given voice to: blanks to be filled in with our own breaths.

Pornography would seem to be a representation of sexuality and sexual fantasy based on the endless availability of one gender, and the endless capacity of the other – or as in the case of same-sex pornography, the endless availability and capacity of the Other and others generally. Acknowledging that the majority of such representations speak to men, for men (even though women may be and generally are involved), whichever gender or sexual being is displaying its availability and capacity is debased, perhaps, more by virtue of this display, than by the mere fact of sexual body parts (or the words for these body parts) having been shown: more dehumanised not by virtue of being sexual, or even being nothing *but* sexual, but by virtue of being rendered nothing but a capacity and an availability: a kind of slave.

BAUDY on the other hand presents its sexual subjects as partaking of a more varied condition. Enslaved in a sense, not to their sexual others but to sex itself: in the grip of our flesh. And in a way reduced to this 'status' or condition. But that's not quite the right way to put it. Some of the songs, like 'Act Sederunt of the Session,' are about the legal restrictions on sexual expression more than about sex itself, or like 'When Princes and Prelates' are about politics and economic injustice, with sex (specifically, 'mowing') as one of the argument's key elements – not any particular couple's sexual encounter but the widespread fact of sexual activity among human beings: hardly the pornographic perspective.^[19] ('When Princes and Prelates' is where 'Poor bodies hae naething but mowe,' and where 'Br–nsw–ck,' 'Fr–nce,' 'Pr–ss–a,' and 'Emp–r–r' would appear to be obscenities.)^[20] 'While Prose-Work and Rhymes' (to the tune of 'The Campbells Are Coming') is reflective along these lines as well; it includes the line 'No treason is in a good ---' (where the dash means 'mow'), itself, again, a kind of nascent sociopolitical compact.^[21] 'Ode to Spring' – where Latona's son rogers Madame Thetis – is a classical romp, a naughty pastiche of classical highmindedness, and in the end just another case of the old gods and their randy ways, more Ovid than Henry Miller. Even among the songs that deal more directly with sexual encounters between mortal (and one could say eternally contemporary) individuals presented in some degree of graphic detail, the range is wider than the term 'pornographic' suggests. Some songs, like 'The Patriarch' and 'Duncan Gray', are about the endless capacity of one and the endless *unavailability* of the other;^[22] Duncan Gray and 'our Meg' pursue each other with equal persistence to the tune of cosmic laughter – 'Ha, ha, ha, the girdin' o't' is the refrain – until in the end Duncan himself 'wearies o' the girdin' o't,' a kind of sin in porno.^[23] Quite a few songs fit into this mismatch-of-energies category, including 'Nine Inch Will Please a Lady', which you could also call a bit of domestic sex education (this is the 'evidently old' song to the effect that size indeed matters, but that spirit and technique matter more: closer to tender than to salacious).^[24] 'O Saw Ye My Maggie' is a tender tune as well, a powerful love song (it helps to hear Ewan

MacColl sing it), which speaks directly to the power of a beloved body, and happens to use forbidden words.^[25] Finally there's 'The Trogger' which may be, among other things, about getting a case of the crabs or pubic lice from a roadside sex encounter – hardly, again, the porno perspective. But even if the song's conclusion, 'I've clawed a sairy c–t sinsyne, / O the deevil tak sic troggin!' refers to a case of compulsive masturbation instead (as indeed it sounds in MacColl's rendition), we're talking (or singing) not endless consummation here but bitter loss, or at least rueful recognition of our incapacities, needs and frustrations – which is not where porn lives, either.^[26]

Perhaps it *would* be better to call them Body Songs (to which category we could admit other songs, about fingers or lips or eyes) – or maybe, simply, Baudy is best understood as the Body in its condition or categorisation as forbidden in word or deed. That this forbidden body is of an elemental nature, nowhere else addressed (except by specialists, doctors or pornographers), makes the loss a great one, and makes Baudy's reclamation of the body a powerful one, however unsavoury we may find it.

Scotland, for Burns, is a kind of forbidden body too – this is in part what his massive Song project is aimed at bearing forth, not to mention *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. (The body is always his most trusted touchstone, and the poor body's oppression his steadiest complaint.) If Scottish identity is at once proscribed and inescapable, and a matter of endless construction and reconstruction, then Baudy must be at least one of its Muses.

In the end for Burns 'the smuttiest sang that e'er was sung / [the] Sang o' Sangs is a' that,' – that's King Solomon's Sang o' Sangs – so who's to say: one body's trash is another body's Bible.^[27] This is from 'The Bonniest Lass', more a sermon on hypocrisy in high places than a raunch-fest, and without even a single word blanked out: the crime of this song would seem to be merely imagining 'Your patriarchs in days o' yore' as sexual beings of sometimes questionable morals, and making direct though veiled reference 'to what we shall not name' – the female sexual organ. At the other end of the spectrum there's 'Eppie McNab', an old song collected by Burns, where 'Thy breeks they were hol'd, and thy [blank] hung out, / And thy [blank] play'd ay did dod, did dod' – and not much else goes on.^[28] But from one end to the other, Baudy for Burns gives voice to central preoccupations with the body, in both its subjection and its resistance: a political matter, ultimately, that undercuts the authority of all parliaments, courts, and churches.

NOTES

- [1] Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 208.
- [2] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers* (London: Walter Scott, 1888), p. 113.
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Ibid., p. 114.
- [6] Ibid., p. 120.
- [7] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett (New York: Norton & Company, 1973), p. 12.
- [8] Ibid., p. 13.
- [9] Ibid., p. 12.
- [10] Ibid., p. 13.
- [11] Ibid.
- [12] Robert Burns, *Poems and Songs*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 354.
- [13] Ibid., p. 106.
- [14] Ibid., p. 105.
- [15] Ibid., p. 116.
- [16] Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, ed. James Barke & Sydney Goodsir Smith (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), pp. 90, 72, 62, 64.
- [17] Robert Burns, *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. J. DeLancey Ferguson, 2nd ed. G. Ross Roy, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931, 1985), I: 462.
- [18] Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1936), 12.
- [19] *Merry Muses*, pp. 54-57.
- [20] Ibid., p. 56.
- [21] Ibid. p. 58.
- [22] Ibid., pp. 89-91, 128-130.
- [23] Ibid., pp. 128-129.
- [24] Ibid., pp. 60-1.
- [25] Ibid., pp. 64-6.
- [26] Ibid., p. 101.
- [27] Ibid., p. 93.
- [28] Ibid., p. 127.