Between 1707 and 1918, Scotland underwent arguably the most dramatic upheavals in its political, economic and social history. The Union with England, industrialisation and Scotland’s subsequent defining contributions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the culture of Britain and Empire are reflected in the transformative energies of Scottish literature and literary institutions in the period. New genres, new concerns and whole new areas of interest opened under the creative scrutiny of sceptical minds. This second volume of the History reveals the major contribution made by Scottish writers and Scottish writing to the shape of modernity in Britain, Europe and the world.

The other volumes in the History are:
The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume 1: From Columba to the Union (until 1707)
The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume 3: Modern Transformations: New Identities (from 1918)

The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature offers a major reinterpretation, re-evaluation and repositioning of the scope, nature and importance of Scottish literature, arguably Scotland’s most important and influential contribution to world culture. Drawing on the very best of recent scholarship, the History contributes a wide range of new and exciting insights. It takes full account of modern theory, but refuses to be in thrall to critical fashion. It is important not only for literary scholars, but because it changes the very way we think about what Scottishness is.

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The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature is conceived and produced as a single entity. In consultation with the publishers, the editors have sought to present it in three volumes. This is done for practical reasons. Each volume is in itself of some substance. To publish all three in one volume might have produced an unwieldy and inaccessible tome, not so much weighty as burdensome.

The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature in three volumes then is, yet, a single work. Each editor has taken prime responsibility for an individual period: Thomas Owen Clancy for up to 1314, Murray Pittock for 1314–1707, Susan Manning for 1707–1918 and Ian Brown for 1918 onwards. Nonetheless, it is the essence of our editorial process that every chapter has been considered by all editors. In other words, the conception and shaping of this History aims to avoid false time divisions, and to promulgate the understanding that Scottish literature is a continuous and multi-channelled entity from its beginnings – presumably well before the first remnants that survive from the first millennium – till the present moment. Similarly, it has sought to include, and give adequate representation to, wide varieties of Scottish literature, including that in Gaelic, Latin, Norse, Welsh and French as well as the Scots and English most commonly in the past associated with the term ‘Scottish literature’. It also includes, as appropriate, oral and performance literature and diaspora literatures and writers. Scottish literature is best understood as an inclusive, not an exclusive, term. This is a theme, both of intellectual discourse and architectonic structure, of The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature.

In preparing this History, the editors have sought at all times to marry the most up-to-date and rigorous scholarship with the avoidance of a distracting reference apparatus unsuited to the needs of the general reader. Each of the following chapters is, the editors hope, marked by both a high degree of accessibility and straightforward readability, and also by reliability and the intellectual rigour that comes from commanding knowledge gracefully worn. It is in pursuit of this aim of a balance of deep scholarship and ease of access that the three-volume format has been adopted. Although of course it is entirely possible for an individual reader to choose to focus her or his study on the volume that most closely meets immediate needs or interests, each volume will be most rewarding when read in the context and light of the other two.

Readers of volumes two and three are therefore recommended to bear in mind the matters raised in the Introduction which opens volume one. This contains two chapters considering the nature and study of Scottish literature, one prepared by the editors, the other by Cairns Craig. Volume one continues with the first two periods of the History, up to 1314 and 1314–1707. Volume two contains the period 1707–1918. Volume three contains the period from 1918 onwards. Each volume has its own index and list of contributors and so can be read as a coherent whole. The editors, however, make no apology for the fact that each volume contains material that relates to years beyond its explicit period or for the many
cross-references between volumes that are required for a full understanding of the material under discussion. Many necessary cross-references between volumes demonstrate the power of the continuity of Scotland’s literature. This is a strength of these volumes, and an essential premise of their underlying argument.

This volume, in common with the other two, has within its period section (i.e. 1707–1918) a standard structure. Each period has introductory chapters providing a historical, a geographic and a linguistic context to the period’s literature. There is also a fourth introductory chapter in all but the first period concerned with the international reception and literary impact of Scottish literature. Such a chapter does not exist for the earliest period because during that period so much of the literature under discussion is shared between the developing Scottish literary tradition and others. From 1314 on, as more coherent and conscious traditions of Scottish literature develop, so it is more possible to discern and trace their international impact. The chapters in this History relating to this impact offer, for the first time, a coherent picture, based on objective measures of levels of translation, of the powerful impression made by Scottish literature on other cultures. This grew discernibly over the centuries, but began with some éclat with the enormously important writings of Duns Scotus and, later, the often-underrated impact of George Buchanan on wider European culture, particularly the dramaturgic development of writing for the modern European stage. In each period, following these introductory chapters, a variety of distinguished experts addresses aspects of Scottish literature in a series of chapters; some focus on the work of individual writers; more consider the varieties of interaction of writers with one another and with their cultural contexts.

Taken as a whole, these volumes offer the most extensive, the most various and the most inclusive history of Scottish literature available to date.
Scotland as North Britain: The Historical Background, 1707–1918

T. C. Smout

In the political history of Scotland, the Union of Parliaments in 1707 is of course a watershed of supreme importance. It brought to an end the evolution of a native parliamentary tradition, the independent vigour of which has only recently begun to be appreciated by scholars. Henceforth, Scotland’s MPs were to be a numerically minor part of the Westminster Parliament, performing on a distant stage and scarcely noticeable in the eighteenth century unless marshalled as a cohort by their political managers to support the government of the day. Any politician ambitious either for himself or for Scotland cultivated the arts of trimming and lobbying in London; even nineteenth-century franchise reform and twentieth-century democracy, while altering, could not entirely erase this characteristic of the political Scot.

Perhaps at the time, however, the Union of the Parliaments (despite the rioting and brouhaha that preceded it) was not seen to have the same overwhelming significance that it took on in subsequent Scottish literary and political culture. For one thing, the role of eighteenth-century parliaments was quite constrained compared to those of the present day. Government was largely a matter of taxation, the regulation of foreign trade in a protectionist manner and foreign affairs: in time of war it might bring the press-gang to maritime communities. Government had little to say about social welfare, public services (including education) or the regulation of income, and nothing at all about public or private health. Agriculture, the livelihood of most people, fell almost entirely outside its purview except for some regulations on the import and export of grain and cattle. The great political issues of the age had little to do with the restoration (or otherwise) of a parliament for Scotland – the Scottish Home Rule Association was not founded until 1886 and then only as part of a ‘home rule all round’ solution to the Irish problem; it thereby gained little popular support until after 1910.

What was mooted in the first forty years after 1707 was the restoration of the Stuart kings and, while the Jacobites called for the dissolution of the Union, it was not especially for love of a Scottish parliament. The first Jacobite rising, in 1689, pre-dated the Union of the Parliaments by a generation. The next attempt, in 1708, could easily have succeeded as a coup d’état had the French admiral not lost his way to the Firth of Forth: the Jacobites were so embarrassed by the fiasco, and the Hanoverians so alarmed by their narrow escape, that both sides played down its significance and history has largely overlooked it. The third rising, in 1715, might have succeeded if the Earl of Mar had not dithered so long in command of the main army, but weakness in popular support for a Catholic prince in the Presbyterian south of Scotland can be detected in the failure of anyone to join Mackintosh
of Borlum when he marched with the second army through Fife, Lothian and Dumfriesshire to meet his nemesis at Preston. The rising of 1719 led by Spanish troops was snuffed out as it began. That of 1745 was vastly more dangerous and Charles Edward Stuart went through the Lowlands like a knife through butter. But he, too, did not succeed in recruiting a great tail of Lowland followers that would have frightened the king in London, and failed, in the end, because the French could not come to his aid with an invasion army in the south.

The seventeenth century had civil wars involving the enthusiastic participation of tens of thousands driven by passion and ideologies. The eighteenth century had risings, mostly minority interests leading small armies: even Mar at the battle of Sheriffmuir led only 4,000 against Argyle’s one thousand or so government troops. Many thousands more of Mar’s troops had ‘melted away’, such was their enthusiasm to live rather than to fight. The bulk of the population came to dislike the Hanoverians but distrusted the Jacobites, so they tried to keep their distance until the winner was known. Unless, that is (in the case of the Highlanders), they were forced to act decisively on one side or the other by their chiefs: in 1745, twenty-two clans fought on the rebel side, and ten on the government side. After Culloden, Jacobitism was dead as a political cause, but retained a powerful cultural after-life. Even before, anonymous pamphleteers had been asking if it mattered very much if the king was called Jamie or Geordie, but that was not an opinion anyone would have been wise to put his or her name to.

In other less overtly political aspects of Scottish life, the impact of 1707 altered the context of action and behaviour but did not immediately initiate new trends. This was partly because of its subtle character. Despite being described by contemporaries as an ‘incorporating union’, it was only ever acceptable to Scots because it guaranteed independence for the Scottish Church (Presbyterian since 1690) and for the Scottish legal system. The career patterns of Scottish professional classes were not interrupted, though within a few years the Kirk found its ‘liberties’ invaded by having to see toleration extended to other loyal Protestants and the right of patronage (of selecting the minister) returned to landowners; both were resented ‘anglicisations’ imposed by Westminster. Similarly the independence of the judiciary was compromised by referrals in civil cases being allowed to the House of Lords in London, and changed more basically in 1747 when the heritable right of landowners to try their tenants in baron courts was abolished. But such modifications in no way altered the character, distinctiveness or centrality of Kirk and law in Scottish life, or affected their potential as beacons and rallying points for the Scottish identity.

By extension, since they were essentially run by Kirk and law, the institutions of welfare and education, central to everyone’s daily life, were for decades barely touched by Union. The poor law, unlike the rate-supported system in England, normally depended on haphazard church collection and distribution of very small sums by the elders, so most of the sick, old and orphaned were perforce reliant on the pity of kin and neighbours, which made for a certain kind of thrift and mutuality in society. Conversely, the parish schools, a matter of charity in England, were supported in Scotland by a rate on the landowners (or heritors): this did not of itself create an adequate network of schools or a fine system of elementary education, but it gave the Scots a leg-up in a world where social betterment depended on certain standards of literacy. The universities of Glasgow, St Andrews, Edinburgh and Aberdeen were similarly beyond the reach of anglicising interference and developed in remarkable and indigenous ways through the eighteenth century. What had been in 1700 no more than provincial seminaries for boys, inadequate for the fullest teaching of medicine or law (for which Scotsmen often travelled to the Netherlands and elsewhere) in most cases
ended the century as institutions for higher learning famous across Europe and America, and particularly noted for medicine, science and philosophy.

The place of the Union in economic history is more complex. When the Treaty was entered into, many hoped for what Daniel Defoe had promised: immediate and substantial economic benefit from complete freedom of trade with England and its colonies. In fact, the serious economic crisis that had begun in Restoration Scotland and deepened in the decade before 1707, and which was characterised by stagnant Scottish living standards while those of England rose, continued (in varying degrees of severity) for another four decades afterwards. It was neither fundamentally relieved nor fundamentally aggravated by the fact of Union. In terms of commerce, what ultimately pushed Scotland forward were the exports of cattle and linen to England, and the import and re-export of tobacco from America, each of which had roots in the change and enterprise of Scots in the late seventeenth century, but were enabled by free trade with England and its Empire. On the other hand, Union was insufficient in itself to ensure instant success. Issues of quality and price in exports took time and native ingenuity to solve, and the same were needed to break the grip of London and Whitehaven merchants on the existing tobacco trade. On the other hand, the aftermath of Union was accompanied by an increase in tax burdens and a change in customs dues at the ports, which occasioned serious sporadic rioting. Fortunately the price of grain generally remained low in the first half of the eighteenth century, and there was no return to the starving 1690s, though it was a close-run thing in 1740.

From the perspective of the London press, xenophobic then as now, the biggest effect of the Union was to unleash upon England a horde of uncouth and unwelcome immigrants. The Scots had an ancient culture of migration, mainly in the seventeenth century directed towards Europe, and from the later eighteenth century also directed to America; but, after 1707, the Scots were increasingly involved with opportunities in England and the British Empire. Although the stock character of the cartoons was the itchy, smelly, Highland ‘Sauny’, it was not especially a movement of the Gaelic-speaking or of the poor, but rather of the culturally and economically ambitious. The younger sons of the gentry sought offices in the military and in the service of the East India Company and their numbers and success did much to reconcile even old Jacobite families to the Act of Union and the new dynasty. And intellectuals of all kinds sensed the attraction of the most vibrant city in Europe.

The Union truly bore fruit economically in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Glasgow challenged London as the main tobacco port, the linen industry soared and laid the foundations for the cotton manufacture of the Industrial Revolution and the cattle trade brought widening profit. Glasgow and Edinburgh grew greatly in size and prosperity; this in turn brought prosperity to the agriculture of the Lowlands. Farming mattered more than any other economic activity. Despite the success of the merchants and the founding of a few spectacular industrial plants – the vitriol works at Prestonpans in 1749, the iron works at Carron ten years later, and big cotton works at New Lanark, Deanston, Stanley and elsewhere in the 1780s – the eighteenth century was essentially an age of agrarian capitalism. Agriculture was seen as the one true source of a nation’s wealth. Improvement became an ideology of patriotic duty for enlightened lairds supported by agricultural societies and peer pressure. If the consequences were sometimes disastrous for small tenants swept aside by enclosure of fields and consolidation of holdings, and for cotters made redundant by new ploughs that needed fewer ploughmen, the general benefit was held by spokesmen such as Henry Home, Lord Kames, to far outweigh the cost to unhappy individuals ground down by the process.
Similarly, as country life was seen to be virtuous and town life to be corrupting, scores of new model villages were built by the lairds to retain employment (and rent) on their estates in the face of change: both the local dispossessed and the hard-working incomer were invited to pursue industries and crafts within them. Few succeeded to the degree that their promoters intended, though some thrived for a time on the linen trade or on fishing.

Overall, the period from 1740 to 1790 was indeed one of rising standards of living in farm, village and town alike. The material success of Scotland was a matter of pride to intellectuals like David Hume, Adam Smith and Lord Kames, and of profit to great magnates and small lairds alike. It was a world celebrated in Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791–9), that, with the editor’s manic enthusiasm and organisation, brought together the clergy to describe the present state and future potential of every parish in the land. It was a feat of mass authorship without parallel in the history of Europe.

What the implications of Union were for cultural history is extraordinarily difficult to understand and disentangle. The ideology of Improvement itself is a case in point. Scottish topographical writing before the mid-eighteenth century normally described the natural resources of the country or district involved as if they were fixed, something given by the wise hand of God, pleasant or difficult as may be but not readily capable of change. Then they increasingly came to be described in terms of their potential, and with the *Statistical Account*, almost every parish description includes observations of what might be bettered. The term ‘Improvement’, like the term ‘industry’, had both a moral and an economic meaning and was linked with a historiographic theory of social progress from barbarism to civility. A population might be morally improved by making it sober and industrious: the land might be economically improved by enclosing and liming the fields, exploring for minerals or tapping the power of its streams for an industrial mill. The moral and the economic were inseparable: one would lead to the other, but the absence of one could obstruct the other. The clergy of the established Presbyterian Church and the landowners were natural allies in their particular fields, but it was appropriate also for the clergy to take a lead in setting an economic example by enclosing their glebes, and for the landowner to punish the drunken or the lazy by salutary eviction when the land was being reallocated. It was a socially conservative and economically radical agenda.

This ideology belongs especially to the period 1750–1820, the centrepiece of agrarian change that encompassed an agricultural revolution over most of the Lowlands and the start of clearance in the Highlands. But its origins can be traced back to debates in the last quarter of the seventeenth century about why Scotland was poorer than England or the Netherlands (for example in Privy Council in 1681), to writers like Sir Robert Sibbald in Fife writing before the Union about how the country might be improved, and to the first authors of agricultural advice, one of the most famous of whom, Lord Belhaven, also became a ferocious opponent of Union. After 1707 the debate grew ever more urgent, the references to English superiority more frequent and English example more cited. Some of the earliest Improvers were MPs at Westminster and, like Cockburn of Ormiston, were impressed and inspired by their encounters with the great farming grandees of Norfolk among their political friends. Others, however, were Jacobites like Mackintosh of Borlum, who as a prisoner in Edinburgh Castle wrote a tract about agricultural improvement equally excoriating the sloth of the peasants and the wasteful luxury of a gentry corrupted by tea-drinking and other effete English manners. The Jacobites in no sense represented some otherworldly, non-capitalist ethic opposed to the modernism of the Hanoverian party. Improvement ignited enthusiasm on both sides of the political divide. Criticism of it was extremely muted before the 1770s, when a few writers, including Burns, began to ask (in the face of mounting emigration of
poor displaced people) for whose benefit all this change was taking place. But the most improved and economically dynamic country in Europe was England, and it was obvious that its example would not be lost on Scotland. The Union made its example more urgent and compelling, but the response to it was indigenous and not imported.

Similar points can be made about the Scottish Enlightenment, whether considered purely as a philosophical movement, the crowning achievements of which were the works of Hume, Smith and Reid, of Kames, Robertson, Millar and Ferguson, or as a wider cultural movement also including scientists like Cullen and Black, physicians like the Munroes, inventors like Watt, architects like Adam, artists like Ramsay and Raeburn, poets like Burns. It was an astonishing cultural effervescence that gave eighteenth-century Scotland a resounding reputation throughout Europe. Was it a fruit of Union?

