The Functionality of Lyric in Sixteenth-Century Scotland

Alasdair A. MacDonald

A remarkable fact in the literary history of early modern Scotland is the sudden efflorescence of the lyric.¹ Whereas in England numerous vernacular lyrics survive from the three centuries between 1200 and 1500 (to say nothing of compositions in Anglo-Saxon which might be claimed as belonging to the genre), from Scotland there is almost nothing equivalent,² save for sporadic and brief quotations from poems encountered in historical works,³ or else whole stanzas which, though part of longer poems, have, or can be alleged to have, a certain detachability from their narrative or descriptive environments.⁴ It is, of course, always dangerous to proceed from an *argumentum ex silentio*, and it is in the nature of things likely that a corpus of Scottish vernacular lyrics did once indeed exist. The latter, however, would have subsequently disappeared from sight, as a result of such normal factors as accident, weather, vermin, and military depredation. Yet in addition to these expected forces of destruction, one additional and very specific factor was probably involved: the Protestant Reformation. As the monks and friars, together with their institutions, were swept away, so the texts which they may be supposed to have copied and preserved, or the lyrics which they may have preached in their enterprise of evangelisation, would have proved easy victims of organised vandalism.⁵ Whatever the explanation, the loss is almost total: how, then, can one be justified in speaking of an efflorescence of the lyric in the sixteenth century?

1 For their comments on an earlier draft of this essay I am much obliged to Dr Jamie Reid Baxter, Dr Theo van Heijnsbergen, and Prof. Dr David Parkinson.

2 I omit here the Latin lyrics (hymns, sequences, etc.) used in the liturgy of the church. Also omitted from the discussion are lyrics written in Gaelic, which belong to a quite different tradition.

3 An example would be the Latin verses lamenting the death of Alexander III (1286): Bower (1993–1998) vol. v, 420.

4 E.g. the 'lyrics' from *The Kingis Quair*, attributed to King James I (c.1424), and from the anonymous *The Buik of Alexander* (1438) and *Lancelot of the Laik* (c.1475): MacQueen (1970) 7–10.

5 MacDonald (2005a) 246–247.

Answering this question involves reference to several discrete historical phenomena. The first concerns the novel appearance of Protestant lyric verse—which in the case of Scotland was first Lutheran, and shortly thereafter Calvinist in character. This was of course a new development, but one common to much of northern Europe at the time; on the other hand, and in particular as regards the poetry, the development was not altogether without roots, and a considerable part of the corpus of sixteenth-century Scottish Protestant lyric verse in fact has its genesis in translations from Latin, German, English, and French.⁶ The very process of destruction that was applied to the institutions that had previously fostered the lyric could, by an ironic paradox, give rise to new lyrics, as in the following example:

Of the fals fyre of Purgatorie,
Is nocht left in ane sponk:
Thairfoir, sayis Gedde, wayis me,
Gone is Preist, Freir and Monk.
1–4⁷

Of the false fire of Purgatory / there is not one spark left / therefore, says
Gedde, woe is me! / Gone are priest, friar and monk.

A second factor concerns the mediation of the lyric. Specifically, most of the Older Scots lyrics are known to later ages by virtue of their preservation in a small number of anthologies compiled in the sixteenth century (most of these, if not all, in manuscript). To such texts modern scholarship attaches the highest cultural-historical value, even though the proper interpretation of such anthologies is not free of difficulties, especially since the functioning of a lyric within the context of a more or less deliberately structured verse-collection may be somewhat different from the functioning of that item if considered as an original and independent composition. Thus, medieval lyrics may lurk concealed beneath early modern recensions, and poems—like chameleons—may acquire significance from their textual environment.⁸ Thirdly, the political disturbances which led to repeated interruptions in the production of courtly culture during the sixteenth century have brought about a situation in which our knowledge of the contemporary impact of many courtly-style lyrics must

6 MacDonald (1978) chap. x.

7 *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis*, Mitchell (1897) 186–187. All translations in this article are my own.

8 MacDonald (2003a).

be inferred from their transmission in later, and generally non-courtly, circles. In other words, the textual evidence of much sixteenth-century Scottish lyric testifies less to the circumstances of composition, and more to those of reception. Although the strictly medieval (i.e. pre-1500) Scottish lyric is conspicuous by its well-nigh total absence from the surviving literary-historical record, the sixteenth century presents an abundance of material, of which some may actually be medieval in terms of date of composition and some may be brand-new; in either case, much careful critical discrimination and interpretation is called for.

