

Mood disorder in the personal correspondence of Robert Burns: testing a novel interdisciplinary approach

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History & Humanities

Appendix 1 Examples of two letters, colour-coded and annotated to illustrate the analysis in practice

Letter 63¹. JOHN BALLANTINE Esq. *Banker Ayr*

My honored Friend,

I would not write you till I could have it **in my power** to give you some account of myself & my matters, which by the bye is **often no easy task**. — I arrived here on tuesday was se'ennight, and have suffered ever since I came to town with a **miserable head-ach & stomach complaint**; but am **now a good deal better**. — I have found a worthy, warm friend in Mr Dalrymple of Orangefield who introduced me to lord Glencairn, a man whose **worth and brotherly kindness** to me I shall remember when time will be no more. By his interest it is passed in the Caledonian Hunt, & entered in their books, that they are all to take each a Copy of the second Edition, for which they are to pay one guinea. - **I have been introduced to a good many of the noblesse**, but my avowed Patrons & Patronesses are, the Duchess of Gordon — the Countess of Glencairn, with my lord & lady Betty — the Dean of Faculty — Sir John Whiteford. — I have likewise warm friends among the Literati, Professors Stewart, Blair, Greenfield, and Mr Mckenzie the Man of feeling. — An unknown hand left ten guineas for the Ayrshire Bard in Mr Sibbald's hand, which I got. I since have discovered my generous unknown friend to be Patrick Miller Esq. brother to the Justice Clerk; and drank a glass of claret with him by invitation at his own house yesternight. — I am nearly agreed with Creech to print my book; and, **I suppose**, I will begin on monday. — I will send a subscription bill or two next post; when I intend writing my first, kind Patron M^r Aiken. I saw his Son today, and he is very well. —

Dugald Stewart and some of my learned friends put me in the periodical paper called The Lounger, a copy of which I here inclose you. — I was, Sir, when I was first honored with your notice, too obscure, **now I tremble lest I should be ruined** by being dragged to [sic] suddenly into the glare of polite & learned observation. — I shall certainly, my ever-honored Patron, write you an account of my every step; & **better health** and **more spirits** may enable me to make it something better than this stupid, **matter-of-fact epistle**. —

I have the honor to be, good Sir,
Your ever grateful humble servt
ROBERT BURNS

Edinr 13th Dec: 1786}

If any of my friends write me, my direction is
Care of M^r Creech Bookseller

Comment [MH1]: Key to annotations:

Red text – relating to mood
Blue text – relating to cognition and perception
Green text – relating to activity and behaviour

Comment [MH2]: Indicates lowered energy levels and possibly sluggish thought processes

Comment [MH3]: Self-critical indicative of low self-esteem

Comment [MH4]: Possibly physical manifestation of mental disorder arising from increased stress of relocation to an unfamiliar geographical and social setting

Comment [MH5]: Indicative of reducing severity of symptoms, connecting to reduced severity of lowered mood

Comment [MH6]: Sense of status and self-esteem in relation to social superior

Comment [MH7]: A matter-of-fact listing of individuals, fitting with the tone of the 'matter-of-fact' epistle Burns knows he is writing

Comment [MH8]: Tone of resignation indicating lowered mood and lack of enjoyment in the prospect of further publication, unusual given this was his purpose in coming to Edinburgh.

Comment [MH9]: Indicative of anxiety and feelings of stress of the attention that fame is bringing; also indicative of a sense of pessimistic inevitability at being found wanting in ability, manners or character

Comment [MH10]: Indicates Burns's own sense of physical and mental impairment, and the impact this is having on his ability to write and to write well. Adds to the overall tone of a letter being written out of a sense of duty rather than genuine desire.

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Letter 411B². ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM

Ellisland 8th August 1790

Forgive me, my once dear & ever dear Friend, my seeming negligence. — You cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead. — I laid down my Goose-feather to beat my brains for a pat Simile, & had some thoughts of a country Grannum at a family-christening; a Bride on the market-day before her marriage; an Orthodox Clergyman at a Paisley Sacrament; an Edin^r Bawd on a Sunday evening; a tavern-keeper at an Election-dinner; &c. &c. &c. — but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is, that poor, blackguard Miscreant, Satan, who, as Holy Writ tells us, roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, searching, whom he may devour.³ — However, tossed about as I am, if I chuse (& who would not chuse) to bind down with the crampets of Attention the brazen foundation of Integrity, I may rear up the Superstructure of Independence, & from its daring turrets bid defiance to the storms of Fate. — And is not this a "consummation devoutly to be wished?"⁴

"Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;
"Lord of the lion-heart, & eagle-eye!
"Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
"And brave each blast that sails along the sky!["]

Are not these glorious verses? They are the introduction of Smollet's Ode to Independence: if you have not seen the Poem I will send it you. — How wretched is the man that hangs on & by the favors of the Great! To shrink from every dignity of Man at the approach of a lordly piece of Self-consequence, wh[o,] amid all his tinsel glitter & stately hauteur, is but a creatu[re] formed as thou art — & perhaps [as a creature (deleted)] not so well formed as thou art — came into the world a puling infant as thou di[dst,] & must go out of it as all men must, a stinking corp[se] — & should the important piece of clay-dough deign to cast his supercilious eye over you, & make a motion as if to signify his tremendous fiat — then — in all the quaking pangs & staring terrors of self-annihilation, to stutter in crouching syllables — "Speak! Lord!! for thy servant heareth!!!"⁵ — If such is the damned state of the poor devil, from my soul I pity him!...