Clearly the English influence was very profound. The thinking of Newton and Locke was the starting point of Enlightenment philosophical enquiry, and Addison, Steele and Shaftesbury were mentors to the polite and intellectual clubs of Edinburgh in the decades after 1707. Yet the roots of the Scottish Enlightenment can be clearly traced back to changes in the curricula of the Scottish universities after around 1680, and to Restoration savants like Robert Sibbald, Archibald Pitcairne and the great lawyer Lord Stair. These were men of European learning: the lawyers and the physicians had often been taught at Leiden and Utrecht as well as in Scotland, and were at home with scholarship in Latin or French as well as in English. In a later generation, Hume, a close friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, declared himself more comfortable in Paris than in London, and Smith’s biggest acknowledged debt was to the French physiocrats. The starting point of the French Enlightenment was itself in many respects English: in Newton’s search for underlying scientific principles, in Locke’s rationalism and in Shaftesbury’s deism. English thought did not need Union to make it potent. On the other hand, the Republic of Letters needed freedom from censorship to allow it to flourish, and an incidental effect of Union had been to weaken the grip of the Church and of church courts. Orthodoxy could no longer be compelled or atheists suffer death as had been the case before. It was important that Scotland could plug into an English tradition of intellectual freedom.

The study of history was an essential part of the Enlightenment project. The philosophers subscribed to a view that humanity advanced through a series of stages from hunting to commerce, which they equated with progress from barbarity to civility. Improvement, with all its implications for a conservative social order, was the modern end of this process; for Hume it was self-evident that an age which gave rise to skilled ships’ carpenters and weavers would also excel in science and philosophy.

Hume and Robertson, the two most influential of the Enlightenment historians, viewed history, Scottish history in particular, as a moral and political lesson. For them, most of what had happened in Scotland before their own century was nasty and barbarous, the fruit of tyranny, ignorance and religious superstition, from which the country had been rescued by the Glorious Revolution of 1689 and by the Incorporating Union of 1707. They therefore wrote off Scottish history as a serious object of study, an opinion that appears to have been widely shared in Scottish universities throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. Enlightenment history in this mould was a grand affair of conjecture and general trends, certainly conscious of interlocking aspects of intellectual, cultural, political, economic and social history, but classical in sweep and seldom actually tied down to documentary sources. More rigorous was the history of the Jacobite priest Father Thomas Innes, which drew on the modern French source criticism of Jean Mabillon, who exploded the mythological history of older writers like George Buchanan and set a new standard for...
basing history upon verifiable fact. Later in the eighteenth century, David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, writing from his crammed library at Newhailes (called by Dr Johnson the most learned room in Europe) began to link medieval Scottish history to charter, legislation and chronicle, a procedure that would inspire Sir Walter Scott with an overwhelming conviction of the importance of collecting and publishing documents.

One can understand that Hume and Hailes were not friends. The strength of the former’s grand philosophical historical tradition made Scottish intellectuals vulnerable to the impositions of James Macpherson, whose *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* claimed to be based on Gaelic manuscripts of the poems of Ossian that he never could produce, but which seemed to exemplify the conjectured primitive state of society and to combine antiquarian recovery with evidence for philosophical theories. To Hugh Blair and his Edinburgh friends who supported him, the fact that the Highlands ought to have been as Ossian described was sufficient evidence that they were, and a romantic bandwagon began to roll that ultimately reached European proportions.

Those who subscribed to the ideologies of Improvement and Enlightenment were of course an elite. They lived in country houses of increasing elegance, in manses sometimes of a greater cubic capacity than the rural kirks, and in towns – especially Edinburgh, but also Glasgow and Aberdeen – of fine modern architecture and a network of clubs where they met to discuss economic or intellectual progress (and sometimes matters less edifying). They were literate, well educated, wrote and read in English and emphatically regarded themselves as British as well as Scottish. Even Jacobites, who often emphasised their Scottishness more than their Hanoverian opponents, aimed to place a Stuart on the throne in London.

There was, however, another Scotland, not elite, less literate, not inclined to politeness in the eighteenth-century sense of polish, and, if religiously enthused, it was more likely to attend a kirk of evangelical or seceder tendency than one of the dominant ‘moderate’ faction. It was also less inclined to think of itself as British until the wars at the end of the eighteenth century made service in the British army rewarding and acceptable. If Highland, this Scotland spoke Gaelic: the Wordsworths in 1803 encountered Gaelic speakers immediately as they crossed the Highland Line at Luss on Loch Lomondside. Though this Scotland did not always read very much, it still consumed the great Gaelic poems of the oral tradition. In the Lowlands, this Scotland spoke and read Scots. There has been debate about the true extent of literacy in eighteenth-century Scotland, which has shown that the Scottish ability to write (as measured by the ability to form a signature) was not very exceptional in northern Europe. On the other hand, a universal ability to read, at least in the rural Lowlands, was commented upon by all observers from Daniel Defoe onwards, and was true for women as well as for men.

The eighteenth century was the age of the ballad and the chapbook, sold from house to house among the wares of a pedlar along with ribbons, needles and suchlike little necessities and luxuries. The Scots of the chapbooks was an ideal language for reading aloud in a cottage where people could read but not always write, the phonetic spelling of words like ‘plooman’ making sense where ‘ploughman’ would have been nonsense. The extraordinary success of the poems of Burns among working people of both sexes was one illustration of the consumption of vernacular literature, the repeated editions of the medieval epics of Wallace and Bruce another: all demonstrated how a sense of Scottishness was alive, and a sense of Britishness perhaps still muted.

As the eighteenth century slipped into the nineteenth, Scotland began to change in many profound ways. Politically, the challenge of the radicals of the 1790s, inspired by the French
and American revolutions, culminated in 1796 in the trial and transportation of Thomas Muir. The Scottish establishment was stirred though not immediately shaken, but these events set in train a chain that led, successively, to the so-called Radical War of 1820 (an abortive rising of a few hundred weavers in the west of Scotland), to the Great Reform Bill of 1832, to Chartism, to further Reform Bills in 1868 and 1884–5 and to the beginnings of the rise of organised labour in Parliament before the First World War. What it did not bring was democracy: no women had the vote as a result of any of these Bills, and as late as 1911 some 40 per cent of adult males, mainly the poor, were left out of the voter registration rolls.

Nevertheless, in 1832 the ancien régime fell. No individual ever again would wield the political power of those eighteenth-century managers, the third Duke of Argyle or Henry Dundas, whose control of Scottish parliamentary seats at the bidding of the government made them satraps in the land. Yet electoral corruption continued for decades and the arts of political management hardly went out of fashion. Victorian Scotland was a Whig and Liberal country at least as resoundingly as late twentieth-century Scotland was a Labour one: the Tories hung on in some rural areas, and had an injection of urban energy when the Liberals split over Ireland in the 1880s, spawning the Unionists, who eventually became part of the Conservative cause. But the political folk heroes of late Victorian Glasgow were the Grand Old Man, Mr Gladstone, and the new labour MP, Keir Hardie, alike at least in their enmity towards the landed classes and their belief in moral and political progress, one step at a time. The old tenets of the Improvers in the nineteenth century were transmogrified into a personal search for respectability to which the political working classes aspired as much as the middle classes, and for national economic prosperity not so much through agriculture as through free trade and industry.

Economically, the nineteenth century was dominated by the Industrial Revolution, which began to transform the country from the closing decade of the eighteenth century as cotton mills multiplied not only in the countryside but also in the towns. The age of steam truly began when coal fuel replaced water-power in the new urban factories, though in the Border mills water stayed dominant until almost the end of the century. Cotton remained the leading sector in the west of Scotland until the 1830s, when the hot-blast process kick-started the Lanarkshire iron and coal industry: textiles and mining together sucked in Irish immigration just as other strains and opportunities in town and country were drawing out Scottish emigrants to the boundless opportunities of the USA and the Empire in unparalleled numbers.

Ship-building on the Clyde really took off in the second half of the nineteenth century, and with its related trades was astonishingly successful: the Glasgow area in 1911 made one-third of the ships, one-half of marine engine horsepower, one-third of railway locomotives and rolling stock, one-fifth of the steel and most of the sewing machines in the United Kingdom. It made one-fifth of all the ships launched in the world on the eve of the First World War. Jute was the staple of Dundee, textiles and granite of Aberdeen, sugar machinery of Greenock, printing, banking and legal services of Edinburgh.

Towns suddenly burgeoned. The proportion of people living in towns of 10,000 or more, under 10 per cent in 1750, was nearly a third one hundred years later, a rate of urbanisation unparalleled in Europe and accompanied by a spawning of slums that seemed to many similarly unparalleled. To contemporaries, the growth of the city was becoming an uncontrollable juggernaut, and it did not stop in mid-century. Glasgow, for example, ‘the Second City of the Empire’, grew from 275,000 to 784,000 between 1841 and 1911, while Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen all more than doubled over the same period. Urban government struggled to keep pace and much tenement housing remained dense and squalid.
in the inner cities. The grosser forms of pollution with their concomitant outbreaks of cholera, typhus and typhoid, however, gradually became things of the past, and were memories by the end of the century, although the infant mortality rate singularly failed to decline in the same way. The great railway termini were a new feature of urban architecture: most of the network was completed between 1840 and the end of the 1860s, but its lynchpin, the mighty Forth Rail Bridge, was not put in place until 1890.

As the urban sector grew, the rural sector contracted in relative importance and, ultimately, also in absolute population. The notorious Highland Clearances, the replacement of crofters by sheep farms, are part of this story and remain both historically and culturally contentious, though there were few clearances after about 1870 and more people still lived in the Highland counties in 1900 than in 1800. Furthermore, the Highlanders from 1886 gained special protection from the law to defend them from eviction or unwarranted rises in rent, provisions quite denied to Lowland tenants in a similar position, many of whom also emigrated in large numbers. But it was the Gaels alone, with their fervently expressed love of the land and their burning resentment of landed abuse of power, who caught the public imagination as victims.

Who gained and who lost in industrialisation? It is easy to see the principal gainers, in the middle-class villas of Morningside and Helensburgh, the elegant tenements of Kelvinside and Aberdeen, the good housing at Broughty Ferry and Perth Road, Dundee, all stepped out from the centres. It is easy to see the principal losers, in the slum dwellers and on the Highland emigrant ships. It is less easy to see what industrialisation meant to the bulk of the population in between. There is not much to suggest that the general improvement in the standard of living evident before 1790 continued in the next half-century, and some groups, like the handloom weavers, found themselves first pulled up to prosperity and then thrust down into the most dismal poverty. Experience was very uneven. Some skilled or semi-skilled workers, including Lothian ploughmen, most coal hewers, millwrights and other engineers, maintained improvements. The least skilled probably did not. Later in the century, especially after 1870, there was a more general improvement in the common lot: real wages for men probably doubled in the second half of the nineteenth century, though a great deal of employment was in badly paid juvenile and female labour, where improvement was much less marked. Gender inequality was written into the system of rewards for the workforce: whether it was agricultural day labourers in the 1840s or schoolteachers in 1890s, a male received twice or more the remuneration of a female for a comparable job. Nor, in terms of their own health record or in the liability to suffer the agony of infant mortality, is it clear that the lot of Scots women improved at all in the second half of the nineteenth century when it was certainly improving for men. The conspicuous new outlets for pleasure, the flashy pubs and the football stadia, were only for men, though the music hall and the theatre catered for a more mixed audience.

Religion in Scottish life enjoyed a revival in the nineteenth century at several levels. While church-building did not keep pace with population rise in the great towns early in the nineteenth century, it did after the Disruption of 1843 when the Church of Scotland split between the old Kirk and the new Free Church over the question of patronage and the appropriate role of the state in church affairs. Thereafter, the various competing Presbyterian Churches embarked on a spree of church-building and missionary activity, often with a temperance message, accompanied by a revived and increasingly accepted and self-confident Catholic Church trying to minister to the Irish immigrant, and Episcopalians, a small minority occupying a position between. Altogether the effect was to arrest any previous decline in church-going, and to particularly attract skilled working-class men and their wives back to
the Presbyterian pews. Right to the end of the century church attendance was relatively high in Scotland among the middle class and the working class, especially among women, and visitors noted one of its consequences, the sternness of Sabbath observance in town and country, with a certain amount of awe.

Just as religion regained its social place, so it reasserted its intellectual place. Divines had never ceased to be central to Scottish life, but whereas men like William Robertson and Hugh Blair in the eighteenth century had been accommodating to the Enlightenment ideals of free enquiry and knowledge-centred rather than scripture-centred human and natural science, Thomas Chalmers and his nineteenth-century evangelical colleagues were overtly concerned about rationalism overstepping the bounds set by faith. It would be wrong to suggest that they sought to reimpose censorship, but in the great mid-century controversies about geology and evolution the Scottish clergy made it socially unacceptable to be too outspoken. Thomas Carlyle, for example, found Edinburgh provincial, too constraining for his talents, full of ‘intellectual smoke’, or, in his wife Jane’s words, a ‘poor, proud, formal, “highly respectable” city’ (Thomas and Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage, 2001). Robert Chambers published anonymously his remarkable book, Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844), which set the agenda for the cosmological debate before Darwin and further defended himself by larding it with anodyne comments about the Wisdom of the Creator, to conceal his basic scepticism. He did not escape intense personal attack, though his book was also phenomenally successful.

Yet there was still plenty of room in nineteenth-century Scotland for intellectual achievement, at least of the kind the Church had no interest in smothering. Thus Sir Walter Scott met no obstacle in his gargantuan achievements as a novelist and scarcely less notable ones as a historian. He is sometimes now accused of making the Scottish past blandly palatable (after its Enlightenment rubbing), by bathing it in a soothing romantic haze. Yet he also had a remarkable and unprecedented passion for accurate social history, of which he might fairly be regarded the father, brilliantly pioneering in his attempts to recapture the texture and experience of ordinary daily lives. He also did more to stimulate the publication of Scottish historical documents (through historical clubs) than anyone before or since.

Other nineteenth-century Scottish historians included Thomas McCrie, whose biographies of Knox and Melville saved them from the infinite condescension of the Enlightenment and inspired a generation of evangelical clergy to recover the stern Church of their forefathers. This was acceptable, but Patrick Fraser Tytler’s History of Scotland (1828–43), by suggesting that Mary Queen of Scots might have been more sinned against than sinning, caused Presbyterian uproar. The antiquarian John Pinkerton (who vociferously denied the authenticity of The Poems of Ossian) gave the Scottish past a racist twist by suggesting the Scots were more Teutonic than Celtic, and was part of popular discourse in the nineteenth century, but W. F. Skene’s Celtic Scotland (1876–80) was the first scholarly attempt to investigate Highland history in its own right. It unwittingly helped to promote the so-called ‘Celtic Revival’ at the end of the century.

In natural science, the titanic figure of James Clerk-Maxwell proved to be the most important British physicist since Newton with his work on electromagnetism and the kinetic theory of gases. In social science, the titan was Patrick Geddes, founder of modern town planning and urban environmentalism. In arts, it was Charles Rennie Mackintosh, centre of a cluster of Glasgow geniuses that included his wife Margaret Macdonald and her sister Frances. This was the city of another great architect, Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson, and of the circle of artists known at the end of the century as the ‘Glasgow Boys’. There is
no sense that Victorian Scotland was starved of genius, but if they called biblical Christianity into question they did not find the same congenial company as Hume and Smith had done. In 1881, William Robertson Smith was expelled from the chair of the Free Church College in Aberdeen for suggesting that the Pentateuch might be been written by different hands, and withdrew to Cambridge University, where he became one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology. Presbyterian heresy trials continued until as late as 1902, disciplining academic clerics who questioned the literal truth of the Bible or demonstrated the debt of the Old Testament to Babylonian myth and Jewish fancy.

What reception could intellectuals and literary figures hope for, beyond the clergy? The early nineteenth century was the age of the reviews, beginning with Francis Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review* in 1802: it was Whig, and offended the evangelical clergy, who declared it had crucified Christ anew, but it was still an extraordinary national and international success. Seven years later it was followed by the Tory *Quarterly Review* (founded partly on the instigation of Scott and his preferred outlet) and accompanied by equivalent newspapers, *The Scotsman* and *Blackwood's Magazine*. By the 1830s and 1840s publication of 'useful knowledge' became big business, and *Chambers Journal* (another venture of the author of *Vestiges*), started in 1832, reached a middle-class readership of nearly 90,000 a decade later. Readership widened again after the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855 reduced the price to a penny or so, and the number of newspapers in Scotland grew from about eighty in 1845 to three times as many by 1910, mostly local papers. By 1871, almost 90 per cent of men and 80 per cent of women marrying in the previous decade had been able to sign their names, though in the Highlands these percentages were only 65 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. Reading ability would have been greater. So as literacy increased, the newsprint fell on fertile ground.