At the outset of the discussion it is perhaps appropriate to say that in what follows a generously pragmatic definition of lyric is adopted, namely: any poem, composed in stanzas (thus *ipso facto* with regular metre, rhyme-scheme and often a refrain), which (while exceptions are possible) commonly has a length of not less than eight and not more than 120 lines, and which may have (or may have had) a musical dimension. Many poems can be packed into this portmanteau. As will be shown below, and especially in connection with the famous Bannatyne MS (1565–1568), the Older Scots lyrics correspond well, in terms of their thematics, with contemporary European lyrics in general.

Certain basic classifications need to be made among the lyric poets in sixteenth-century Scotland. (a) The lyrics of poets writing about, for, within or near the royal court are perhaps pre-eminent in modern critical esteem—such as those of William Dunbar (c.1460–after 1513), under James IV (1488–1513); William Stewart (c.1490–1541), a Dunbar epigone of the reign of James V (1513–1542); Alexander Scott (c.1520–1582/3), under Mary Stuart (1542–1567); and Alexander Montgomerie (c.1550–1598), during the 1580s at the court of James VI (1567–1625).⁹ It is notable that none of these poets, with the exception of Montgomerie, were of noble birth; their works are thus the creations of men who were tolerated participants in, and/or observers of, the activities of the court. Though they sometimes wrote celebratory lyrics, they also cultivated satire at the expense of their social superiors. Almost the only truly aristocrat court poet (if we except Mary Stuart herself, who wrote in French) was Mary's second husband, Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley (1545/6–1567), who was the author of some mechanical and uninspired verses.¹⁰ (b) Among the lairdly (i.e. minor landowner) poets, who characteristically kept some distance

9 For biographical details on these and other poets mentioned in this article, the reader is referred to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

10 For Mary, *Bittersweet within my heart: the collected poems of Mary, Queen of Scots*, Bell (1992); for Darnley's poems (assuming the manuscript ascriptions to be trustworthy), *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, Ritchie (1928–1934) II, 227–228; III, 338–339.

from the court, are Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington (1486–1586) and Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie (c.1532–c.1586), better known for his *Historie* of Scotland. (c) The class of legal professionals and merchants was well represented, and includes John Bellenden (c.1495–c.1548), of the age of James V, the above-mentioned Sir Richard Maitland, a judge and commentator on the social life of Scotland in the central decades of the century, and Maitland's friend, Alexander Arbuthnot (d.1583), Principal of Aberdeen University. Alexander Scott was linked through family marriage alliances and friendships with the Edinburgh legal and merchant circles, while enjoying privileges (through the church) which on occasion gave access to the court. (d) Two poets linked to the publishing trade were Henry Charteris (d.1599), who did so much to promote the literary achievement of Scotland, and Robert Norvell (d.1566?), who may have been a relation of the printer Thomas Bassandyne (d.1577), and who translated several works by Clément Marot. Not every writer of lyrics can be mentioned here: for practical reasons several minor writers of lyrics have been passed over, as have other distinguished poets who preferred large-scale poems—e.g. Sir David Lindsay (c.1486–1555).

As will be seen, the Reformation would have a powerful effect on the Scottish lyric. Some poets would adopt an equivocal stance in the religious disputes (e.g. Maitland) or align themselves with the new religious order (Scott), others (Norvell, Pitscottie, Charteris) would become convinced supporters of Protestant Reform (Lindsay, for his part, was Catholic and reformist), while one poet (Montgomerie) would convert to Catholicism and become active in the cause of the Counter-Reformation.¹¹ Importantly for our purpose, the lyric verse of the Protestants, while novel in doctrine, was on the whole fairly traditional in artistic practice, and some court-favoured lyrical forms would be employed in the impugnation of the belief-systems inherited from earlier times and in some respects still favoured by the court.

To the extent that the production of courtly literature may be supposed to be predicated upon the presence of a fully functioning court, the situation of sixteenth-century Scotland was fraught with problems. Between the years 1513 and 1528, 1542 and 1561, 1567 and 1579—that is to say, for almost half of the century—the country experienced royal minorities or regencies, with all the ensuing dislocations of cultural production.¹² Nonetheless, though courtly culture was somewhat a matter of fits and starts, there were certain continuities. Among the traditional subgenres of the lyric, public celebration (*casu quoque*

11 For a survey of the poets of the 1560s see MacDonald (2001a).

12 MacDonald (2003c); Hadley Williams (2003); Lynch (2003).

deploration) is evident. When the distinguished military commander, Bernard Stewart, hero of the French wars in Italy and cousin of James IV, visited Scotland in 1508, this elicited a triumphal lyric from William Dunbar, couched in the highest laudatory style:

Renownit, ryall, right reuerend and serene,
 Lord hie trywmphing in wirschip and valoure,
 Fro kyngis downe most cristin knight and kene,
 Most wyse, most valyand, moste laureat hie wictour,
 Onto the sterreis vpheyt is thyne honour.
 In Scotland welcum be thyne excellence
 To king, queyne, lord, clerk, knight and seruatur,
 With glorie and honour, lawde and reuerence.