Comment [MH11]: Indicative of energy levels, perhaps with a touch of hyperbole

Comment [MH12]: Illustrates efficiency and fluidity of thinking, coupled with energy and rapidity. Triplicate 'c' points to ongoing state of this as well as an elevated mood state.

Comment [MH13]: Comparison of self with Satan indicating grandiosity and hinting at inappropriate behaviour open to criticism.

Comment [MH14]: Simile pointing to high levels of energy

Comment [MH15]: Grandiose language and inflated sense of self-esteem in the face of unpredictable, uncontrollable Fate.

Comment [MH16]: This, and in fact the whole of this second half of the letter, is a grandiose railing against class order and status conferred by virtue of title or birth. It demonstrates a clarity of thinking, but also risky in committing such egalitarian ideas to paper. The overall tone creates a sense of Burns being clearly aware of and enjoying taking such a controversial stance, particularly in light of ongoing events in Europe.

² Text and numbering of letter as per J. DeLancey Ferguson, *The Letters of Robert Burns*, ed. by G. Ross Roy, Second (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). The MS is torn and bracketed portions are conjectural

³ 1 Peter 5:8

⁴ Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, Act III, sc. 1

⁵ 1 Samuel 3:9

Appendix 2 Mood states for Block 1

Letter*	Date of letter**	Recipient	Number of symptoms***	Mood state
593	29 October 1793	George Thomson	0	Euthymia
593A	01 November 1793	Alexander Cunningham	0	Euthymia
594	01 November 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
595	01 November 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
595A	01 November 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
598	01 November 1793	Edward Whigham	0	Euthymia
599	01 December 1793	Louisa Fontenelle	2 ↑	Euthymia
599A	01 December 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
600	03 December 1793	William Robertson	2 ↑	Euthymia
600A	03 December 1793	Maria Riddell	5 ↓	Mild depression
601	03 December 1793	Alexander Findlater	0	Euthymia
602	03 December 1793	George Thomson	3 ↓	Euthymia
603	03 December 1793	Frances Dunlop	3 ↓	Euthymia
603A	03 December 1793	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
605	15 December 1793	Frances Dunlop	5 ↓	Mild depression
606	15 December 1793	William Stewart	0	Euthymia
607	15 December 1793	John McMurdo	0	Euthymia
608	01 January 1794	Elizabeth Riddell	2 ↑	Euthymia
609	01 January 1794	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
610	07 January 1794	Robert Graham	0	Euthymia
610A	07 January 1794	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
611	12 January 1794	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
612	12 January 1794	Earl of Buchan	0	Euthymia
613	12 January 1794	Patrick Miller	0	Euthymia

*Refers to numbering as per Roy's 2nd edition of Burns's letters³²; **Italicised dates indicate those letters where dating is incomplete; ***Direction of arrow following number of symptoms indicates whether symptoms were consistent with depressed mood (↓) or with elevated mood (↑)

Appendix 3 Mood states for Block 2

Letter*	Date of letter**	Recipient	Number of symptoms***	Mood state
60	29 November 1786	George Reid	0	Euthymia
61	01 December 1786	John Whitefoord	5 ↑	Hypomania
61A	06 December 1786	John Mackenzie	0	Euthymia
62	07 December 1786	Gavin Hamilton	3 ↑	Hypomania
63	13 December 1786	John Ballantine	3 ↓	Euthymia
64	15 December 1786	Robert Muir	3 ↓	Euthymia
65	16 December 1786	Robert Aiken	3 ↓	Euthymia
66	16 December 1786	William Greenfield	6 ↓	Mild depression
67	20 December 1786	Robert Muir	0	Euthymia
67A	20 December 1786	John Tennant	0	Euthymia
68	27 December 1786	William Chalmers	6 ↑	Hypomania
69	30 December 1786	Lord Monboddo	0	Euthymia
70	30 December 1786	Henry Erskine	0	Euthymia
71	05 January 1787	James Sibbald	1 ↓	Euthymia
72	07 January 1787	Gavin Hamilton	4 ↑	Hypomania
73	11 January 1787	John Mackenzie	0	Euthymia
75	13 January 1787	Earl of Glencairn	0	Euthymia
76	13 January 1787	Margaret Chalmers	3 ↓	Euthymia
77	14 January 1787	John Ballantine	3 ↓	Euthymia
78	15 January 1787	Frances Dunlop	5 ↓	Mild depression
78A	15 January 1787	Patrick Miller	4 ↓	Mild depression
79	15 January 1787	Dr Moore	1 ↓	Euthymia
80	05 February 1787	George Lowrie	3 ↓	Euthymia