The population read in both English and Scots, though many fewer in Gaelic. Discovery of the vigour of the Scots language in the Victorian local press has been one of the surprises of modern scholarship. The subjects discussed were by no means confined to the couthie and the comic, or to sub-Burns verse, but encompassed many serious topics, especially of a local nature. And serious books in English now began to count their sales in tens of thousands: Chambers's *Vestiges* sold 40,000 over fourteen editions between 1844 and 1890, and the works of the geologist and evangelical journalist Hugh Miller, not least *Foot-prints of the Creator* (1849), which was intended as a riposte to *Vestiges*, sold at least as well.

Meanwhile, this vigorous and multi-faceted Scotland continued to emphasise its Scottishness in a number of other ways. The growing power of the British Parliament at Westminster, interfering for the first time in the early Victorian period in matters of public health and poor law reform, and then in land law and industrial relations, called forth a strong reaction, a demand for greater sensitivity to Scottish peculiarities expressed in 1853 by the foundation of an Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights. This issued in 1885 not in a Scottish Parliament but in a Scottish Office, based not in Edinburgh but at Dover House in London. It acted like a Home Office but controlled the various agencies that were situated in Scotland such as those dealing with the poor law, education and lunacy. The country was still lightly governed: as late as 1911, there were only 944 civil servants or government officials in Scotland including the customs and excise service.

Increasing sensitivities about the invasion of Scottish rights and peculiarities, however, went hand in hand with an enthusiastic assertion of Britishness, and a feeling that Scotland had embarked on the Union with England on equal terms, entering a partnership and not a subservient relationship, what Graham Morton has called 'Unionist Nationalism'. Even in the midst of an age of European nationalism, patriotic pride in Empire and in the large part
that the Scots played in it, both as administrators and soldiers, fostered a feeling of Britishness. Indeed, it was an expression of nationalism to be simultaneously fervently Scottish and British. When the Wallace Monument was constructed outside Stirling, European nationalists such as Kossuth, Mazzini, Garibaldi and Louis Blanc were invited to contribute their own ‘appropriate patriotic sentiments’ that were to be placed in ‘a large and beautiful frame’ made of wood from the Wallace Oak at Elderslie. The meaning of the tower to Victorian Scots was that they had secured their own liberation long ago, by avoiding conquest in the Middle Ages, humbling kings, fighting for religious liberty and finally making a profitable union on equal terms with their former enemy, now their partner and friend.

The meaning of Union and of Scottishness took another turn in the tragic, final years of our period. In the First World War, more than half a million Scots enlisted in defence of Britain and the Empire, and more than a quarter of those died. Proportionately the loss of life in Scotland was far greater than that in the other parts of the United Kingdom. Memorial after memorial, from the great one in Edinburgh Castle to the small monuments crowded with names in villages and glens, remind us still of the scale of the sacrifice. At home, it was the shipyards and munitions factories of Glasgow that provided the sinews of war, and in the discontent of the workers and the rent strikes of their wives demonstrated a latent power of the people not yet realised.

It would take the final arrival of democracy after the war, interwar economic depression, various crises after the Second World War, collapse of that Empire in which so much Scottish energy and blood had been invested and finally the discovery of oil to give Scottish nationalism a different meaning. And it would take a remarkable economic revival and devolution to give the Union a different face and to make it still apparently acceptable to most Scots in the twenty-first century. But that is another story.

Further reading

A Nation Transformed: Scotland’s Geography, 1707–1918

Charles W. J. Withers

Neither 1707 and the Union of Parliaments nor 1918 and the end of the Great War mark significant moments in Scotland’s geography. The roots of that agrarian transformation that would so alter the rural landscape from the later eighteenth century lie in the half-century before 1707. The effects of agrarian change, including the capitalisation of farming and rural-to-urban population redistribution, would not be everywhere the same even by 1918. True, almost every town and village in Scotland has its monument to the dead of the Great War. Yet, and not forgetting the personal geographies that lie behind these lists of names, 1918 witnessed no major change to the face of the land.

Even so, Scotland’s geography was dramatically altered in this period, the result, usually, of slow and episodic rather than revolutionary change. In 1707, most Scots lived in the countryside. By 1901, most Scots were urban residents, principally in the central Lowlands, and earned their living from industrial manufacture or in associated services. Many had quit Scotland altogether. They and their descendants may have thought of Scotland, even a particular croft or wynd, as ‘home’. Letters – from frontier cabins in upper Canada, Australian shores or Flanders’ trenches – nurtured migrants’ Scottishness from a distance. For Scots abroad at any time, Scotland’s geography is encountered through acts of remembrance: for residents between 1707 and 1918, it was a changing daily experience.

Scotland’s geography in this period was transformed through the interrelated effects of changes in agriculture and rural society, urban and industrial development and population growth and displacement. One of the essential features of such national transformation was its regional variation, whose resultant patterns and formative processes are revealed through source materials – such as estate maps and the Census – not available for Scotland in earlier centuries. It is also possible to think of Scotland’s geography in other ways. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment may be considered as not just a historical phenomenon but also a geographical one, rooted in Scotland’s improving soil and diverse urban life. In mapping, in written surveys, most notably in the 1791–9 ‘Old’ Statistical Account of Scotland, in the nineteenth-century New Statistical Account (1831–45), and through formal scientific enquiry, Scots geographically recorded themselves. There is, even, a geography of geography in that, from 1708 and for years afterwards, lecture classes in geography were held in Scotland’s cities and towns as the urban public sphere used geography as a vehicle for the promotion of civic utility. In the nineteenth century, documents rooted in the politics of social intervention and amelioration record the state of Scotland’s urban poor and, for the Highlands, the condition of the crofting populations. In providing insight into the geographies of people’s lives, they also represent a particular form of investigative social literature.
There is generally in this period, furthermore, a geography of or, more properly, a geography behind Scottish literature as the facts of change in Scotland’s countryside and towns were used as the settings for works of literature. The period also sees the creation of enduring imaginative geographies of Scotland – for Highland Scotland in particular with its geographies of tartanry, Balmorality and myth-representation.

Changes in the geography of agriculture and rural society in Lowland Scotland were apparent from the mid-eighteenth century in several ways. One was the movement to enclose fields with stone dykes or hedges. Another was the move to extinguish the run-rig system. Others included the adoption of newer methods of land management, including fertilisation, longer written leases, the concentration of land ownership in fewer hands, and that rhetoric of ‘Improvement’ which informed both the landowners’ views of their own mission and the state’s judgement concerning the agrarian economy. Labour services hitherto largely paid for in kind increasingly demanded cash.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider such processes as everywhere and at once the same. The salience of terms like ‘Agricultural Revolution’ depends upon where one stood, geographically and socially, in Scotland’s changing farming world. The rate of agricultural enclosure in Lowland Scotland, for instance, had an initial peak in the 1760s, was followed by a decline, reached its highest point around 1810 and had generally high levels through the nineteenth century. The gradual capitalisation of farming – of which enclosure was one expression – was likewise uneven in geography and chronology. Yet, over time, the growing penetration of Scottish farming by the demands of profit and the market had an important effect upon Lowland rural society. This was not so much to remove people from the land as to alter their relationship to it and to others. The result, locally, was that sub-tenants and cotters were pushed on to smaller holdings on marginal lands and, generally, that farm labouring systems with new social hierarchies came into existence in different parts of the country.

In the eastern Lowlands, the expansion of cereal cultivation, advances in rotation, fertilisation and technology meant that ploughing became a more specialised task, the ‘plooman’ becoming the aristocrat of the labour force. Even there, advances in agriculture depended as much upon personality as upon the philosophies of profit. James Hutton, the geologist and Berwickshire farmer, took his ploughman to Norfolk to learn first hand from his peers in that advanced agricultural region: the attempt failed as neither ploughman could understand the other. Both practice and language were local. In the south-east Lowlands generally, ploughing was undertaken by a hind, who would reside on the farm in a rented cottage with a small holding with his wife, and, usually, a bondager (a female labourer on the farm hired and paid by the hind). Outside the south-east, most hinds had a place in either the ‘kitchen and chaumer’ system or the bothy system. In the first, all farm labourers ate in the farmhouse kitchen, the male workers sleeping in the ‘chaumer’. In the bothy system, which was chiefly confined to the central and Lowland counties of Fife, Perth, Forfar and in Buchan, the ploughman and other farm workers ate and slept in separate quarters known as bothies. Bothy ballads provide rich insight into the changing geographies of farm life: bargaining at feeing fairs, the rigours and companionship of labour, the impact of mechanisation.

Overall, the effect in the Lowlands was regional specialisation in rural social structure and in farming type. In the south-east and west, married labour was normal. Prompted by the markets of the Edinburgh area, the region was distinguished by large grain farms and strict labour hierarchies. In the eastern Lowlands, single men and women made up a class of farm servants. There, wage earners outnumbered independent holders of land by about...
ten to one. The south-west became, increasingly, a region of cattle-keeping, early enclosure and farming based upon the family unit, with local distinctiveness reflecting the demands for dairy produce from the urban populations of west central Scotland. In the north-eastern counties of Aberdeen, Banff and Kincardine, a hierarchy in farm type was apparent by the 1830s: many small one-plough farms and small crofts on the marginal lands with larger-scale farming in the region based chiefly on cattle-rearing. William Alexander’s _Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk_ (1871) well describes the rural north-east at work and play: orra men, feu’d loons, hiring fairs, authority vested in the clergy and the schoolmaster (the Rev. Andrew Sleekaboot and Mr Jonathan Tawse).

Occupational change within rural society after 1707 was apparent in the growth in size of villages and small towns and in the establishment of planned villages, designed to employ the rural labour force in textiles, fishing or distilling. Most planned villages in Lowland Scotland were established between 1750 and about 1840. In the north-east, they were mainly associated with estate improvement, in the west with the expanding cotton industry and, in the south-east and central areas, with advances in agricultural marketing. Between 1770 and 1820, most planned villages were located in the Highlands in an attempt to bring employment and industry to the region.

To see Scotland’s geography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as marked by a distinct separation between ‘Highlands’ and ‘Lowlands’ is misleading. The Highlands do not enter the contemporary British geographical consciousness as some sort of ‘problem’ or ‘underdeveloped’ region simply in consequence of 1746 and All That. It is true, of course, that the area was largely foreign to outside observers and the need to know underlay the mapping work of the 1747–54 Military Survey of Scotland. This survey, the earlier development of military roads under Wade and the related building of barracks at Fort George and Fort Augustus and so on were part of the military surveillance of the Highlands. Yet the region had connections with the rest of Scotland. Many Highlanders of nobility and achievement saw themselves as British Gaels. The Highland economy, especially on its south and east margins, was integrated into neighbouring areas. The region was never wholly Gaelic speaking: Gaelic was for far longer in this period the language of the hearth and of religious worship than it was of commerce. Nor should we see the Highlands as a uniform region. Those districts south and east of the Great Glen were the ‘farming’ Highlands with a mixed economy in which, for example, large-scale cattle-raising and commercial sheep-farming and the social consequences of agrarian capitalism were known, in south-west Argyll and in upland Perthshire, before 1746. The north and west, including the Hebrides, were the ‘crofting’ Highlands. Crofting, a form of small-scale subsistence land-working dependent upon by-employment, was established as an agricultural system only from the later eighteenth century in response to rising population levels and the need to retain labour. Crofting is not a timeless feature of Highland geography.

What characterised and changed the Highlands, especially the crofting districts from the 1750s onwards, were the facts of comparative regional disadvantage. The climate and the terrain limited arable agriculture. Highland social structure centred upon the clan, loyalty to kin, and an attachment to land encapsulated in the Gaelic word _duthchas_, which encompasses notions of birthplace, hereditary occupation and belonging. The tenantry, which looked to a moral relationship with land and the landowner, was increasingly faced with the imperatives of political economy. Subsistence agriculture, especially the dependence upon the potato, was unreliable, but unless emigration or, in extreme years, famine took people away from the land, it had the effect of allowing the population to increase beyond its means. On Tiree, to take just one parish, the population rose from 1,500 persons in 1747,
to 1,997 in 1776, to 2,306 in 1787 and 2,443 by 1792. In 1771, the Duke of Argyll described the island as even then 'over-peopled, and my farms oppress'd with a numerous sets of indigent tenants and cottars'.

The climax to the Highland problem came with the potato famine, which began in the early 1830s and reached its height in the decade after 1844. The geography of shortage was especially severe in the north and west Highlands and Hebrides. As population pressure remained and the cash economy collapsed, so landlords accelerated the emigration of their labour force and converted agricultural holdings to deer forests and shooting estates. Only with the 1886 Crofter Holdings Act was the power of landlords restrained in law. Not until the 1897 Congested Districts Act was additional land made available for the Highland populations. This date marks the effective beginning of what, in modern parlance, we would think of as formal regional assistance for the Highlands and Islands.

The Highlands were, in short, subject to the same processes of capitalisation and economic rationalisation that affected the rest of Scotland, albeit later and in a more acute and accelerated form. How, then, in terms of Scotland's geographical identity did the Highlands come in this period to have a cultural significance quite contrary to their economic importance? The cultural creation of the Highlands after about 1760 is the result of several agencies in combination. The region was 'discovered' by travel writers and painters. James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry helped to instil the idea of Highlanders as Europe's primitives and encouraged cultural forays into the region by antiquaries and poetry collectors. Cultivated interests valued the aesthetics of the uncultivated – upland scenery and the sublimity of desolation. The Highlander was seen as Scotland's 'noble savage' in relation to Enlightenment theories on the stages of social development, the region as the nation's past in the present. Dr Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) influenced later travellers as he had himself been swayed by Martin Martin's 1695 *Description of the Western Isles*. Where Martin and Johnson and Boswell led, others followed – natural historians like John Lightfoot and Thomas Pennant, literary figures like the Wordsworths and, notably, Sir Walter Scott, whose writings helped open up the Highlands to outsiders' curious, amused and, often, condemnatory gaze. Scottish literature was here made through geography: as tales of particular places, in accounts where topography is integral to the narrative and through walking the landscape, representing its moral and physical contours to distant audiences.

Royalty lent an already apparent Highlandism further marketing power from 1822 when George IV wore tartan for his visit to Scotland and from 1848 when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert bought Balmoral Castle on 'Royal' Deeside. Nineteenth-century landscape painters and photographers captured Highland scenery as others, with rod, gun and net, bagged its specimens. By the early twentieth century, the 'wet wilderness' of the Highlands was seen as a natural heritage elsewhere lost through careless exploitation, but was so at just the moment its 'naturalness' was threatened by ramblers, mountaineers and others who saw the region as a playground.

Yet we must be careful in seeing Highland geography in just these terms and only from the outsiders' perspective. Many of the above views were confined to bourgeois sensibilities. What aesthetic theory saw as sublime emptiness and sportsmen as shooting grounds, emigrant Gaels remembered as home. Gaelic poetry and prose writing has a tradition of opposition to unwelcome material change, in the eighteenth-century through men such as Duncan Ban MacIntyre (Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir) and Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, and in that theme of 'homeland' which informs the poetry of the Clearances. The break-up of Highland (and, earlier, Lowland) society was resisted with more than words. The geography of Highland protest effectively began in Easter Ross in 1792 when locals
opposed the establishment of a commercial sheep farm in Alness parish: 1792 is remem-
bered as *Bliadhna nan Caorach*, ‘The Year of the Sheep’. Between that date and the
Highland Land Wars of the 1880s and 1890s, dozens of acts of opposition to rural change
took place: rent strikes, assault on estate officers, destruction of field dykes and land raids.
Many land raids in the Outer Hebrides even after the Great War – protest there contin-
ued into the 1930s – drew strength from the feeling that fighting for one’s own land was
more just than fighting for one’s country. As one land raider declared in 1919, ‘We fought
for this land in France and we’re prepared to die for it in Lewis.’

Set against the context of an increasingly capitalised and specialised agriculture,
Scotland’s urban geography experienced major changes from the mid-eighteenth century.
In 1755 there were only four towns with a population of 10,000 or more, a figure that rep-
resented about 9 per cent of the nation’s total population. By 1851 approximately one-third
of the country’s population lived in towns of 10,000 persons and over. By 1891 the pro-
portion was just under 50 per cent. In 1911 when a new census definition of urban as
centres of 1,000 persons or more was introduced, 75 per cent of the country could claim to
be urban residents. In respect of the term ‘urbanised societies’ (the percentage of a nation’s
total population inhabiting towns of 10,000 persons or more), Scotland was tenth in
Europe in 1700, seventh by about 1750, fourth by 1800 and second only to England and
Wales by the mid-nineteenth century.

Such statistics represent new urban geographies – of population distribution, economic
activity and social change – in formation. In 1755, over half of Scotland’s population lived
north of the Clyde-Tay line. By 1911, 72 per cent of Scotland’s population lived in the
central counties of Ayr, Dunbarton, Lanark, Renfrew, Clackmannan, Fife, Stirling, the
Lothians and the city of Dundee. But statistics mask geographical difference and do not
explain Scotland’s urbanisation. In general terms, most Scottish towns in this period fitted
into a threefold urban hierarchy: the four major cities, smaller industrial towns and local
centres whose principal function was serving their immediate neighbourhood. In similarly
general terms, four main causes for the nation’s urban growth may be identified. The first
was enhanced agricultural productivity. The second was the further development of spe-
cialised services. The third was industrial growth. Finally, population in-migration from
rural Scotland and, for Dundee and towns in the west central Lowlands, from Ireland pro-
vided cheap labour.