1–8¹³

Renowned, royal, most reverend and serene / lord, triumphing high in
 worship and valour, / from kings considered the keenest and most Chris-
 tian knight, / the most wise, the most valiant, the most laureate exalted
 victor; / your honour is upraised to the heavens. / May your excellence be
 welcome in Scotland / to king, queen, lord, churchman, knight and squire,
 / with glory and honour, laud and reverence.

When the great man died only a few months later, Dunbar also wrote a fitting lament. The poem of welcome was immediately printed by Scotland's first printers, Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar, and their text was presumably intended to capitalise on the joyful happening: whether there was any subsidy from the king is unknown, though such would have been not inappropriate. For this poem, the medium of print (new to Scotland) would doubtless have assured the wide and rapid dissemination of several hundreds of copies.¹⁴ A comparable case is Alexander Scott's welcome poem for Mary Queen of Scots, on the occasion of her first New Year spent back in her own country (1562).¹⁵ As contrasted with Dunbar's eulogy on Bernard Stewart, Scott's poem is notable for its balanced criticism of both the delinquencies of the pre-Reformation Catholic Church and the rapacities of the post-Reformation Protestant lords.

13 *The Poems of William Dunbar*, Bawcutt (1998) vol. 1, 177. Further on Bernard Stewart: Gray (1974).

14 For a facsimile of the productions of Scotland's first printers: Beattie (1950); these prints are now available online via the National Library of Scotland website.

15 Van Heijnsbergen (2007).

Perhaps significantly, this poem, as far as we know, was never printed, but its message, though initially intended essentially for the circle of the queen and her advisers, would have been likely to seem politically explosive: this may explain why the only known copy of the poem is in manuscript, and the poet himself was probably the person who ensured the survival of his work by passing it to Bannatyne.

Many other decorous lyrics in celebration of court activities survive. With these may perhaps be grouped a large number of religious lyrics which could have catered to the devotional tastes and practices of high-placed persons at the court. Dunbar's *Hale, sterne superne*, which is rhetorically flamboyant in the manner of the *grands rhétoriciens*, is an outstanding specimen, though there are many other fine, if less exuberant (and often anonymous) congeners.

Hale, sterne superne, hale, in eterne
 In Godis sicht to schyne,
 Lucerne in derne for to discerne,
 Be glory and grace devyne.
 Hodiern, modern, sempitern,
 Angelicall regyne,
 Our tern inferne for to disperne,
 Helpe, rialest rosyne.
 Aue, Maria, gracie plena.
 Haile, fresche flour femynyne,
 Yerne, ws guberne, wirgin matern,
 Of reuth baith rute and ryne.

1–12¹⁶

Hail!, most lofty star, Hail! / [chosen] to shine eternally in the sight of God,
 / a lamp to lighten [our] darkness, / by means of glory and divine grace. /
 For this day, for the present time, and for all ages, / Queen of angels, / lend
 your help, most royal rose, / to banish our hellish sorrow. / *Ave, Maria, gra-*
tia plena. / Hail! fresh flower of womanhood, / have compassion and direct
 us, virgin and mother, / both the root and stem of mercy.

Quite a number of such religious lyrics are connectable (e.g. through their refrain-lines) with specific liturgical feasts, and it is possible that their purpose was to assist in the private devotions of individuals provided with Books

16 Bawcutt (1998) I, 83–85.

of Hours and within the domestic situation. Unfortunately, nothing can be known with certainty as to the identity of such persons, beyond that they must have been literate, pious, sensitive to stylistic and rhetorical fashion, and—one presumes—possessed of some degree of wealth. While it is probably safe to suppose that such qualities would be likely to be found only among a somewhat restricted number of readers and users of lyrics, it would be unsafe to rush into an equation of these readers and users with either the narrow circle of the royal family, or of the wider aristocracy at large.

Prince-pleasing is another important function of the lyric, and was clearly relevant to William Dunbar, whose poems evince an intimate connection with court circumstances, and who received a pension directly from the king; it probably also applies in the case of Alexander Scott, author of many fine love-lyrics, including a moving lament (for which music has survived) for the youthful son of the courtier Earl of Erskine.¹⁷ On the other hand, some of Scott's lyrics evince a seemingly cynical boredom with the by-now played-out conventions and trite attitudinising of courtly love. Does this reflect a trait in the mind of Scott himself? Or is he simply catering to the advanced taste of some patron or patrons? The following is representative of Scott's advice in this vein to male lovers, in their treatment of the fair sex:

Your hummill service first resing thame,
 For that to your intent sall bring theme,
 With leif of ladeis thocht ye thing thame,
 Ressoun,
 Bot eftirwart and ye maling thame,
 Tressoun.