*Refers to numbering as per Roy's 2nd edition of Burns's letters³²; **Italicised dates indicate those letters where dating is incomplete; ***Direction of arrow following number of symptoms indicates whether symptoms were consistent with depressed mood (↓) or with elevated mood (↑)

Appendix 4 Mood states for Block 3

Letter*	Date of letter**	Recipient	Number of symptoms***	Mood state
398A	28 May 1790	William Nicol	0	Euthymia
399	06 June 1790	Frances Dunlop	3 ↑	Hypomania
400	07 June 1790	William Burns	0	Euthymia
401	07 June 1790	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
402	10 June 1790	Elizabeth Graham	0	Euthymia
402A	10 June 1790	Robert Graham	0	Euthymia
403	09 July 1790	Frances Dunlop	2 ↑	Euthymia
404	14 July 1790	John Moore	3 ↑	Hypomania
405	16 July 1790	John Murdoch	0	Euthymia
406	16 July 1790	William Burns	0	Euthymia
407	23 July 1790	Robert Cleghorn	1 ↑	Euthymia
408	23 July 1790	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
409	23 July 1790	Dugald Stewart	0	Euthymia
410	30 July 1790	Dugald Stewart	1 ↑	Euthymia
411	30 July 1790	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia
411A	02 August 1790	John McMurdo	2 ↑	Euthymia
411B	08 August 1790	Alexander Cunningham	5 ↑	Hypomania
412	08 August 1790	Frances Dunlop	3 ↑	Hypomania
413	09 August 1790	Helen Craik	0	Euthymia
414	09 August 1790	Alexander Findlater	0	Euthymia
416	29 August 1790	Robert Cleghorn	0	Euthymia
417	29 August 1790	John Mitchel	6 ↑	Hypomania
418	01 September 1790	Excise	1 ↑	Euthymia
419	04 September 1790	Robert Graham	5 ↑	Hypomania
420	11 September 1790	John Wilson	0	Euthymia
421	11 September 1790	John Sommerville	0	Euthymia
422	05 October 1790	Alexander Dalziel	1 ↓	Euthymia
423	06 October 1790	Frances Dunlop	1 ↑	Euthymia
424	08 October 1790	Crombie & Co	0	Euthymia
425	15 October 1790	Crauford Tait	4 ↑	Hypomania
426	01 November 1790	James Anderson	0	Euthymia
427	01 November 1790	Frances Dunlop	5 ↑	Hypomania
427A	01 December 1790	Francis Grose	0	Euthymia
428	06 December 1790	Frances Dunlop	0	Euthymia
429	31 December 1790	Thomas Sloan?	0	Euthymia
430	17 January 1791	Peter Hill	5 ↑	Hypomania

*Refers to numbering as per Roy's 2nd edition of Burns's letters ³²; **Italicised dates indicate those letters where dating is incomplete; ***Direction of arrow following number of symptoms indicates whether symptoms were consistent with depressed mood (↓) or with elevated mood (↑)

Appendix 5 Mood states for Block 4

Letter*	Date of letter**	Recipient	Number of symptoms***	Mood state
640	22 September 1794	Robert Riddell	0	Euthymia
643	01 October 1794	Peter Hill	4 ↑	Hypomania
644	19 October 1794	George Thomson	4 ↑	Hypomania
645	29 October 1794	Frances Dunlop	1 ↓	Euthymia
646	01 November 1794	George Thomson	6 ↑	Hypomania
647	19 November 1794	George Thomson	8 ↑	Hypomania
648	09 December 1794	George Thomson	3 ↑	Hypomania
649	20 December 1794	Frances Dunlop	6 ↑	Hypomania
650	01 January 1795	Maria Riddell	3 ↑	Hypomania
651	01 January 1795	George Thomson	5 ↑	Hypomania
652	15 January 1795	William Stewart	1 ↑	Euthymia
652A	15 January 1795	Unidentified	0	Euthymia
653	29 January 1795	John Hamilton	3 ↓	Euthymia
654	29 January 1795	Morning Chronicle	5 ↑	Hypomania
655	31 January 1795	John Hamilton	2 ↓	Euthymia
656	06 February 1795	George Thomson	0	Euthymia
657	07 February 1795	George Thomson	2 ↓ / 1 ↑	Euthymia
658	01 March 1795	Maria Riddell	0	Euthymia
659	08 March 1795	Patrick Miller	3 ↑	Hypomania
660	08 March 1795	Patrick Heron	2 ↑	Euthymia

*Refers to numbering as per Roy's 2nd edition of Burns's letters³²; **Italicised dates indicate those letters where dating is incomplete; ***Direction of arrow following number of symptoms indicates whether symptoms were consistent with depressed mood (↓) or with elevated mood (↑)