Rapid urban growth after 1755 did not at once mark a break between the old and the
new urban Scotland. The four major cities of the early nineteenth century, Edinburgh,
Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee, had been the biggest burghs in the seventeenth century,
and, with only one or two exceptions, the thirteen largest towns in 1831 were the same as
those in the early eighteenth century. What was new was the rapidity of urban growth, the
regional concentration of population that it effected, the specialisation of urban occupa-
tional and residential patterns and, from the 1830s, the scale of the social consequences.

In all except Edinburgh of Scotland’s major cities by 1841, textile employment was the
dominant source of employment. The capital had, relatively, higher proportions than else-
where employed in the professional and commercial sectors and domestic service was by
far the largest source of employment for women. In Dundee with its linen manufacture,
and notably after 1860 in its jute mills, the textile industries dominated and female labour
was prevalent in certain sectors of jute production. Glasgow’s growth from 1707 was the
result of the tobacco trade, cotton manufactures, developments in coal and iron working
in its hinterland, and, from the later nineteenth century, heavy engineering and ship-build-
ing. Aberdeen, like Dundee, served its hinterland as a regional capital and became a major
fishing port, the third biggest in Britain by 1911. Scotland’s urban growth was particular in character, rooted in shared national circumstances and part of international networks – Glasgow with the Americas in tobacco and cotton and, as the ‘Second City of the Empire’, with the world; Dundee with India; Edinburgh and Leith with Baltic Europe, the Low Countries and beyond.

By the 1830s, the geography of urban Scotland was for many a geography of distress. Rapid urbanisation was accompanied neither by housing controls nor the management of sanitation. If nineteenth-century Scotland had a ‘shock city’, it was Glasgow. The population of the City of Glasgow increased nearly fourfold between 1831 and 1911. Suburbanisation, itself dependent upon the growth of the railway, had, as in Edinburgh, produced large dwellings for the better-off and a distinct residential segregation across the city. But in the wynds and closes of the inner city lay an unimproved Glasgow: overcrowded, dirty, disease ridden, perceived to be beyond moral and spiritual improvement and revealed, if at all, only through the agents of municipal philanthropism, the pens of radical journalists and the probing lenses of photographers like Thomas Annan.

Improvements to the basic necessities of domestic geography came late to urban Scotland. Provision of fresh water to Glasgow followed the construction of the reservoir and dam at Loch Katrine in 1859. Fresh water to Dundee from the Sidlaws only came in 1875. National legislation informed by a passion for sanitary purity progressed from the Dwelling Houses and Nuisances Removal Act (1855) to the 1875 Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Act, where municipal authorities had the right to demolish ‘nuisance areas’, to the 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act, which encouraged public housing construction. Scotland’s principal cities each had improvement schemes, in effect, corporate demolition plans: Glasgow in 1866, Edinburgh in 1867, Dundee in 1871, Greenock in 1877 and Aberdeen in 1884, and new houses were built following these schemes. But the ‘long nineteenth century’ ended with working-class unrest in relation to housing – in the agitation of the Scottish Miners’ Federation in 1909 and in the Glasgow rent strike of 1915, for example – and poor housing continued as a problem feature of Scotland’s urban geography well into the twentieth century.

By 1918 and for some decades before, Scotland’s industry was factory-based, heavily capitalised and geographically concentrated. This was not always so. The countryside was for long the locus of industrial production. Scotland’s principal manufactures in 1707 were linen and woollen cloths produced, largely, in domestic systems of production. The production of linen overtook that of woollen cloth during the eighteenth century. Both displayed regional, even local, specialisation. Galashiels produced yarns, for example, Kilmarnock and Stewarton concentrated upon bonnets and serges, Angus, Fife and Perth were the leading linen-producing counties. By the later eighteenth century, cotton was a leading industry and, initially, given the importance of clean water, it too was located in the countryside albeit in large manufactories as at Deanston and Stanley in Perthshire.

From the early nineteenth century and in relation to urban growth, the demands of technical change and the availability of and need to concentrate labour, cotton production became concentrated in the west central Lowlands. By 1831, 91 per cent of Scotland’s cotton mills were located in Glasgow, Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire. Woollen manufactures concentrated in the Borders towns. Further development of the west central Lowlands as Scotland’s industrial heartland came with the nineteenth-century coal and iron age. In 1830, Scotland had twenty-seven furnaces producing pig iron. By 1860, there were 171. Coal output, a total of 7.5 million tons in 1854 – the product of 368 collieries spread across Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, the Lothians, Stirling and Fife – had doubled by 1873. From the last
quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, iron and coal production underlay the emergence of steel-making and, in turn, the remarkable productivity of Scottish ship-building centred on Clydeside. Between 1870 and 1914, Scottish shipyards produced nearly one-third of Britain's total production; in 1913, it was one-fifth of the tonnage in the world.

In contrast to pre-Union periods, Scotland's population geography between 1707 and 1918 can be determined in its overall numbers, dynamics and patterns with considerable certainty. It is, nevertheless, a geography whose underlying sources determine different accuracies in different periods. The Census begins only in 1801. Only from 1851 do we know place of birth at parish level and can we document migration at that scale between birthplace and place of enumeration. Statistics on the numbers speaking Gaelic and Gaelic and English are first available from 1881. Civil registration of births, deaths and marriages was not instituted in Scotland until 1855. Before then, we are reliant upon parochial registers that have survived, and were originally kept, variably well.

Scotland's population in 1755 was about 1.25 million, 1.6 million in 1801 and 2.3 million by 1831. Between 1831 and 1911, the nation's population almost exactly doubled, to 4.7 million. In the mid-eighteenth century, Scotland exhibited a 'high pressure' demographic regime characterised by high birth rates and high mortality rates. Population growth thereafter was principally determined by reductions in crisis mortality as, for example, harvest failure and famine became less frequent and severe, and by a decline in underlying crude death rates. Epidemic disease still characterised mortality – measles and smallpox for children, cholera and typhus more generally in the 1830s and 1840s – and cities such as Glasgow were distinguished by high rates of age-specific mortality associated with respiratory diseases among the old until well into the twentieth century. In general, mortality rates dropped because of improved living standards, medical advances and, perhaps, the diminished virulence of diseases themselves. For mortality anyway, it is more accurate to think of different local geographies – of urban–rural and intra-urban contrasts, of changes in the age-structure of Scotland's population, and of age- and disease-related mortality – than it is of a national mortality decline everywhere and at once the same.

Scotland's crude birth rate was fairly stable at around 35 per 1,000 population from the 1830s to the late 1870s, then fell steadily to about 25 per 1,000 in the period 1911–15. Fertility was mainly within marriage, yet, as with other demographic indicators, there were regional and temporal variations. In parts of south-west Scotland, for example, and, notably, in districts in the north-east, illegitimacy was much higher than elsewhere. Quite why is still not fully understood, but there appears to have been in places what we might think of as accepted local geographies of bastardy and of moral tolerance in which the bearing of children outside wedlock was common over several generations. In 1861, the mean age at first marriage for women was twenty-five and was generally lower in towns given the economic opportunities there. In regions like the Highlands with a less secure resource base, marriage was often delayed or never happened at all.

The expansion of urban Scotland and the transformation of the countryside were underlain by cycles of seasonal labour migration, notably from the Highlands, and, increasingly throughout the nineteenth century, by the permanent redistribution of population. Assessment of inter-regional permanent migration flows shows, for 1851 and for 1901, an increased emptying of the Highlands and of the Borders and north-east Lowlands. On a smaller scale, redistribution within counties occurred as people moved from farms to smaller towns and, in the west central Lowlands and Midlothian, from smaller towns to the cities.

There were two quite distinct waves of immigration into Scotland: of the Irish, from the late eighteenth century until its peak in the 1840s; and a smaller movement, mainly of Jews,
Poles, Lithuanians and others from eastern Europe, between 1890 and 1914. Emigration from Scotland, which began in major ways from the Highlands in the 1770s, may not have been more than a few thousand persons per year in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and is only statistically assessable from 1861. Scotland lost nearly 1.5 million people through net emigration between 1861 and 1939, nearly 44 per cent of the country's natural increase in population. The peak of this loss was in the 1910s and 1920s. Relatively, few Scots emigrated to Australia, southern Africa or elsewhere in the world. Most headed for North America with the favoured national destination before 1838 and after 1905 being Canada. In the five-year period from 1910, almost 170,000 Scots emigrated to Canada. The United States predominated between 1860 and 1905.

The processes of geographical change here explained are apparent, for the late eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century respectively, in the 'Old' and New statistical accounts of Scotland, works which amount to national geographical self-portraits. Both are part, however, of a longer-run tradition of geographical enquiry in Scotland. Geographical descriptions of the nation, only partially or never realised, were undertaken in 1708, 1721–44, 1757 and 1781. The particular mapping project that was the Military Survey of Scotland (1747–54), an exercise in political control after Culloden, was followed by the work of estate surveyors and, in turn, by maps and plans of farms and new policies as the rhetoric of Improvement became inscribed on the land.

In the cities especially, a new type of Scot emerged, the self-styled 'private teacher of geography': men like Robert Darling, who, in Edinburgh's Ramsay's Land in 1776 and again in 1793–4, 'teacheth Youth Writing, Book-keeping, Mathematics and geography, and Gentlemen to Measure and Plan their own estates'. Ebenezer MacFait, another such in late Enlightenment Edinburgh, taught geography to Walter Scott. Robert Burns took what he termed 'My knowledge of ancient story' from geography books, including the Brechin-born William Guthrie's _Geographical Grammar_, first published in 1770. Geography was taught in the universities: by mathematicians like Colin MacLaurin, by natural philosophers like Robert Burns and by natural historians like Robert Jameson.

If, then, we can locate geography in the Scottish Enlightenment, it is also possible to see the Enlightenment as both concerned with matters of geography – with the cultural status of the Highlands, with potato yields and with soil chemistry, for example – and itself geographically different. In Glasgow, for example, the Enlightenment had its own distinctive character based on the city's industrial and American-oriented commercial growth, the dynamism of the evangelicals and the status of the merchant classes. In Aberdeen, by contrast, the Enlightenment was distinguished by the town's European outlook, apparent both in philosophical concerns and in the town's trading links, by explicit interests in rhetoric and the Scots language and by the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid and his circle.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Scotland's geographical self-awareness was furthered by the work of formal survey projects: the Ordnance Survey with its hesitant beginnings in Scotland in 1809; the Geological Survey of the north-west Highlands between 1883 and 1907; the British-wide Linguistic and Ethnological Surveys of the 1880s and 1892–9 respectively, and the 1907 Pigmentation Survey, which aimed to document the racial make-up of the nation by measuring head shape and skin colour. Individual Scots at home and overseas likewise promoted the geographical sciences as a contribution to Empire: John Murray on HMS _Challenger_, W. S. Bruce on the _Scotia_ in the 1902–4 Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, and, from his Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, Patrick Geddes emphasised geography as a means to local knowledge, national understanding and global citizenship.
Consideration of Scotland’s geography over the 300 years from 1707 reveals a nation transformed by being always in a state of becoming ‘modern’. Scotland’s geography was, at one and the same time, internally dynamic, locally variable and, in numerous ways, implicated in the circumstances of global change. These things we can think of as the changing geography of Scotland’s places. The period 1707 to 1918 was also marked by a wider public engagement with geography – in school and university teaching, in geographical book and atlas publishing, in public lectures in geography and in mapping, hill walking and other popular geographical practices. This we can think of as the changing place of geography in Scotland. If it was the case that Scotland in 1918 looked a different country than it had in 1707, so, too, many Scots at home and abroad would have looked differently upon themselves as geographical citizens.

Further reading

Standards and Differences: Languages in Scotland, 1707–1918

Charles Jones and Wilson McLeod

The Gaelic language

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the Gaelic-speaking community of Scotland was overwhelmingly monolingual and almost entirely confined to the Gàidhealtachd. Publishing in the language was confined to a few basic religious texts, and literacy rates were extremely low; the Scottish Gaelic vernacular, as distinct from the Classical Common Gaelic used by the learned classes of both Scotland and Ireland since the end of the twelfth century, had not yet been codified. Two centuries later, following a succession of repressed risings, heavy emigration (both voluntary and forced) and economic transformation, the position of the language and the speech community had changed dramatically. Language shift from Gaelic to English had begun in almost all parts of the traditional Gàidhealtachd, and indeed was effectively complete in a number of areas; the Gaelic community had diffused beyond the Gàidhealtachd into industrial cities and distant countries; the range of publication had expanded enormously, and the language had been significantly standardised; and public authorities had taken the first tentative steps to move away from policies of repression or malign neglect to an acceptance and accommodation of the language.

In 1700 Gaelic was the sole language spoken by the great majority of the Gàidhealtachd population; of the total Scottish population of around 900,000, about 25 to 30 per cent spoke Gaelic. English–Gaelic diglossia had not yet developed: for most Gaels English was an unknown tongue, although there were of course many individuals in the Gàidhealtachd who knew English to some degree, including cattle drovers and those living in areas adjoining the Lowlands where economic interactions involved language contact.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, language shift was evidently under way in certain Highland areas, especially those nearest the ‘Highland Line’. In such districts transitional bilingualism had developed, with the language passing out of community use soon thereafter. Adam Ferguson, born and raised in Perthshire, became a chaplain in the Hanoverian Black Watch regiment by virtue of being a Gaelic speaker; education in St Andrews and Edinburgh prepared him to become a major contributor to the Scottish Enlightenment with An Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767), which drew on this double inheritance. Language-shift processes slowly worked their way north and west, driven by improved transport links and increased economic interaction with the English-speaking world, including both internal migration and overseas emigration. Gaelic was very slow in disappearing altogether, however: when the Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of
Scotland undertook its fieldwork from 1950 onwards, linguistic investigators were still able to locate Gaelic speakers native to almost every parish in the traditional Gàidhealtachd.

Before 1881, when questions concerning Gaelic were placed on the national census, evidentiary sources for the demography of the language are relatively thin. The ‘Old’ Statistical Account (1791–9) and New Statistical Account (1831–45) provide invaluable information about the linguistic dynamics of the different Highland parishes, revealing a complex and variegated situation across the region, and often recording significant sociolinguistic changes in the few decades between these surveys. Calculations based on this data suggest that there were just under 300,000 Gaelic Speakers at the start of the nineteenth century, approximately one-fifth of the total Scottish population. Having reached its peak between 1820 and 1840 in most districts, the population of the Highlands dropped precipitously from the middle of the century, so that the first census results in 1881 showed a total of 231,594 Gaelic speakers (both monoglot and bilingual), a mere 6.2 per cent of the national population, which had grown significantly during the era of industrial expansion in the Lowlands.

By 1921, the number of Gaelic speakers had fallen to 158,779 (3.3 per cent of the national population), with only 9,829 monoglots, and had become a minority language in most Highland parishes. In parts of the Black Isle, south Kintyre and Highland Perthshire, the Gaelic-speaking population had dropped below 10 per cent of the total, while much of Easter Ross, Badenoch and Strathspey had dropped below a quarter. On the other hand, most of the mainland to the north and west of the Great Glen, to say nothing of the islands, remained well over 75 per cent Gaelic-speaking. Ten parishes, mostly in Skye and the Western Isles, stood at over 90 per cent, with Applecross, at 91 per cent, being the strongest Gaelic area on the mainland.

Internal migration and overseas emigration from the late eighteenth century onwards meant that Gaelic had spread out beyond the traditional Gàidhealtachd. Sizeable Gaelic communities developed in the Lowland towns and cities, especially in west central Scotland. By 1921, in the wake of language shift within much of the Highlands summarised above, almost a quarter of Scotland’s Gaelic speakers lived outside the Gàidhealtachd. Indeed, a significant proportion of the overall Gaelic-speaking population lived outside Scotland: in 1901, for example, there were some 50,000 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia alone (between one-quarter and one-fifth of the total recorded in Scotland in that year).

Although Scottish Gaelic had diverged from Irish and Manx Gaelic during the Middle Ages, the language was codified in a distinctively Scottish form only in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gaelic publishing in Scotland had begun in 1567, yet it was only with the preparation of the Bible in vernacular Scottish Gaelic (a project completed in 1801) and the publication of a range of secular poetry collections from 1751 onwards that an orthography designed for Scottish Gaelic was developed. This orthography was based on the system of Classical Common Gaelic, the literary language of the late medieval period, but with appropriate modernisation and adaptation to suit Scottish pronunciation and morphology. One key innovation was the development of the grave accent – previously only acute accents had been used – which allowed the written form to show key phonological differences. This written form was polished further during the nineteenth century, especially in works written or edited by ‘Caraid nan Gàidheal’ (Rev. Norman MacLeod, 1783–1862), and remains in use today, albeit with some relatively minor modifications.

Grammatical study also developed at the turn of the nineteenth century, beginning with the Rev. Alexander Stewart’s Elements of Gaelic Grammar (1801) and a number of Gaelic dictionaries were published from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, beginning with Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s Leabhar a Theagasc Aimminnin, produced for the
Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), and culminating in Edward Dwelly's *Illustrated Gaelic–English Dictionary* (1902–11), which remains the standard work. Academic interest in Celtic Studies grew significantly during the nineteenth century, particularly in connection with advances in philology led by central European scholars, and the first Chair of Celtic was created at the University of Edinburgh in 1882, following a lengthy grass-roots campaign in the Gaelic community, led by Professor John Stuart Blackie, the Professor of Greek in Edinburgh. Glasgow followed suit by creating a lectureship in Celtic in 1901.