13–18¹⁸

First give to them your humble service, / for that will bring them round to your purpose. / Although ladies should grant you permission to 'thing' them, / this is just as it should be; / but afterwards, if you malign them, / that is treason.

Here the suggestive *significatio* of 'thing' seems to belong to a world of erotic *franc parler*, and the poet's stance seems to hover somewhere between mildly

17 MacQueen (1970) 89–90; also Shire (1969) 44–66. The musical notation for this poem is given in Elliott and Shire (1964) 163. For the most recent study of Scott: Van Heijnsbergen (2010).

18 *Ballatis of Luve*, MacQueen (1970) 75–77.

amused observation and an active contempt directed at both sexes (the ladies being sadly all too willingly open to seduction by unscrupulous male lovers triumphantly invoking the vapid conventions of courtly love in their pursuit of conquests). Consonant with the ambiguities of this specimen, another of Scott's lyrics draws disturbing parallels between human and animal behaviour:

The bitche the cur-doig fannis,
 The wolffe the wilroun vsis;
 The mwle frequentis the anis,
 And hir awin kynd abusis.
 Rycht so the meir refusus
 Ane cursoure for ane aver;
 Rycht few I find excusis,
 Bot women quhyllis will wavar.

105–112¹⁹

The bitch favours the mongrel, / the wolf the wild boar. / The mule resorts to the ass, / and abuses her own nature. / Likewise the mare spurns the charger / for the beast of burden. / Accordingly, I find few excuses [for this], / except that women sometimes just will prove fickle.

A poem like this is not—in terms of numbers—typical of the courtly lyric in sixteenth-century Scotland, but this kind of invective may have tickled the jaded palates of readers nourished on a surfeit of amatory platitudes. Such poems may have been composed for the entertainment of specific and sophisticated patrons in or on the fringes of the court (e.g. officials, and their extended families): it is difficult to imagine any other possible context. However, as we shall see, the lyrics that were likely to please the court were susceptible to being wrenched out of their social (and literary) context and given a moralistic spin. In other words, lyric functionality in this period cannot be guaranteed to be stable.²⁰

Lyrics, being normally short, tend to survive in one or other of two ways: either on the conveniently empty pages of texts with a different main purpose, or as part of dedicated poetry collections. In this respect, printed collections continue the example of manuscripts. The productions of the first Scottish printers (1508) exhibit a similar pattern, whereby one long main poem tends

19 Craigie (1919–1927) vol. 1, 294–298.

20 Van Heijnsbergen (2005) 171.

to be followed by one or more lyrics. In such printed booklets, therefore, lyrics essentially have the practical function of space-fillers, and seldom is there a discernible thematic affinity between the principal and the supplementary poems. To an extent, this might suggest that the prestige of the lyric is relatively low, since lyrics, unlike other genres, lend themselves to being treated as make-weights.

However, in the case of the several large-scale sixteenth-century poetry miscellanies the case is different, and varies depending on the purpose of the respective collection. The Asloan MS (c.1515–1525) consists of a number of separate pamphlets, the first half of the contents containing prose, the later ones poetry.²¹ The man responsible for this important text, John Asloan, was a notary in the burgh of Edinburgh, and there is no reason for one not to assume that the courtly works which Asloan chose to preserve is not merely a reflection of his personal tastes.

The genesis of the largest Scottish manuscript containing sixteenth-century lyrics, the famous Bannatyne MS of 1565–1568, is more complicated. When he copied his miscellany, Bannatyne was a young man, a future merchant, a member of a very large family, whose father was Deputy Justice Clerk to an official (Sir John Bellenden of Auchnoll) high in legal circles (the Bannatynes were related to the Bellendens).²² As with the Asloan MS, the Bannatyne MS, which contains hundreds of lyrics, is a compilation which has emerged from a courtly circle, but from the urban, legal and professional milieu. The Bannatyne MS brings together some pre-1500 Scottish lyrics, combines its Scottish material with many English poems (translated into Scottish dialect), and juxtaposes the lyrics of contemporaries (e.g. Alexander Scott—a family friend, moreover) with those of past generations. Since the manuscript dates from after the Reformation in Edinburgh (1560), there are places where the scribe can be seen applying doctrinal censorship to Catholic material.²³

Even more interesting is the deliberate structure of the collection, which is divided, in its final state, into five coherent sections: religious, moral, comic, amatory and fable poems. The prioritising of religious and moral material has been interpreted as reflecting the relative values of the new Protestant religious order—although medieval priorities as regards the positioning of such literary domains were probably little different. The arrangement of the amatory poems into a) songs of love, b) contempts of love and evil women, c) contempts of evil,

21 Craigie (1923–1925); Cunningham (1994).

22 On this famous text much has been written in the last quarter-century: see Van Heijnsbergen (1994) (giving further references).