Language contact between Gaelic and English became increasingly obvious through the adoption of successive waves of loanwords, particularly names for new materials that came into the Gàidhealtachd from the south. The poetry of the Jacobite period, for example, is replete with English terms relating to weaponry and military activity, while nineteenth-century usage demonstrates an adaptation to urban life in the industrial era. From at least the later eighteenth century, complaints about the decreasing 'purity' of Gaelic became commonplace, as knowledge of English and eventual full-scale bilingualism became more and more prevalent.

Although various plans and initiatives had been announced throughout the seventeenth century, only in the eighteenth century did the authorities succeed in establishing schools in the Gàidhealtachd in a meaningful fashion. Instrumental in these efforts was the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), founded in 1709, which had set up over 300 schools by 1795. The record of the SSPCK schools with regard to Gaelic is a mixed one. The ideology underpinning the initial approach of the SSPCK was summarised by a royal commission in 1716 as ‘reducing these Countries to order [. . .] making them usefull to the Commonwealth [. . .] teaching them their duty to God [. . .] and rooting out their Irish Language’. Over time, however, a more accommodating policy developed, partly due to the manifest failure of English-only methods in strictly educational terms.

The publication of the Gaelic Bible, coupled with the initiatives of the SSPCK and other educational institutions, affected a significant increase in Gaelic literacy rates in the first part of the nineteenth century. This growth in the scope of the reading public led to a wave of publication initiatives, including the first Gaelic periodicals from 1829 onwards. Only seventy Gaelic books were published in the 1700s (forty-five of these in the 1780s and 1790s), but the number reached more than 1,000 in the following century.

The Education Act of 1872, which replaced the existing network of charitable schools managed by the SSPCK and other private institutions with a system of state schools from whose curriculum Gaelic was entirely excluded, has generally been considered a disaster for the Gaelic language. Under this hostile regime, Gaelic literacy began to decline once again, and generations of Gaels were ‘educated out’ of the language, immersed in an unknown and foreign language and trained for emigration. The Act was deeply unpopular among Gaelic organisations and activists at the time, but efforts to promote the language in the education system lacked a critical mass, and failed to persuade the authorities. Piecemeal improvements were made to authorise the teaching of the language in different ways, culminating in the ‘Gaelic clause’ of the Education Act of 1918, which required education authorities to make appropriate provision for the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas. Even so, Gaelic remained marginal to the state education system until the 1960s, when the first initiatives in Gaelic-medium education began in parts of Inverness-shire.

Despite the wrenching upheavals that affected Gaeldom during the period between the Union of Parliaments and the First World War, the discourses and language ideologies relating to Gaelic underwent relatively little change, although differences of idiom and
emphasis did become apparent over time. The voices of power generally expressed hostility of varying kinds and varying degrees of intensity, while a countervailing strain of what might be called Gaelic ethnolinguistic consciousness also emerged.

From at least the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards the state’s policy towards Gaelic was explicitly hostile, with its stated goal that of ‘abolishing and removing’ the language. A similar viewpoint underpinned many of the initiatives of the SSPCK and other religious institutions in the Gàidhealtachd, as summarised above. By the later eighteenth century, the ideology of improvement had become dominant, an outlook that was to be further developed during the Victorian era, with its gospel of progress. In this vision, Gaelic was perceived as a barrier to the economic development of the Highlands, and linguistic uniformity was considered a necessary precondition of British national unity.

Although such views certainly found currency among some Gaels, who voted with their tongues, so to speak, by shifting towards English, the dominant ethos within Gaelic circles was one of cultural self-defence. Beginning in 1707, when three Scottish ministers wrote dedicatory Gaelic verses to the pioneering Celticist Edward Lhuyd as epigraphs for his Archaeologia Britannica, a new sub-genre of poetry developed, praising Gaelic’s glorious past and bewailing its current neglect. Most influential of these compositions was Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s ‘Moladh an ùghdair don t-seann chànain Ghàidhlig’ (‘The Author’s Praise of the Ancient Gaelic Tongue’) (c. 1738), which praised (with purposeful bombast) the origins and virtues of the language:

Bha a’ Ghàidhlig ullamh
’Na glòir fìor-ghuineach cruaidh
Air feadh a’ chruinne
Mun thuilich an Tuil-ruadh.

Mhair i fòs
Is cha tèid a glòir air chall
Dh’aindeoin gò
Is mioruin mhòir nan Gall.

Is i labhair Alba
Is gallbhodaich fèin
Ar flaithe, ar prionnsaidhe
Is ar diùcanna gun èis [. . .]

Is i labhair Goill is Gàidheil,
Neo-chléirich is cléir,
Gach fear is bean
A ghluaiseadh teanga am beul.

Is i labhair Àdhamh
Ann a Phàrras fèin
Is bu shùbhhlach Gàidhlig
O bheul àlainn Eubh [. . .]

Tha Laideann coimhliont’,
Torrach teann na’s leòr;
Ach ’s sgalag thràilleil
I do’n Ghàidhlig chòir [. . .]

(Gaelic was fully formed
With its rigorous truly keen voice
Throughout the world
Before the Red Flood.

Still it survived
And its voice will not be lost
Despite the deceit
And great ill-will of the Lowlanders.

It is [Gaelic] that Scotland spoke
And very Lowland churls
Our nobles, our princes
And our dukes, without defect [. . .]

It is [Gaelic] that Lowlander and Highlander spoke,
Layman and cleric,
Every man and woman,
Who would move their tongue in their mouth.

It was [Gaelic] that Adam spoke
In his own Paradise
And Gaelic came fluently
From Eve’s beautiful mouth [. . .]

Latin is complete,
Abundantly fruitful and rigorous;
But it is a servile churl
To the noble Gaelic [. . .])

In the wake of the Ossianic controversy, the rhetoric of Gaelic cultural self-defence became more insistent, especially in the many celebratory songs composed for Gaelic societies in the Lowlands and beyond, although this rhetoric was tempered with an awareness of the language’s weak state and the power of countervailing discourses of disdain. Stewart’s pioneering *Elements of Gaelic Grammar* (1801) began with an apology, which gives a useful summary of the competing arguments of the era:

The utility of a grammar of the Scottish Galic [sic] will be variously appretiated [sic]. Some will be disposed to deride the vain endeavour to restore vigour to a decaying superannuated language. They who reckon the extirpation of the Galic a necessary step toward that general extension of the English, which they deem essential to the political interest of the Highlands, will condemn every project which seems likely to retard its extinction. Those who consider that there are many parts of the Highlands, where the inhabitants can, at present, receive no useful knowledge whatever, except through the channel of their native tongue, will probably be of [the] opinion that the Galic ought at least to be tolerated. Yet these too may condemn
as useless, if not ultimately detrimental, any attempt to cultivate its powers, or to prolong its existence. Others will entertain a different opinion. They will judge from experience [ . . . ] that no measures merely of a literary kind will prevail to hinder the progress of the English language over the Highlands; while general convenience and emolument, not to mention private emulation and vanity, conspire to facilitate its introduction, and prompt the natives to its acquisition. They will perceive at the same time, that while the Galic continues to be the common speech of multitudes; while the knowledge of many important facts, of many necessary arts, of morals, of religion, and of the laws of the land, can be conveyed to them only by means of this language, it must be of material service to preserve it in such a state of cultivation and purity, as that it may be fully adequate to these valuable ends; in a word, that while it is a living language, it may answer the purpose of a living language.

As with many other small nations and quasi-nations across Europe, a range of revivalist Gaelic organisations emerged in the later nineteenth century. The creation of An Comunn Gaidhealach (the Highland Association) in 1891 was an important milestone; this was the first organisation founded with the objective of defending and promoting Gaelic culture, particularly through the Mòd, an annual cultural festival patterned on the Welsh Eisteddfod that began in 1892. An Comunn maintained an explicitly non-political stance, however, and it never succeeded in inspiring a broad-based language movement of the kind that emerged in Wales or Ireland.

In the early twentieth century, revival efforts in a different vein involved literary and cultural initiatives by Gaelic intellectuals, notably Ruaraidh Erskine of Mar, whose periodicals (especially Guth na Bliadhna, 1904–25) and other publications endeavoured to modernise the language in various respects, including the development of innovations in literature. Underpinning this was a new Gaelic-centred form of Scottish nationalism that promoted Gaelic as the national language of Scotland, a move suggested by successive waves of activists in more recent decades.

If the politics of such proposals are transparent, the changing nomenclature relating to Gaelic is sometimes more subtle. One small but telling indicator of the evolving position of the language is the change of names used to label it in English. Until the end of the fourteenth century or later, Gaelic had generally been known as 'Scottish', but then acquired the name 'Irish' (or 'Erse') while the Germanic vernacular of the Lowlands became 'Scots'. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, the term 'Irish' went out of fashion and was replaced by 'Gaelic'. While 'Irish' seems to have been the universal form before 1700, 'Gaelic' began to appear from at least the 1720s onwards and had almost completely replaced 'Irish' by the end of the century. The reasons for this shift of usage are not entirely clear, but it is certainly tempting to explain the change in terms of the politics of the Union and the new 'North Britain'.

The English language in Scotland

We might expect that what was still very much an economically impoverished country, with its national status lost at the beginning of the period and a considerable proportion of its population non-English speaking, would seem fertile ground for a linguistic take-over by its larger and more powerful southern neighbour. Indeed, the revolutionary tendencies in politics, economics and religion which typify the 'long' eighteenth century and which lasted into the nineteenth, brought with them social changes of a type which led to the
overt politicising of language. Should there be, for instance, a single type of English for both parts of Britain; should the language of North Britain be treated as foreign and therefore brought into line with its more prestigious southern cousin? What kind of role should language itself play in the identification of the emerging social class structures – could there be a Scottish-English as well as an English-English standard? There can be no question but that linguistic usage was at the forefront of political and social concerns throughout both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at a level perhaps seen neither before nor since. It is at this time that we see a sustained effort to standardise the form of the spoken language in England, bringing with it high levels of contempt of and demands for the suppression of regional and other non-standard types.

Socially-aspirant Scots men and women were conscious as probably never before of the challenges to their social standing presented by their vernacular form of English both at a local and British national level. At first sight it may appear that for such individuals there was a stark choice – either adopt the language recommended by the very active proselytisers of the usage of metropolitan London (especially its court) or, at the very least, adopt an intermediate stratagem, ridding themselves of what were seen to be the most saliently Scottish features of their language, and adopting instead a ‘refined’ form of the version of English spoken in Scotland at the time, a usage devoid as far as possible of what were seen (both in Scotland and England) as ‘Scotticisms’. There can be no doubt that south of the border there was a general view that the form of English spoken in Scotland was non-prestigious; for some of its manifestations, such a view was held even within Scotland itself as well. Comments on usage by the Scottish compilers of the first **Statistical Account** regularly characterise the language of the lower classes as ‘vulgar’, ‘harsh’, or ‘crude’, as well as reflecting a view that the language of the Scots gentry was coming to be more and more distinct from that of the peasantry. By the middle of the nineteenth century we see what were generally considered to be the negative effects of language contact brought about through industrial migration. In his **History of Renfrewshire** (1840) Andrew Crawfurd records the arrival of immigrants into the village of Lochwinnoch, resulting in a ‘clanjamfray of Irish, Highlanders and other dyvours [. . .] a Babylonish dialect, both in idioms and accent’ (Crawfurd MSS, Paisley Library); yet the surrounding countryside is still seen as the place where the ‘pure’ Scots is spoken among the peasantry. Not unrelated to such a perception, there was a view emerging that while the ‘old Scots’ language of the earlier literary tradition was to be appreciated and held in high regard, its contemporary equivalent in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was seen as compromised. Rather earlier, Allan Ramsay was bullish about the positive role of Scotticisms in his **Poems** (1721):

> The Scotticisms, which perhaps may offend some over-nice Ear, give new Life and Grace to the Poetry, and become their Place as well as the Doric Dialect of Theocritus, so much admired by the best Judges.

In the late eighteenth century particularly, however, the view of the English spoken in Scotland is an intensely negative one: for Hugh Blair, in his immensely influential **Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres** (1783), the mark of a good literary style was a function of the extent to which it avoided Scotticisms of all kinds, these being unashamedly conflated with general grammatical irregularity:

> Style may be pure, that is, it may all be strictly English, without Scotticisms or Gallicisms, or ungrammatical irregular expressions of any kind, and may, nevertheless, be deficient in Propriety.
From an English perspective at least, the English spoken in Scotland was regarded as at best second rate, the repository of ‘errors’, ‘barbarisms’ and ‘vulgarities’. Even a Scotsman like James Buchanan in 1757 condemned Scottish English as ‘that rough and uncouth brogue which is so harsh and unpleasant to an English ear’.

The irony of the situation is that the success of the movement in England for linguistic prescriptivism, which was so prominent a feature of language politics from 1750 onwards, was in a very large part due to the efforts of Scottish grammarians like James Elphinston, James Buchanan, James Beattie and (as an emigrant to the United States) John Witherspoon. These were among the foremost advocates for the purification of language, the eradication of vulgarity and error, and the suppression of provincial (including Scots, Irish and English regional) forms. Some of the most ardent supporters of an English Academy where the linguistic rectitude of ‘correct’ English would be maintained, on the model of the French Academy and the Academia della Crusca in Florence, were Scotsmen: Tobias Smollett, Henry Home Lord Kames, Hugh Blair, Adam Smith and William Robertson.

But the case for supporting at least some form of modification of the broad Scots vernacular was strongly argued by many influential individuals and groups who believed passionately that political union had brought with it a sense that a national British language would be a major cultural, social and – perhaps above all – economic gain. The dilemma faced by the socially aspirant classes in Scotland was to ascertain which was the appropriate ‘standard’ of language at which they should aim: was it to be some purely English model (thus risking a charge of national treachery); a more indigenous, ‘polite’ Scottish version; or, more radically, should speakers simply refuse to abandon even ‘broad’ versions of their language? This predicament is echoed in the contrasting views of two eighteenth-century observers, both patriotic supporters of political Union. Sylvester Douglas (1744–1823), KC and diplomat, averred in 1779 in *A Treatise on the Provincial Dialect of Scotland* that: ‘A provincial phrase sullies the lustre of the brightest eloquence, and the most forceful reasoning loses half its effect when disguised in the awkwardness of a provincial dress’, while the Scotophile English Jesuit James Adams took the view in his *Pronunciation of the English Language* (1799) that:

> There is a limited conformity in the present union of heart and interest of the two great kingdoms, beyond which total similarity of sounds would not be desirable, and dissonance itself has characteristic merit.

Writers like Adams defended the pedigree of the Scottish form of English, saw it more as a separate identifiable language in its own right and advocated its preservation as a ‘tempered medium’, an expression of national identity.

But the written Scottish Enlightenment, especially in the latter half of the eighteenth century, supported what were contemporary pressures not merely across Britain, but across Europe, for language standardisation, especially through the invention of new orthographies that would result (it was claimed) in the permanent ‘fixing’ of language in both time and space. Scottish intellectuals were much attracted to such views and were not averse to the idea of establishing a Scottish linguistic Academy of some kind; James Elphinston, for example, in 1786 embraced the idea wholeheartedly for the opportunities he believed it would bring for the establishment of linguistic propriety.

No Scottish Academy along such lines was ever established. However, less formal attempts at setting up a linguistic regulatory body were attempted. Richard Sheridan referred in his *Heads of a Plan for the Improvement of Elocution and for the Promoting of the Study of the English Language* (1762) to the need to see established an ‘institution of societies for encouraging
such arts, sciences, manufactures, and studies as are most wanting’. Following his public lectures On Elocution in Edinburgh in 1761, he drew up a special set of Regulations ‘for promoting the reading and speaking of the English Language in Scotland’ by the Select Society, a philosophic debating society of the Edinburgh literati. Its members were particularly zealous in the identification and eradication of ‘Scotticisms’ in their writings. Nor were such intellectual societies, part of whose remit was language ‘improvement’, entirely in the male domain: in Edinburgh as early as 1717, the all-female Fair Intellectuals Club supported similar aims. The importance of linguistic usage in achieving the interconnected aims of political and economic success for Scotland often underlay appeals for ‘standardisation’ in the direction of models which were London English in origin. Echoing the utilitarian point of view of the Select Society’s Regulations, John Sinclair recommended the political advantages of a ‘national language’:

such as wish to mix with the world, and particularly those whose object it is to have some share in the administration of national affairs, are under the necessity of conforming to the taste, the manners, and the language of the Public. Old things must then be done away – new manners must be assumed, and a new language adopted.

To the modern observer, it seems wholly unrealistic to expect the everyday users of an entire national language, or even certain social classes within a national group, to completely forego their native linguistic habits in favour of an imported, imposed model (notwithstanding their familiarity with its forms in written prose). But this is precisely what many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prescriptive grammarians sought to achieve. But their literary counterparts used Scots within standard English as a way to validate and create a space for Scottish experience. More realistic attitudes were also being proposed to cleanse Scots of its perceived vulgarisms. There were other definitions of ‘propriety’ in the air, several observers proposing that a Scottish national spoken standard should be minimally influenced by the emergent metropolitan standard being advocated for the territory of its English neighbour. While several Scottish linguistic commentators, like their English counterparts, were anxious to promote language propriety and to establish a spoken (perhaps a written) standard, the sense of national identity tended to favour the promotion of extant local, Scottish ‘refined’ usage, based upon what were perceived to be the best Scottish exemplars: academics, lawyers, advocates and the clergy.

There was strong support for the promotion of a form of Scottish English which would fulfil all the requirements of linguistic propriety sought for by the socially aspirant. James Adams’s Pronunciation of the English Language even went so far as to claim that ‘mere local dialectal sound never should, never will, never can be, totally removed’.

**Scots language in the nineteenth century**

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the effects of political union were being increasingly seen as having a negative effect on the Scottishness of the English spoken in Scotland, and several observers were coming to share the view expressed by John Jamieson in the Preface to his Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language:

Since the union of the kingdoms, how beneficial soever this event has been in other respects, the language of Scotland has been subjected to peculiar disadvantages. No longer written in
public deeds, or spoken in those assemblies which fix the standard of national taste, its influence has gradually declined, notwithstanding the occasional efforts of the Muse to rescue it from total oblivion.

Despite views like this, the recognition persisted that, far from being universally regarded as vulgar or barbarous, there were varieties of Scottish English that in Scotland—and to some extent even in England—were regarded as refined and acceptable usage. The author of *The Vulgarities of Speech Corrected* (1826) for example, notes that

Many well-educated Scotsmen, who move in the most polite circles in their own country, take a pride in speaking the Scots dialect blended with English, and when this is not done from affectation, and a love of singularity, it can scarcely be reckoned vulgar, though it must require great attention to avoid low and unseemly expressions.

The Scottish speakers of Adams’s ‘tempered medium’ were clearly the individuals in the mind of Sylvester Douglas as those ‘whose language has already been in a great deal refined from the provincial dross, by frequenting English company, and studying the great masters of the English tongue in their writings’. Adams held up the model of ‘The manly eloquence of the Scotch bar’ which ‘affords a singular pleasure to the candid English hearer, and gives merit and dignity to the noble speakers who retain so much of their own dialect, and tempered propriety of English sounds’. We might ask: what was the ‘tempered medium’, the ‘mixed’ Scotch, the prestigious and non-barbarous variety to which so many contemporary observers made reference, and were there any attempts at devising orthographic systems which might unambiguously represent its salient characteristics? Both of these questions were at least partially addressed by Alexander Scot in a letter of 1779 extolling the improvements in Enlightened Scotland he noted as a returning exile:

That Caledonians can think, nay, that Caledonians can write, is no secret to the learned world. But that any nation should write a language, which it can neither read nor speak, was a paradox reserved for the ingenuity of modern times. Certain it is however, that our Country, amidst the many improvements which daily more distinguish her, has within these fifty years made considerable alteration in her language. The Scottish dialect of this day is no more that of Allan Ramsay than of Gawin Douglas; but that the language of Edinburgh is not nearer the language of London than it was a century ago, whether in idiom or in utterance, will irrefragably appear from the following letter, which fairly paints the present Caledonian English of the college, the pulpit, and the bar.

Scot devised an orthographic system to represent the ‘Caledonian’ usage of that most prestigious of Scottish social groups: ‘the present college, the pulpit, and the bar’. In his *Epistle* addressed to the Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries in Edinburgh, Alexander Geddes too ‘ventured [. . .] to make the orthography a little more uniform, and more agreeable to the Scottish idiom, than the orthography of the present day’, by utilising a set of vowel and consonantal diacritics in his poems ‘Tránslâtít into Skottis vers’ (*Three Scottish Poems* (1792)).

Yet the picture regarding ‘broad’ Scots usage throughout the period is not altogether one of denial. Vernacular spoken Scots obviously continued to be used in daily communication and even from the pulpit—albeit alongside an English Bible—and there is no evidence that pulpit discourse was delivered in anything approaching a London metropolitan norm.
Indeed, it could be argued that the independence and unique character of Scottish Presbyterianism were preserved and enhanced through a conscious use of Scots rather than English-English. Even the ‘tempered medium’ of the pulpit and the bar have appeared quite ‘broad’ to a modern. In Walter Scott’s The Heart of Midlothian (1818) the Edinburgh Provost compelled to justify the activities of the local guard during the Porteous Riots causes offence in the House of Lords by describing the calibre of the ammunition used as ‘sic as ane shoots dukes and fools with’. Now, it would seem likely that in the highly formal context of the Upper House, an official like the Provost would be extremely conscious of his linguistic usage, and select forms which, for him at least, were of a high – albeit local – prestige. Thus the *djooks* for ‘ducks’ and *fools* for ‘fowl’ should perhaps be considered examples of the very ‘tempered medium’ to which Adams and Scot were so attached. That it might cause confusion and offence in London serves to demonstrate that the two ‘standards’ were rather different. Many nineteenth-century authors used Scots not only as a ‘tempered medium’ but authentically and for new purposes. William Alexander’s novel of the 1843 Disruption, Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk (1871), preserves his Aberdonian dialect; Scots becomes the dialect of political dissension through the plot but also a vehicle of reclamation and recovery. George MacDonald’s use of Scots is optimistic like Alexander’s, but MacDonald employs dialect for theological issues. Rather than being problematic as in Johnny Gibb, the dialect is praised in MacDonald’s later novel, Castle Warlock (1871). Robert Louis Stevenson’s use of Scots is more complex, articulating the imaginative, evocative experience of the Scots. Diablic in The Master of Ballantrae (1889), it registers internal division in Weir of Hermiston (1896). However, the end of the nineteenth century saw writers flattening the dialect and pandering to the popularity of Scots as a piece of exoticism. George Douglas Brown’s novel, The House with the Green Shutters (1901), parodies Kailyard themes but falls back on a similar use of the dialect.

Linguistically, by the late nineteenth century many of the concerns relating to the sociolinguistic status of the English language in Scotland had been superseded by a more ‘scientific’ approach to the description and formal analysis of the contemporary language itself. For the first time, exhaustive research using data gathered from actual speakers was carried out into the regional forms of English in Scotland. James Murray produced the still unsurpassed Dialects of the Southern Counties of Scotland (1876), a landmark not only in Scottish regional studies but also in dialectology in general, while E. J. Ellis performed a wider survey of Scottish regional variation in his Early English Pronunciation (1889). To carry out such detailed phonetic accounts, Murray (alongside Ellis and Melville Bell in the tradition of their Scottish predecessors such as Elphinston and Scot) devised a highly elaborate and powerful set of phonetic alphabets, Paleotype and Glossotype, the forerunners of the International Phonetic Alphabet itself. Murray can be credited too for the first coherent linguistic history of the English language in Scotland.

Further reading


The International Reception and Literary Impact of Scottish Literature of the Period 1707–1918

Paul Barnaby and Tom Hubbard

Introduction

This chapter reviews the international reception of Scottish writers and assesses their role and impact in the development of world literature. It focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on writers who are perceived as Scots abroad and thus directly contribute to foreign images of Scottish writing and culture. For brevity's sake, it adopts a relatively narrow definition of literature as poetry, fiction and drama, touching only briefly upon philosophy, political science, theology and historiography. While Scottish literature has often had a significant impact in non-literary art forms – for example, Ossian and Scott were both highly influential on music and opera – this chapter is of necessity focused on Scottish literature's literary impact. The chapter concentrates on reception in non-English-speaking areas, the emphasis inevitably falling upon Europe.

Eighteenth century

Like the makars, the Vernacular Revivalists awoke little foreign interest. The first translation of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson dates from 1846. They came too early (Ramsay, in particular) to benefit from the 'anglomania' that swept mid-eighteenth-century France and Italy or the late eighteenth-century German discovery of Volkspoesie. Paradoxically, they may have appeared insufficiently polished to European Classicists, but too Classical for their Romantic successors. Burns did enjoy a significant international reception, but, with only three poems translated before 1800, not until the nineteenth century. The Romantic discovery of Burns sparked little interest in his immediate forebears; indeed Ramsay and Fergusson still await an international readership.

Barring the isolated late sixteenth-century translations from the Scots of James VI and Lindsay discussed in the ‘Reception to 1707’ section of Chapter 18 of volume one, the first literary work translated from any of Scotland’s vernacular languages is James Thomson’s The Seasons (1726–30). Thomson’s (largely posthumous) European vogue has been obscured by that of Ossian for which he paved the way. The first extracts from The Seasons, translated by Barthold Heinrich Brockes, appeared in German periodicals in the early
1740s. Brockes’s complete translation was published in 1745, printed with his own *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott*, the first major poem influenced by Thomson. Five further German versions followed before the end of the century, and eight French translations between 1759 and 1806. *The Seasons* also appeared in Dutch (1765), Italian (1793), Latin (1795), Russian (1798), Spanish (1801), Swedish (1811), Greek (1817), Czech and Hebrew (both 1842).

Although Thomson’s international importance lies essentially in his contribution to the cult of nature, foreign interest initially centred on his moral and philosophical digressions. French critics praised him for his love of humanity and meditations on conjugal happiness and eternal life, subsequently imitated by poets like Léonard and Delille. In Germany, Hagedorn and Klopstock echoed Thomson’s advocacy of religion, patriotism and the pleasures of friendship and the country life. Schiller, meantime, drew on Thomson’s ideas on the rise and fall of civilisation in his *Der Spaziergang unter den Linden* (1782).

As the century progressed, Thomson was increasingly seen as the first poet to celebrate nature even in its irregular, uncultivated state. Particularly influential was his vision of nature as divine revelation, a harmonious creation designed solely to assure human happiness. In their portrayal of men living according to natural law, imitators of Thomson implicitly criticised existing social and political regimes. While early admirers were most drawn to passages which placed man at the centre of nature, the ‘pre-Romantic’ cult of Ossian and Rousseau led to an appreciation of nature at its most sublime or inhospitable. Where ‘Winter’, whose landscapes betray little human presence, was initially ignored or abridged by translators, it was now seen as *The Seasons*’s most original section.

Besides writers already mentioned, Thomson inspired Gessner in Switzerland (with whom he is often paired as a co-founder of nature poetry), Wieland and C. E. von Kleist in Germany, Saint-Lambert, Fontanes and André Chénier in France, Pindemonte and Cesarotti in Italy, Karamzin and Zhukovsky (who both translated his work) in Russia, Niemcewicz in Poland, Wergeland in Norway and Winter in the Netherlands. Although few complete translations of *The Seasons* were made after the early nineteenth century, descriptive fragments became much anthologised, attracting translators of the calibre of the Czech Doucha in the nineteenth century, and Menart (Slovenia), Orban and Tótfalusi (both Hungary) in the twentieth. Perhaps surprisingly, Thomson’s dramas played a role in the development of modern European tragedy. Championed by Lessing and translated by Johann Heinrich Schlegel, they helped persuade *Sturm und Drang* writers to take up blank verse. (Germany also saw the only eighteenth-century translation of John Home’s *Douglas* (1769), although versions subsequently appeared in France, Italy (both 1822), and Japan (1979).) Although the first Scot after Buchanan to influence European verse and drama, Thomson is seldom (even today) perceived as a Scot by his international admirers. James Anderson Russell has argued, in *Dutch Poetry and English* (1939), that his reception on a continent still dominated by Classical aesthetics was positively aided by his construction of generalised, typical landscapes and avoidance of local colour.

James Macpherson’s *The Poems of Ossian*, contrastingly, are matched only by the Waverley novels in their impact on foreign images of Scottish national and literary identity. The first fragments were translated in France in the early 1760s by some of the leading lights of the *Encyclopédie*: Diderot, Turgot, and Suard. The complete *Poems* were subsequently translated in Austria (1768–9), Italy (1773), France (1777), Denmark (1790), Russia (1792), Sweden (1794), Hungary (1815), Poland (1838), Norway (1854) and Spain (1880). Ten German versions appeared between 1768 and 1924, and seven French between 1777 and 1859. For many readers, however, the first encounter with Ossian came via Goethe’s much-translated
The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774), which included Goethe’s own versions of extracts from ‘The Songs of Selma’ and ‘Berrathon’.

Macpherson created a taste for a natural landscape wilder and more sublime than even Thomson could offer. Far from remaining the focal point, man paled into insignificance, his helpless alienation tempered only by the ‘joy of grief’. The providential, deistic religion of The Seasons gave way to a pantheism in which no element of organised religion remained. For many of its earliest European readers, Ossian’s lament for a vanished race articulated fears about contemporary society’s debilitated state and guilty feelings over the destruction of primitive cultures in the name of civilisation. Simultaneously, Ossian’s heroes offered a model for cultural and national regeneration through the noble disinterestedness that characterised their pre-feudal, pre-capitalist society. The Celts came to be seen as the founders of a distinctively northern culture. Particularly in Scandinavian and German-speaking countries, Ossian was adopted as a national bard, the ‘Homer of the North’, in the perceived absence of an adequate indigenous candidate. Herder argued, in Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker (1773), that while the spontaneous, concrete, sensual character of ancient verse could never be recaptured, the northern peoples retained enough of their primitive vigour to foster a genuine Volkspoesie expressive of national character.

Mme de Staël adapted Herder’s ideas in De la littérature (1800) to present Ossian as a model even to the effete south. For her, Ossian is superior to Classical Greek poets as he goes beyond sensation to invite reflection on the human condition. As modern poetry must follow the philosophical bent of its times, Ossian suggests how to blend image and idea, lyric and meditation.

By the early nineteenth century, Ossian’s western European admirers largely followed de Staël in stressing his intimate and subjective rather than historical and folkloric qualities. (The latter, of course, presupposed the authenticity of Macpherson’s epic.) For Europe’s and Latin America’s emerging or re-emerging national literatures, however, Ossian continued to offer a model for cultural regeneration. Macpherson’s example stimulated scholars and antiquarians to reconstruct their own fragmented native traditions, real or ‘invented’. In stark contrast to his Scottish reputation as arch-angliciser and apologist for the Union, he was translated and imitated by the Romantic nationalists Petőfi in Hungary, Runeberg in Finland, Palacký in Bohemia, and Heredia in Cuba. Macpherson helped create the myth of the moral superiority and greater cultural antiquity of the subjugated people, which, in much Romantic historiography, provided justification for defeat and failure. The prototype for the national bard of Romanticism, Ossian showed how despoiled rights might be reclaimed in the imaginative realms of poetry and prophecy.

Macpherson’s anti-classical commingling of genres – epic narrative and dramatic dialogue, elegy and lyric, poetry and prose – influenced pre-Romantic and Romantic novelists as well as poets: these include Klopstock, Schiller and Tieck in Germany; Chateaubriand and Lamartine in France; Zhukovsky, Pushkin and Lermontov in Russia; Monti and Foscolo in Italy; Mickiewicz and Niemcewicz in Poland; Rivas and Espronceda in Spain; Almeida Garrett in Portugal; Bilderdijk in the Netherlands; Bridel in Switzerland; Atterbom in Sweden; Clewberg and Kivi in Finland; Oehlenschläger in Denmark; Vörösmarty in Hungary. Ossian’s European success also initiated the Romantic literary tour of Scotland, pioneered by the Poles Jan Potocki and Princess Izabela Czartoryska, followed by, inter alia, Frenchmen like La Tocnaye and Pichot, Germans like Arnim and Fontane, and the Swiss Necker de Sausure.
The Poems of Ossian sparked no interest, however, in more contemporary or authentic Gaelic verse. The first translation from Scottish Gaelic into a language other than English or Latin is as late as 1948; the first into a non-Celtic language (other than English or Latin) 1972. Whether one regards Macpherson as exploiting and traducing tradition, or as attempting to safeguard a threatened corpus by adapting it for Enlightenment tastes, his success effectively blocked translation from Gaelic for two centuries by nurturing the perception that it was an ‘ancient’, ‘primitive’, dead medium. European Ossianists also encouraged the belief that ‘Scottish’ and ‘Highland’ were synonymous. Ironically, rather than promoting Celtic culture, they often elided it entirely by superimposing Lowland culture on the north. Thus operatic and theatrical adaptations of Scott clad his heroes in plaid and transferred the action to a mountainous realm more precipitous than anything Scotland could offer. Likewise, an early Burns translator like Philarète Chasles claimed to be rendering ‘the patois of the Scottish mountains’, implying descendants of Macpherson’s Celts had abandoned Gaelic for Scots.

The only other Scottish poem to influence eighteenth-century European verse was Robert Blair’s The Grave (1743). Outside the Netherlands, where it was translated and imitated by Elizabeth Wolff, and Germany, where versions appeared in 1784 and 1793, its direct reception was modest. As an inspiration, however, for Edward Young’s Night Thoughts, which rivalled The Poems of Ossian and The Seasons in popularity in eighteenth-century Europe, it helped form the pre-Romantic taste for the sepulchral. (Blair was often confused with his namesake Hugh, whose Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres were widely translated in early nineteenth-century Europe and even in mid-century formed part of the school curriculum in Spain and Italy.)