23 MacDonald (1983).

false and vicious men, and d) poems in detestation of love and lechery, has likewise been declared to cater for the new, moralistic age (Mary Stuart was overthrown in 1567). In point of fact, however, dates on the manuscript itself (though subsequently altered), show that the love lyrics were the very first part of the Bannatyne MS to be assembled: this was in the year 1565, which was the very year of the Queen's marriage to Darnley.²⁴ As a result, a collection intended to mark royal (and Catholic) nuptials has been 'reformed' into a miscellany able to placate Protestant readers. It is of course true that to Bannatyne goes the eternal honour of having preserved so many lyrics, but his initial purposes and his ultimate achievement were significantly different, and some decidedly nimble reorganisation has been required.

Similar accommodations can be seen in the other sections of this manuscript, and much critical attention has been devoted to the details thereof. Almost as a side-effect, the scribe, guided, one presumes, by a combination of critical acumen and the knowledge that much of his material had suddenly become politically incorrect, has developed a set of generic labels for his vernacular lyrics. (The classes of lyric conventionally encountered in modern anthologies are normally the convenience-categories of the editors.) Thus, in the religious sphere, there are 'ballattis' (i.e. lyrics) on the Nativity, on the Passion of Christ, Complaints of Christ (from the Cross), lyrics of the Resurrection—and *mutatis mutandis* further subgeneric labels in the moral, comic and amatory domains of the manuscript. This classificatory and descriptive terminology is quite remarkable, and for its time quite unparalleled in English literature. A recent suggestion is that the inspiration may have come from the in some ways comparable organisation of the famous *Greek Anthology*, then only known in the version of Michael Planudes.²⁵ If this suggestion indeed carries weight, it would reveal a notable transfer of certain literary categories from the world of Classical scholarship to that of lyric poetry in a modern European vernacular. It would therefore seem that the vernacular lyric must have gained in status, in as much as a system of generic labels has had to be worked out for it.

Much more could be said about this uniquely fascinating manuscript. However, other sixteenth-century anthologies also deserve mention. London, BL MS Arundel 285 (c.1550) is a collection of nothing other than Catholic devotional texts and practices, and unsurprisingly includes several religious lyrics;²⁶ Cambridge, Pepysian Library MS 2553 (the Maitland Folio) of c.1570 contains the

24 MacDonald (1986).

25 MacDonald (2003a) 80–81 (giving further references).

26 Bennett (1955).

lyrics which appealed to Sir Richard Maitland; and, for its part, Cambridge, Pepysian Library MS 1408 (the Maitland Quarto) of 1586 is a family book assembled within the poet's household, partly as a memorial to Sir Richard, who died in that year. While some specific lyrics in the Maitland MSS show affinities with those that precede or follow them, these collections exhibit none of the categorical readjustment that is so conspicuous in the Bannatyne MS.²⁷

The assembly, in the decades of the 1560s, 1570s and 1580s, of three large-scale manuscript collections of (mainly) lyric verse is, within the Scottish context, a fact of the greatest cultural importance. One may advance several possible motivating forces to explain this: (a) a wish to collect lyrics which simply appealed to the personal tastes of the respective collectors and their families; (b) a concern to preserve as much as possible of the lyric production of pre-Reformation Scotland; (c) a project to bring the best lyrics of earlier ages into proximity with the best poems of the present; (d) a presumed sense that through such collections future generations of patriotic, Scottish readers would be able to access the lyrical production of their own country; (e) a care to disguise—and so to transmit—originally Catholic material under a mantle of Protestant correctness. Such considerations—literary, cultural, religious and patriotic—seem to have combined to produce these anthologies of lyrics. Perhaps the poem which best expresses this general sense of uncertainty (almost of cultural pessimism) is an oft-cited work by Sir Richard Maitland, *Quhair is the blyithnes that hes bene?* [Where is the happiness that once was?]:

Quhair is the blyithnes that hes bene,
Baith in burgh and landwart sene,
Amang lordis and ladyis schene,
Daunsing, singing, game and play?
Bot now I wait not quhat thay meine,
All merines is worne away.