If contemporary Scots verse remained unknown, Bishop Percy’s inclusion of a number of Scottish pieces in Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) introduced Europe to the ballad tradition. The first translation was Herder’s version of ‘Edward’ in his Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker, where Ossian and the ballads were presented as equally vigorous examples of Volkspoesie. ‘Edward’ was reprinted, along with translations of thirteen other Scottish ballads in Herder’s anthology, Volkslieder (1778). Wilhelm Grimm published an anthology of Scottish traditional ballads in 1813; further German anthologies appeared in 1852, 1861 and 1875. As Romanticism increasingly looked towards indigenous folk traditions as the basis for an anti-Classical aesthetic, Scots ballads were translated by major figures like Pushkin and Pavlova in Russia, Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark, Bilderdijk and ten Kate in the Netherlands, Afzelius and Geijer, compiler of Svenska folkvisor, the major Swedish folk song collection, Doucha in Bohemia, Arany in Hungary, Runeberg in Finland, Wergeland in Norway, and Fontane in Germany.

The eighteenth-century Scottish novel had little European fortune. In Germany, as Price observes, Smollett’s perceived indifference to moral questions led to unfavourable comparisons with Fielding. In France, his linguistic coarseness, ignoble heroes, amorality and cynicism, even in bowdlerised translations, shocked French critics. The picaresque, moreover, was perceived as outdated, superseded by the psychological novel with its limited cast, linear plot, sympathetic heroes and strong love interest. Commercially, Smollett was more successful in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, but there appears to be little research into his reception there. Often regarded as the epitome of English insularity, he was nowhere perceived as Scottish until Scott’s 1821 essay sparked brief interest in his fiction as foreshadowing the Waverley novels. Mackenzie’s Man of Feeling (1771), translated into German (1774), French (1775), Russian (1779), Dutch (1780) and Polish (1817), was favourably reviewed, but often perceived, anachronistically, as derivative of Goethe’s Werther.
Nineteenth century and until 1918

Literary traffic between Scotland and mainland Europe was inevitably suspended throughout the revolutionary wars. A few translations did, however, appear, notably German and (Swiss-)French editions of Joanna Baillie’s dramas. The return of peace in 1815, though, almost immediately brought the first translations of two Scots whose influence on nineteenth-century literature is without parallel: Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.

Byron’s well-charted international fortunes cannot be discussed at length here, as – rarely, if ever, perceived as a Scot abroad – he had little direct impact on perceptions of Scottish literary identity. Nonetheless, as the Romantic writer par excellence, sparking unprecedented foreign interest in British writing, he provided a filter through which other, more recognisably Scottish figures were read. For many international readers, Byron forged a new language to express desire for freedom, national, social, individual, or existential. He showed that the poet could also be a person of action, inspiring the writer-soldiers and writer-politicians who participated in the Latin-American Wars of Independence (like Andrés Bello and José María de Heredia), the 1848 revolutions in Europe (Mazzini, Lamartine, Arany, Eötvös, Mickiewicz), and other national liberation movements. He was influential not only in allying poetry to democratic and national causes, but in rebelling against both Christian and rationalist beliefs and in presenting a vision of cosmic injustice. For many readers living under the restored ancien régime, he expressed a generational sense of metaphysical exile and failed ideals. Major writers under his spell include Vigny, Musset, Stendhal and Hugo (France), Heine (Germany), Lenau and Grillparzer (Austria), Mickiewicz and Slowacki (Poland), Pushkin, Lermontov and Zhukovsky (Russia), Petőfi and Vörösmarty (Hungary), Mácha (Bohemia), Vraz and Kukuljević (Croatia), Espronceda and Bécquer (Spain), Almeida Garrett and Herculano (Portugal), Beets and ten Kate (the Netherlands), Kierkegaard, Rahbek and Paladán-Müller (Denmark), Almqvist and Tégner (Sweden), and Wergeland (Norway). The ageing Goethe translated extracts from Manfred (1817), Don Juan (1819), and English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1821) and cast Byron as Euphorion in the Second Part of Faust. For Goethe, Byron/Euphorion symbolised the union between Romanticism and Classicism, north and south. For most younger writers, however, Byron represented the vanguard of the struggle against Classical restraints. British writers translated in Byron's wake were often erroneously credited with similarly advanced political and aesthetic views. Thus Classical elements in the thought and poetics of Burns and Scott, and the latter’s Toryism, passed largely unobserved.

The primary significance of Scott’s Waverley novels, translated voluminously from 1816 onwards, lay in placing the individual at the confluence of historical forces. Abandoning the abstract psychology of the eighteenth-century novel, Scott rooted the personality in a constantly evolving social and economic context. Almost as important were his formal innovations. In mixing styles and genres and promoting the locally characteristic over the classical and universal, Scott was seen as developing the innovations of Ossian/Macpherson. The use of dialogue to carry narrative, the radically reduced presence of the narrator, the unexceptional ‘wavering’ protagonist all contributed to a new ‘democratic’ vision of the novel where competing passions and ideologies were equally voiced.

Scott’s influence thus extended beyond the historical novel to the great social novel of the mid-nineteenth century. For many nations, Scott is rightly considered father of the novel, finally dispelling prejudices against it as a low genre unsuited to weighty topics and unworthy of serious readers’ attention. Writers turning to fiction following Scott’s example
include Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Vigny, Stendhal, Sand and Mérimée in France, Alexis and Fontane in Germany, Manzoni in Italy, Almeida Garrett and Rebelo da Silva in Portugal, Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Tolstoy and Turgenev in Russia, Gil y Carrasco, López Soler, and Galdós in Spain, Stifter in Austria, Ingemann and Andersen in Denmark, and Sadoveanu in Romania.

Scott's role in creating a pan-European vogue for the medieval is well known. It is less often acknowledged that his 'Scottish' novels, particularly *Old Mortality*, were read as a response to the conflicts and upheavals of the revolutionary years. Liberal and nationalist readers lauded Scott for introducing the people into the novel, granting their language and traditions literary dignity. He was often incongruously paired with Byron as a challenge to the political and cultural order. Particularly in the Habsburg Empire, Scott was widely censored or prohibited for his anti-Catholicism and perceived nationalist and democratic sympathies. Elsewhere, Conservative critics lamented a refusal to give clear moral guidance. Only rarely – but significantly in France – was Scott portrayed as a unionist and apologist for the status quo. Scott could be equally important as a negative example, spurring the Young Germans or Mazzinians in Italy to develop a more explicitly engaged narrative model.

Although Scott's international reputation rests on his fiction, his verse attracted translators of the stature of Droste-Hülshoff and Fontane in Germany, Zhukovsky, Kozlov and Pavlova in Russia, Beets and Potgieter in the Netherlands, Sienkiewicz in Poland, Rahbek in Denmark, Fröding in Sweden and Heredia in Cuba. It was imitated by Pushkin (*Boris Godunov* (1831) draws on *The Lady of the Lake*), Mickiewicz and the Ukrainian Shevchenko. It was primarily the songs and ballads inserted in Scott’s narrative poems that excited interest, offering an influential model for the literary exploitation of folk forms.

Of all literary works, *The Poems of Ossian* and the Waverley novels have had by far the greatest lasting impact on European perceptions of Scottish literary and national identity. Where, at home, they are read as attempts to reposition Scottish writing within a broader British literary identity, to most European critics and readers they have appeared to pursue a cultural-nationalist agenda. In his *Historical and Literary Tour of a Foreigner in England and Scotland* (1825), Amédée Pichot, translator of Byron’s and Scott’s verse and well-acquainted with Scott’s political convictions, described his works as ‘poetical protests against the act of union’. For Pichot, Scott had ‘restored Scotland to the rank of nations, by continually occupying Europe with the subject of independent Scotland’. Such readings of Scott and Macpherson hindered the European reception of writers, notably those of the twentieth-century Renaissance, with more explicitly nationalist (or cultural-nationalist) aims.

Other Scottish novels were translated in Scott's wake, presented as products of Scott’s 'school' or even erroneously attributed to Scott. The 1820s saw translations of Galt, Hogg, Allan Cunningham, Thomas Dick Lauder, J. G. Lockhart, John Wilson, Jane Porter, Grace Kennedy, Susan Ferrier, Elizabeth Hamilton and Mary Brunton. Existing research does not indicate whether these authors had any individual impact. Galt – the most successful of them abroad – may, however, have influenced writers who proposed, like him, a more politically engaged historical novel. The one major Scottish novel of the period not translated is Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*; perhaps unsurprisingly given its stony reception at home. Only in 1949 did André Gide present the novel to a European audience. His preface to the first French translation underlined its innovative techniques and described Hogg's characterisation of the Devil as 'among the most ingenious ever invented'.

Scott's popularity played a major role in the European discovery of Burns. Although eventually translated into more languages than any other Scottish poet, Burns's international success was not immediate. Indeed, despite jingoistic claims to the contrary, his
impact on the high season of European Romanticism was slight. The first of his poems to be translated appeared in Germany in 1795, but by 1850 Burns had been translated into only four other languages: Russian (from 1800), French (from 1818), Dutch (from 1833), and Norwegian (from 1836). He was translated into sixteen more languages in the second half of the nineteenth century, eight more in the first half of the twentieth, and eighteen more in the second. He was first translated surprisingly late in some of the major areas of reception for Scottish literature: Sweden (1854), Italy (1863), Poland (1872) and Spain (Catalan: 1917; Castilian: 1919). No Burns anthology was available in Spanish before 1940, Polish before 1956, and Portuguese before 1994. Conversely, he was translated early (and extensively) in countries with limited historical interest in Scottish writing: the Netherlands, Norway, Croatia (1854), and Latvia (1863). No global study of Burns's international fortunes currently exists, but the above suggests that both his 'universality' and his influence on Romanticism are more problematic than is often assumed.

Although a handful of earlier translations exist, the reception of Burns really began in France in the 1820s with versions by the prominent translators and anglophiles, Pichot and Chasles. Burns was personally recommended to Pichot by Scott during a visit to Abbotsford. The conduit for Chasles was Byron, whose use of lines from 'Ae Fond Kiss' as the epigraph for The Bride of Abydos (1813) first alerted many European readers to Burns. The first French anthology of Burns's works appeared in 1826, followed in 1829 by the first Russian anthology translated by the major Romantic poet I. Kozlov. The poems that appealed to these early translators were those that celebrate the domestic affections or the patriarchal simplicity of country life, and appear to advocate Christian resignation, or develop motifs from the ballad tradition. Even in this relatively conservative presentation, Burns influenced a poet of the stature of Leopardi, whose 'A Silvia' (1828) and 'Il sabato del villaggio' (1829) echo 'To Mary in Heaven' and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' respectively.

Carlyle's advocacy of Burns in correspondence with Goethe was the major spur for German interest. In his introduction to the German translation of Carlyle's Life of Schiller (1830), Goethe called for a German edition of Burns, which, with Goethe's sponsorship, eventually appeared in 1839. So popular did Burns become in Germany that eleven further anthologies of his work appeared before 1896, while in Switzerland August Corrodi prepared his celebrated Schweizerdeutsch versions. The German Burns of the 1830s and 1840s was not the pious peasant of the earlier French and Russian translations, but the democrat Marx admired. Translators favoured poems with patriotic, egalitarian, humanitarian, or Jacobitical themes. Particularly in the translations of Freiligrath he was paired with Byron as the poet of progressive ideas. Similarly in 1850s Russia, the revolutionary poet Mikhaylov presented a Burns who appealed to the democratic writers engaged with the Agrarian Question.

In the second half of the century, Burns was widely translated by champions of the newly emerging (or re-emerging) national literatures of central and eastern Europe. Versions appeared by some of the most significant poets of Romantic Nationalism: the Czech Doucha (1852), Croat Vraz (1854), Hungarian Arany (1873) and Ukrainian Franko (1896). For these, Burns not only combined political radicalism with non-parochial nationalism, but provided the model for literary use of folk traditions and for reclaiming a degraded language. In Italy, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, Burns spurred writers promoting the regional and popular over the metropolitan and artificial. In western Europe, he was as much the poet of realism as pre-Romanticism.

In 1892, Burns became the first Scottish writer (after Alexander Fraser Tytler) to be translated in Japan, where he remains highly popular as a poet of nature. Ironically,
a Chinese version of ‘My Heart is in the Highlands’ became a popular patriotic song of resistance during the Japanese occupation of mountainous northern China. If European interest in Burns slackened during the first half of the twentieth century, the post-1945 period saw massive translation in the Soviet Union (including versions in Estonian, Armenian, Georgian, Belarusian, Mari, Kirghiz, Kazakh and Tajik). Here Burns was presented as Marx’s favourite poet, a peasant revolutionary whose satire lacerated kirk and political establishment. Although an ‘official’ poet, Burns enjoyed enormous popular success in Communist Europe. The inspired versions of the Russian Samuil Marshak, the fruit of forty years’ labour, sold over 600,000 copies. It remains to be seen whether the fall of the Iron Curtain will have a lasting adverse effect on Burns translation. Certainly, the bicentenary of his death in 1996 sparked significantly fewer foreign editions of his work than earlier anniversaries in 1896 and 1959. Nonetheless, the last decade of the twentieth century saw newly translated editions in German, Japanese, Polish, Norwegian, Bulgarian, Portuguese, Spanish and the most authoritative to date in French.

Only rarely, however, have Burns’s translators tackled other Scots poets. In Germany, Heinrich Julius Heintze published a joint anthology of verse by Robert Tannahill and William Motherwell (1841), while Freiligrath included verse by Allan Cunningham, Hogg and Motherwell in an anthology of British verse, Rose, Distel und Kleeblatt (1863). Exceptionally, Freiligrath also included, in Ramsay, a precursor of Burns. For many languages, though, Burns remains the sole Scottish poet to be translated. The little critical and biographical material accessible to most nineteenth-century translators presented Burns as an isolated genius. For his earliest European advocates, he was Henry Mackenzie’s ‘heaven-taught ploughman’. From the 1830s onwards, however, Carlyle fixed the European image of Burns. His ‘Essay on Burns’ (1828) asserts that ‘for a long period after Scotland became British we had no literature’ and that the francophile Scotland of the Enlightenment ‘had no Scottish culture’. It was following Burns’s example that Scottish literature underwent a ‘remarkable increase of nationality’. Yet, Burns had ‘models only of the meanest sort’, taking ‘the rhymes of a Fergusson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty’. Carlyle is unambiguously disparaging of Burns’s immediate Scots predecessors, but many European readers took him to mean that even pre-Union Scotland had no Scots poets. The vision of Burns as reviver of a debased tradition or, more frequently, initiator of a national literature proved immensely influential among the Romantic Nationalists of central and eastern Europe. Just as Ossianism blocked translation from Gaelic, the cult of Burns delayed discovery of the indigenous Scots tradition. There are, however, two remarkable exceptions: Eduard Fiedler in Germany and Stanko Vraz in Croatia.

In 1846, Fiedler published the two-volume Geschichte der volksthümlichen schottischen Liederdichtung, the first anthology of Scottish verse since the Delitiæ poetarum scotorum. His aim in presenting verse in Scots from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century was to show that Burns was no ‘diamond solitaire’, but ‘the centrepiece of a whole set of gems varying greatly in colour, size, and value’. Astonishingly from a contemporary perspective, Fiedler excluded the makars, offering only traditional ballads before the seventeenth century. The earliest credited poet is Lady Grizel Baillie. Volume one deals primarily with the eighteenth-century Vernacular Revival, including the first translations into any language from Ramsay and Fergusson. Volume two introduces no fewer than fifty-seven nineteenth-century Scots poets. Pride of place goes to Motherwell, Tannahill, Cunningham, Hogg and, among living poets, the now obscure Hugh Ainslie, Robert Gilfillan, William Miller and William Thom. Fiedler’s anthology does not, however, appear to have triggered further translations from Scots. Perhaps the very range of (largely mediocre) verse defeated his object.
Stanko Vraz (1810–51), the leading poet of the Croat literary revival, is the first translator of the makars. In 1868, a posthumously published volume of translations from various tongues included poems by Dunbar and Douglas, alongside Drummond of Hawthornden, Burns, Byron, Richard Gall, Alexander Hume, William Thom and William Miller. Regrettably, existing research does not indicate when the translations were made or how Vraz encountered this material.

Scottish literature has never since matched the international visibility achieved by Macpherson, Scott and Burns. Such was its popularity and perceived fecundity that a Polish periodical, Roznaitościszkoście, began publication in 1840, entirely devoted to Scottish or Scottish-inspired writers. The later nineteenth century is necessarily an anticlimax, with continuing interest in Burns masking substantial indifference to contemporary Scottish writing. Indeed no living poet appears to have been translated between the mid-nineteenth century and MacDiarmid in 1923.