1–6²⁸

Where is the happiness that once was—/ seen both in town and country
/ among lords and fair ladies: / dancing, singing, entertainment and playing?
/ But now, I know not what they are about, / all pleasure has been lost.

Such a poem casts the lyric-writer in the role of commentator on the contemporary social scene, and it displays a personal and emotional response to the

27 On the Maitland MSS: MacDonald (2001b); Bawcutt (2005).

28 *Maitland Quarto Manuscript*, Craigie (1920) 15.

ongoing cultural, doctrinal and political upheavals. However, by this very fact the lyric has established itself as the genre of choice for the literary registration of contemporary historical awareness.

If the preceding section has been largely focused on the past, the present one will examine the lyric of the future; within the context of the sixteenth century, this obviously means poetry articulating the views of the Protestants—though the novelty of such poetry can be overrated.

The lyric genre most characteristic of Protestants (and not only in Scotland) derives from one of the very oldest kinds of lyric known in Europe: the psalms. The Church of Scotland, newly constituted, had its favoured printer, Robert Lekprevik, publish its compendium of doctrine and practice, the *Form of Prayers*. Accompanying this volume (1564–1565) came the whole 150 psalms, in the vernacular, and in simple metres to render them suitable for singing by the public, within or without the church. This Scottish collection was based on the Anglo-Genevan Psalter of 1561, with the incorporation of some twenty psalm-versifications by Scottish cleric-poets.²⁹ From the decade of the 1560s, and for centuries afterwards, the phraseology of the psalms would resonate in Scottish lyric poetry. Poets such as Alexander Hume, minister of Logie, and Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross, are altogether saturated in the idiom of the psalms.³⁰ The vogue for psalms was so insistent that King James VI composed his own versifications, and in *The Mindes Melodie* (1605) there are metrically dextrous versifications by James Melville (the first one was by the Catholic Alexander Montgomerie).³¹ However, it was in the 1540s that we first hear of vernacular psalms: John Knox reports that the reformer, George Wishart, sang a version of Psalm 50 on the night before his capture (and subsequent death), in 1546: the lines which Knox quotes are those which reappear in the celebrated work of religious propaganda, *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (*GGB*). This volume was printed in 1565, and was reissued in c.1567, c.1570, 1578, 1600 and 1621.³²

The authors of the *GGB* psalms employ several distinct compositional strategies. One or two are written in couplets, but the majority are in stanzas (often in the seven-line form traditionally known as ‘rhyme royal’), and are either pentameter or tetrameter. The result is a group of psalms somewhat in the manner of Marot and Beza, employing the stanza patterns familiar in courtly lyrics. An interesting exception to this general rule is the version of Psalm 50 (*Miserere*

29 Patrick (1949) 43–55.

30 Anderson (1936) 237–292; Reid Baxter (2004).

31 *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*: Craigie (1958) vol. 1, 1–63; Reid Baxter (2004) 157.

32 MacDonald (2005b). The present writer has published for the Scottish Text Society an edition of the 1565 text: MacDonald (2015).

mei, Domine), which reproduces between each vernacular stanza the opening words of each line of the Vulgate text; each stanza contains two groups of six lines (of alternating four and three feet), each followed by a refrain: 'To thy mercy with the will I go'.³³ Counting in the refrains, this gives 20×14 (= 280) lines in all, a length which is rather excessive for a lyric, but which might be tolerated as a special case, given the cultural importance of the model, and especially since the poem could be carried by the melody.

In other psalms the Scottish versifier will sometimes make effective use of a local turn of phrase:

For lyke the welterand wallis brym,
 Thay had ouerquhelmit vs with mycht
 Lyke burnis that in spait fast rin,
 Thay had ouerthrowin vs with slycht.
 The bulrand stremis of thair pryde,
 Had peirsit vs throw bak and syde,
 And reft fra vs our lyfe full rycht.

8–14³⁴

For, like the fiercely seething waves, / they would have overwhelmed us by their power; / like mountain-streams running swiftly in full flood, / they would have overthrown us with deception. / The rushing torrents of their pride / would have pierced us through back and side / and carried away our life most utterly.

The very effective—and typically Scottish—term 'spait' is most appropriate, since the speaking voice is presented as the passive victim of larger, impersonal forces: in the Vulgate lines it is the soul which—more actively—goes wading through the waters:

4. Forsitan aqua absorbuisset nos. 5. Torrentem pertransiuit anima nostra;
 Forsitan pertransisset anima nostra aquam intolerabilem.

Peradventure the water would have swallowed us up. Our soul has crossed the torrent; mayhap our soul would have struggled through an intolerable flood.

33 Mitchell (1897) 119–129.

34 Psalm 124 (*Nisi quia Dominus*); Mitchell (1897) 111–112.

Vigorous biblical imagery, and a strong sense of authorial outrage arising from, and responding to, contemporary religious politics, have here conspired to produce a style of powerful, public, declamatory lyric new to sixteenth-century Scotland.

The *GGB* continues a venerable and Europe-wide practice inherited from the lyric in earlier ages, namely the making of *contrafacta* upon already existing secular poems, whereby the metre, stanza-form, rhyme-scheme, and—where possible—many of the words of the original are taken over for a new application. In this way, not a few of the lyrics of the Protestants are reminiscent of pre-Reformation practices, and some lyrics of the anti-royalist party in the political conflict have courtly verse as their foundation. For example, one *GGB* lyric opens in strikingly gracious manner:

Rycht sore opprest I am with panis smart,
Baith nicht and day makand my woful mone
To God, for my misdeid, quhilk hes my hart
Put in sa greit distres with wo begone
1-4³⁵

Most sorely oppressed I am with heavy pains, / both day and night making my woeful complaint / to God for my misdeed, which has placed my heart / in such great distress, beset with woe

The secular original, which set the pattern for these lines, ran:

Richt sore opprest am I with paines smart
Both night and day makand my wofull moan
To Venus quein, that ladie hes my heart
Put in so greit distres with wo begone
1-4³⁶

As long as the Protestant poet follows his exemplar, the resulting lyric declines little in value as a lyric, but as soon as the author launches out on his self-made statement of Calvinist doctrine, the effect is one of instant bathos:

Remember, Lord, my greit fragellitie,
Remember, Lord, thy Sonnis Passioun,

35 Mitchell (1897) 62–63.

36 Text as in Elliott and Shire (1964) 160–161.

For I am borne with all Iniquitie,
 And can not help my awin Saluatioun;
 Thairfoir is my Justificatioun
 Be Christ, quhilk cled him with my nature,
 To saif from schame all sinfull creature.

22–28

Remember, Lord, my great weakness; / remember, Lord, thy Son's Passion.
 / For I am born with every sin / and can do nothing to help my own salvation.
 / Therefore my justification is / by Christ, who donned my nature, /
 to save every sinful creature from perdition.

There is no need laboriously to point out the absurdity whereby, in a literalist view, the speaker is ostensibly (and quite unnecessarily) made to explain to God how the divine plan of salvation is supposed to work; *ipso facto*, and at the level of style, the lyric makes an unfortunate lurch, from an articulation of the spiritual predicament of the speaker to an overly assertive statement of reformed dogma. The infelicities resulting from such naïve shifts of literary category may seem ill-advised to the modern reader; it is questionable, however, whether contemporary readers would have found them so problematic.

In fact, it can be argued that, for all the doctrinal novelties of the *GGB*, part of the appeal of the collection may have lain in its marshalling of literary conventions and turns of phrase familiar from older Scottish lyrics or from the courtly idiom cultivated in contemporary social circles very different from those envisaged for the *GGB*—which consisted, according to the Prologue, of young persons of small learning.³⁷ Equally, it might be argued that the success of the *GGB* can be taken as a sign of the appeal of courtly lyric styles in the popular (i.e. non-courtly) social domain. In either event, in no sense was the impact of the volume predicated upon the reader's awareness of the authorship of the poems subjected to translation or to reworking as *contrafacta*, since not a single author of the Scottish lyrics in this book is known by name. That a modern editor of the *GGB* may, with considerable research effort, be able to recognise source-models in lyrics by Martin Luther³⁸ and other German and Swiss Reformers, is something that is ultimately irrelevant: it was uniquely the purpose of propagating new dogma or of satirising traditional Catholic religious institutions

37 Mitchell (1897) 1.

38 MacDonald (2003b).

that counted. Neither is the satire directed at any historical individual. The celebrated lines (themselves a *contrafactum* on an English popular song):

The Paip, that Pagane full of pryde,
 He hes vs blindit lang,
 For quhair the blind the blind does gyde,
 Na wounder baith ga wrang ... [etc.]
 1–4³⁹

The Pope, that pagan full of pride, / he has long blinded us, / for, where
 the blind leads the blind, / it is no wonder that both go astray.

have no specific Pope in mind, and in the volume most of the complaints of oppression are so general as to make dating of items indeterminable. Thus, the most notable functions of the Protestant lyric represented in the *GGB* may be characterised as the raising of a sense of religious outrage and the dissemination of doctrine via the exploitation of already familiar forms, phraseology, idioms and melodies: this potent combination is presumably responsible for the book's manifest success.

Following on from the Reformation disputes, and extending into the period of the civil war (1570–1573) and later, a new subgenre of lyric emerges. This consists of the satirical poems traditionally grouped in loose association with the name of Robert Sempill (d.1595?), and many of which—though by no means all—survive in broadsides printed by the Protestant sympathiser, Robert Lekprevik.⁴⁰ Sempill, however, was not the only practitioner of this kind of political lyric, and his name may occasionally have been used as a convenient mask for the identity of another writer. One poem, for example, (*Ane Answer maid to the Sklanderaris that blasphemis the Regent and the rest of the Lordis*, of 1567), is very unlike Sempill's usual manner, and indeed the colophon of the poem attributes the work to a mysterious 'Maddie', whose name appears in the titles of two other poems, and who (now promoted!) may be the same 'Maddie, Prioress of the Caill mercat' ('Maddie, prioress of the cabbage market') who purportedly wrote a third.⁴¹ One sixteenth-century witness explicitly identifies Robert Sem-

39 Mitchell (1897) 204.

40 Cranstoun (1891–1893). Cranstoun's edition contains a few poems by authors other than Sempill. On these ballads see: McElroy (2007). McElroy notes (326) that the political ballads use many of the strategies of Reformation propaganda.

41 *Ane Answer maid to the Sklanderaris* (65–67); *Maddeis Lamentatioun* (144–148); *Maddeis Proclamatoun* (149–155); *The Bird in the Cage* (160–164)—all in Cranstoun (1891) vol. 1.

pill as the author of *Ane Answer maid to the Sklanderaris*, and it would seem that the fictitious name of 'Maddie' may be little more than an open secret. In terms of content and message, this kind of lyric is a new departure—abounding, as it does, in persiflage, and naming names of individuals when not merely hinting darkly at scandals and corruptions too hot to mention in print. The stanzas are often pregnant with *significatio*, and historical topicality of allusion—or something that looks very like it—is a regular feature. As a specimen, we may take some lines from one stanza of the Sempill poem, The Regentis Tragedie (1570):

Gif murtherars for geir get ony grace,
Ye will be schent; think on, I say, for gude;
Sen art and part ar gyltie of his blude,
Quhy suld ye feir or fauour thame for fleiching?
Ye hard your self quhat Knox spak at the preiching.

86–90⁴²

If murderers receive any mercy for bribes, / you [lords and ladies] will be ruined. Think about it, for your welfare; / since scheming and complicity are guilty of his [i.e., the Regent's] blood, / why should you fear or favour them for [their] fawning? / You yourselves heard what Knox said at the preaching.

This poetry is focused on what is currently sensational, makes great play with a loud rhetoric of accusation and suggestion, and delights in minatory allusions to prominent figures of the contemporary scene (*in casu* the Reformer, John Knox). Whatever the aesthetic quality of such verse, its rhetorical power is beyond question.⁴³ The lyric has become the handmaid of factional politics, and the genre has been chosen for its power to render the political and satirical message all the more pungent—more so, that is, than even the pulpit rhetoric of Knox.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century there would seem to be a distinct dearth of Scottish lyric poetry: by the end of the same century, there is a positive proliferation. To some extent, of course, this will have been the accidental result of normal losses, and of the obvious rule that, *ceteris paribus*, later textual witnesses have a better chance of survival than do earlier ones. On the other hand, one may point to new roles for the lyric—not only for the expression

42 Cranstoun (1891) vol. 1, 103.

43 As McElroy ((2007) 321–322) explains, the generally unfavourable critical opinion regarding these poems has greatly impeded a proper appreciation.

of more or less traditional attitudes of religious devotion, moral didacticism, or courtly love, but now also as the record of the way that poets reacted to social change and to doctrinal innovations. To a large extent, the lyric in the early modern age has become a less socially circumscribed, and more publicly inclusive, genre, and a measure of this change is the ever-increasing use of the medium of print. In the age of the placard, lyrics were often written to be 'set up' in public places: even Sir Richard Maitland composed a three-stanza lyric under the heading 'To be put in ony public hous' [To be displayed in any house open to the public].⁴⁴ On the other hand, private collections of lyrics (typically in manuscript) after the Reformation came to serve a valuable function as anthologies for those readers interested to access the literary achievements of earlier generations of Scottish poets, together with the lyric productions of a contemporary royal court (that of Mary Stuart) in an age that regarded courtly culture with mixed feelings.

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44 *Maitland Folio Manuscript*, Craigie (1919) 36–37. *Ane Answer to the Sklanderaris* has been endorsed with the words 'An answer to the Bills sett upp against the Regent of Scotland': Cranstoun (1891) vol. 1, 67.

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