Novelists like William Black, Margaret Oliphant, J. M. Barrie, Ian Maclaren and Annie S. Swan fared better, especially in Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Bohemia. Sweden, in particular, remained the most receptive terrain for Scottish fiction up to the end of the Second World War. Existing research, however, does not identify the Swedish audience for the Scottish novel, or chart possible late nineteenth-century Scottish influences on Swedish fiction. It seems likely that here and elsewhere, contemporary Scottish fiction was characterised as wholesome family reading. In France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Russia, only a handful of Scottish novelists were translated before Stevenson. The most successful was the now forgotten historical novelist G. J. Whyte-Melville, whose 1863 novel The Gladiators appeared in French with a prestigious preface by Théophile Gautier.

Stevenson won almost immediate critical and popular acclaim abroad. Again the first translations appeared in Sweden – ‘Story of a Lie’ (1881) and New Arabian Nights (1884) – but international interest largely followed the French translations of Treasure Island in 1884 and The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in 1887. Before the century’s end, both were translated into Danish, Dutch, Finnish, German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. Stevenson’s works have continued to be translated and re-translated at a steadily increasing rate. Comprehensively Scotland’s most translated author, Stevenson has now appeared in eighty-nine languages, and is the only Scot translated into a significant number of non-European languages. Yet there is remarkably little research into his reception and influence despite his importance for some of the twentieth century’s major writers: Proust, Gide, Malraux, Borges and Calvino.

For Stevenson’s earliest French advocates, he was essentially a Symbolist. The leading Symbolist poet Mallarmé hailed him as a ‘Visionary’ (‘Robert-Louis Stevenson’, 1896). Marcel Schwob spoke of his ‘unreal realism’, with its ‘images sublimated beyond realities’, and praised the fascinating ‘silent spaces’ in Stevenson’s prose (‘R.L.S.’, 1895). Téodore de Wyzewa, a passionate Wagnerian, extolled Stevenson’s musical language but noted too that his characters shared with Dostoyevsky’s a ‘mixture of grandeur and vice, naive innocence and depravity’ (Revue des deux mondes, 1905).

By 1900, however, French critics recommended Stevenson as an antidote to the narcissism and hypersensitivity of Symbolism and Decadence. Camille Mauclair and Jacques Rivièrè drew on Stevenson’s essays ‘A Gossip on Romance’ and ‘A Humble Remonstrance’ to theorise a new ‘novel of adventure’ in which the creative imagination broke free from utilitarianism, idealism, or overt ideology. They echoed Stevenson in prizeing ‘brute incident’ and the ‘charm of circumstance’ over moral and psychological analysis. This reading proved influential for Gide, who also underlined the mythical, epic dimension to Stevenson’s fiction.
The Vatican Caves (1914), with its mixture of tragedy and farce and constantly changing viewpoints, has been compared to Stevenson’s New Arabian Nights. Gide’s favourite work, however, was The Master of Ballantrae, which has subsequently provided French writers from Mac Orlan to Le Clézio, with a model for exploring France’s colonial relations via the adventure novel. The novelist most sensitive to this dimension of Stevenson’s work, however, was André Malraux, whose The Royal Way (1930) and Man’s Estate (1934) draw from both The Master of Ballantrae and Conrad’s The Heart of Darkness in bringing western man face to face with his sinister double.

The treatment of duality equally fascinated Proust, who, in Time Regained (1927), has Swann declare that Stevenson ‘is a really great writer [. . .] equal to the greatest’. Robert Fraser notes, in Proust and the Victorians (1994), that Proust’s favourite Stevenson works, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and New Arabian Nights, investigate ‘inner spaces that are initially sealed’. He suggests that Proust responded to hints that Jekyll might be homosexual and derived the motif of shuttered interiors in Remembrance of Things Past from Stevenson.

From 1927 onwards, when Borges declared Stevenson’s ‘grandiose romances’ among ‘the greatest literary joys I have experienced’ (‘Literary Pleasure’), he repeatedly identified Stevenson as a major influence. Anglophone interviewers who queried Stevenson’s greatness were told that it was ‘as obvious as the sun in heaven’ (Conversations, c. 1998). The Fables in particular, which he translated (1983), were ‘a brief and secret masterpiece’ providing the blueprint for Borges’s parables of the 1960s. Yet, for Borges, Stevenson was perhaps more important as theorist than narrator. Borges developed the anti-realist aesthetic of Stevenson’s ‘A Humble Remonstrance’, which insisted that life was ‘monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant’ and art ‘neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate’. For Borges as for Stevenson, the well-wrought plot was more important than psychological motives, for the reader identified with incident rather than character. He echoed ‘A Gossip on Romance’ too in recommending that writers select details which open up ‘whole vistas of secondary stories’ rather than pursue descriptive totality. Just as Stevenson acknowledged the artificial nature of literary narrative, branding his characters ‘puppets’, Borges insisted that fiction should be self-contained and non-referential. As read by Borges, ‘A Humble Remonstrance’ and ‘A Gossip on Romance’ became two of the founding texts of Latin-American magic realism.

In Italy, the young Calvino wavered between neo-realism and Stevenson’s creative liberty. Looking back in 1964, he saw his first novel The Path to the Spiders’ Nests (1947) as an attempt to combine For Whom the Bell Tolls and Treasure Island, from which he derived the technique of viewing the adult world through the eyes of a puzzled child. His second novel, The Cloven Viscount (1952), placed Calvino firmly in the Stevensonian camp. Its protagonist, split into good and evil halves by a cannon ball, is a grotesque variant on Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. There are further allusions to The Master of Ballantrae and Treasure Island. Calvino echoes Borges in presenting Stevenson as a master of playful, self-conscious, non-referential fiction, but insisted that his work had a ‘moral nucleus’. Despite having no explicit message, Stevenson taught a ‘precious secret’: that ‘believing in stories with a beginning and an end, with their own beauty and moral, means believing in the writer’s link with his people, in his place in a society’ (‘L’isola del tesoro ha il suo segreto’, 1955).

Endorsed by Borges and Calvino, Stevenson remains a major influence on Hispanic and Italian literature. His impact elsewhere, however, remains largely uncharted. Although Scotland’s most widely read author, it is questionable how far Stevenson has contributed to international perceptions of Scottish writing. As his life-story is well known, he is generally recognised as a Scot, but is seldom placed within a Scottish literary tradition. Where
Scottish critics have traced his interest in moral and psychological duality to indigenous sources, foreign critics locate them within the European Gothic or stress a Calvinist or ‘Puritanical’ background shared with non-Scots such as Hawthorne and Gide. Stevenson’s earliest French readers certainly traced his lineage to Scott, applauding Stevenson for liberating the adventure novel from ‘romantic furors’. However, more recent readings of Stevenson as a forerunner of magic realism and postmodernism have appeared incompatible with Scott’s historical documentation.

Few contemporary works were translated before 1914. ‘Kailyard’ novelists, particularly Ian Maclaren and Annie S. Swan, remained popular in Scandinavia and made belated inroads into Germany and the Netherlands. New writers translated included Mary and Jane Findlater and John Buchan, whose international reception, however, largely post-dates the Second World War. Most successful were the humorists J. Storer Clouston and Ian Hay, author of The First Hundred Thousand, a look at the ‘lighter side’ of life in the trenches. The novels now seen as the period’s major works, George Douglas Brown’s The House with the Green Shutters (1901) and J. MacDougall Hay’s Gillespie (1914), met no more immediate recognition abroad than at home. More surprising is the (persisting) foreign indifference towards Neil Munro, translated only into Finnish and Irish.

In the interwar years, J. M. Barrie, already successful as a novelist in Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Bohemia, was widely translated as a dramatist. His plays proved remarkably successful in crossing linguistic, cultural and political barriers, with editions appearing in post-revolutionary Russia, China, Japan, Turkey and India. Even after the fall of Empire, Barrie’s drama was translated into Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Arabic. The Admirable Crichton has been Barrie’s greatest international success, assisted by film adaptations in 1918, 1919 (Cecil B. DeMille’s Male and Female), and 1957. Its theme of social reversal lending itself to a Marxist reading, it was widely translated and performed in the eastern bloc.

Recent translations of Barrie’s plays – Pantaloon, The Old Friends and Shall We Join the Ladies? in Italy (1993), The Admirable Crichton and The Old Lady Shows Her Medals in France (1999) – challenge British perceptions that he survives only as the creator of Peter Pan. Unquestionably, however, the archetypal ‘Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow up’ assures Barrie’s place in world literature. Pan’s fortune by no means stems solely from the 1953 Walt Disney version. Barrie’s various Pan texts (Peter Pan, Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and Peter and Wendy) were already translated into over twenty languages by 1939. Herbert Brenon’s 1924 film (where George Ali doubled up as Nana the Dog and the Crocodile) had already made Pan familiar to cinema-goers. More recently, growing anglophone interest in Barrie’s private life is matched abroad, inspiring fiction by the Frenchman François Rivière (Les Ailes de Peter Pan, 1993) and the Argentinian Rodrigo Fresán (Los jardines de Kensington, 2003).

[For convenience, key foreign language texts on the topic of this chapter are listed:

Further reading

The parliamentary Union of 1707 was a much-contested event whose cultural consequences have been equally vigorously debated by scholars. This chapter will not attempt to review the course of the ongoing controversy over whether its effects were beneficial, or disastrous; almost the only point of universal agreement is that that Union was a watershed which defined the shape of modern Scotland in cultural as well as political terms. The critical preferences of most commentary have been coloured, if not driven, by (declared or implicit) political allegiance: nationalists tend to prefer literature of resistance that celebrates older Scots forms and idiom; Unionists find interest in assimilative forms. More recently, scholars have become interested in reading the post-Union idiom of ‘Britishness’ not as a condition imposed by loss of parliamentary sovereignty, but rather as a creative Scottish response which made available a whole new range of idiomatic, thematic, formal and – not least – critical possibilities to all subsequent writing in English. Developing this line of approach, this chapter will consider the defining contribution of ‘British’ voices that develop in Scottish writing between 1707 and the beginning of the twentieth century to literary modernity.

In 1766 an ambitious young architect brazenly advertised his connection with an illustrious forebear to win favour for his entry in a major public competition. The architect was James Craig (1744–95), the poet under whose name he sought patronage was his uncle James Thomson (1700–44), and the prize (which included a gold medal and Freedom of the City) was offered by the Town Council of Edinburgh for the best design for a proposed New Town to the north of the ancient city. The ‘Prospect of Britain’ from Thomson’s Liberty (1735–6), elegantly inscribed in the approved version of Craig’s successful plan in 1767, was carefully chosen to appeal to the vanity, and the aspirations, of Scotland’s capital:

August, around, what Public Works I see
Lo! Stately Streets, lo! Squares that court the breeze
See! Long Canals, and deepened Rivers join
Each part with each, and with the circling Main
The whole enliven’d Isle.

The optative vision of the poem brings the confidence of early eighteenth-century neoclassical England into North Britain; like its great Roman antecedent, Augustan Britain would be imperial, connected, and – above all – united. The ‘enliven’d Isle’, surrounded
by sea, reinforced a British identity seen as culturally uniform and secured against its continental predators. Craig’s plan associated Edinburgh with the public-minded and progressive desires of a modernising age, and reminded his judges of the benefits brought by the Union of Parliaments in 1707 (indeed, the original version of his prize-winning plan, now lost, may have inscribed its Unionist patriotism on the cityscape in streets laid out in a Union Jack grid). ‘Order and regularity’ – in the terms of the Proposals for carrying on certain Public Works in the City of Edinburgh (1752) – were its ideals, as they were of the poetry of Augustan Britain. Whether architecturally or poetically embodied, Scottish Britishness proudly announced a public, civic identity, fostered but not circumscribed by the post-Union political state. The Kirk, the universities and the legal system all contributed to the Scottish Enlightenment as a phenomenon that explored – and expanded – what it might mean to be simultaneously Scottish and British. Private diaries, poetry and periodical criticism, formal historiography, ethics and epistemology articulate a multi-perspective sense of identity with complex individual and national expressive resources.

Thomson was the eighteenth-century’s great British poet. A minister’s son from the Scottish Lowlands who lived most of his adult life in London, he wrote (with his countryman David Mallet, or Malloch as he had been known in Scotland before his own move south) ‘Rule, Britannia!’, in a masque of 1740 which attempted to create a unified British mythology of origins around the figure of Alfred, the exemplar of Anglo-Saxon liberties. The new polity that cost Scotland its independence from its ancient enemy was imaginatively legitimated, broadly, in two ways: first, through discovery of more ancient shared origins which antedated the existence of Scotland and England as separate states, and second, by describing the Union as a necessary stage in Scotland’s teleological historical progression from barbarity to the refinement of civil society. Political expedience was elevated to historiographical theory and political science in the Scottish Enlightenment. Adam Ferguson’s A History of Civil Society (1767), for example, found a natural and universal tendency for ‘small nations’ to unite with their neighbours in mutual interests that served the larger cause of progress. (Michael Newton’s chapter on Gaelic diaspora literature is of relevance in relation to this point.) John Home, clergyman and author of ‘a tragedy of Alfred’, was much better known as the author of the sensationally successful historical tragedy Douglas (1756), which though it heralded a revival of Scottish theatre and became an object of Scottish national pride – at its first Edinburgh performance, a voice from the pit was reputed to have cried in triumph, ‘Whaur’s yer Wully Shakespeare nou?’ – Douglas was very much a ‘North British’ initiative, supported by the Kirk Moderates and University of Edinburgh professors. In the first scene Lady Randolph, one of the great tragic parts of the eighteenth-century stage, laments the ancient feud which precipitates the downfall of the Douglas family as a civil war between ‘sister kingdoms’ on either side of an ‘ideal line, /By fancy drawn,’ who refuse to ‘unite their kindred arms’. Thomson spoke broad Scots all his life, but perfected an English prose and poetic style based on Addison, Prior and Pope. His extended political pastoral The Seasons (1726–30) developed Pope’s praise of the prosperous legitimacy of the Stuart monarchy in ‘Windsor Forest’ into Whig praise of the stability of post-Union Britain. Particularly before the final confirmation of its supremacy in Britain in 1746, it was harder to authenticate the Hanoverian dynasty through continuity and tradition; it simply did not have the pedigree, in post-Union Britain, of the Stuart line. Cannily, Thomson instead elevated the concept of ‘British’ Liberty, the constitutional nature of the post-1689 monarchy, as the guarantee of
national prosperity. As we see in ‘Summer’ in The Seasons (1727), if architecture, as Christopher Wren wrote, has its political uses, so clearly has landscape:

Heavens! what a goodly prospect spreads around,
Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires,
And glittering towns, and gilded streams, till all
The stretching landscape into smoke decays!
Happy Britannia! where the Queen of Arts,
Inspiring vigour, Liberty, abroad
Walks unconfined even to thy farthest cots,
And scatters plenty with unsparing Hand.
[. . .] Unmatch’d thy guardian-oaks; thy valleys float
With golden waves [. . .]

Thomson was perhaps the first, but certainly not the last, Anglo-Scottish writer to equivocate usefully around those patriotic ‘guardian-oaks’, symbols at once of covert Jacobitism and of British naval supremacy and doughtiness; the ‘native oak’ appears also in the full version of ‘Rule, Britannia!’ The genre of ‘prospect poetry’ to which ‘Summer’ belongs traditionally offers a unifying vision where the poet’s eye (and the reader’s mind) takes a sweeping, harmonising view of landscape as an evocation in synecdoche of the state of the nation. ‘A spacious horizon is an image of liberty’, Joseph Addison had announced in The Spectator in 1712; The Seasons elaborated this image across the geographical and metaphorical extent of the new Britain of the eighteenth century. It offers both mythological and classical sanction for the status quo; ‘Liberty’ naturalises it, guaranteeing abundance without toil, and sanctioning commerce and – by implication – imperial exploitation.

But origins were as important as advancement in this compound vision. Britons laid claim to ‘ancient’ English constitutional rights, independence, and – somewhat later – invoked Scottish national heroes such as William Wallace and Robert Bruce as precursors of the freedoms of both Scots and English in Britain. In a spectacular exercise of convoluted rhetoric, Joanna Baillie’s ‘Metrical Legend’ of Wallace’s leadership of Scotland’s bloody resistance to Edward I (1821) was made to testify to the ‘blessing’ of the 1707 Union, while in an article on ‘Scottish National Character’ for Blackwood’s Magazine of 1860, Margaret Oliphant would invoke Bannockburn, assuming, for a moment, a Scots idiom to express her own sympathetic resistance to the ‘inevitable junction of the two portions of our island’ which ‘has been the one steadfast ghost afflicting the spirit and aggravating the temper of our auld respected mither’. At a moment of political tension which appeared to undermine the political principles of the Union, Walter Scott penned the Letters of Malachi Malagrowther (1826) to draw attention to the Westminster government’s encroachment on the British liberties of its Scottish citizens, and proclaimed the vitality of unity-in-diversity: ‘let us remain as Nature made us, Englishman, Irishmen and Scotchmen, with something of the impress of our several countries upon each!’ Union is not to be equated with ‘the necessity of Uniformity’.

Malachi is a lineal descendant of a character in Scott’s novel about the earlier Union of Crowns in 1603, The Fortunes of Nigel (1822), in which the Scottish King James VI sits uneasily on the English throne, surrounded by an entourage of adventurers eager to take advantage of the new circumstances. The Letters describe a more passive vision of post-Union Scotland as a patient in the hands of medical innovators, ‘bled and purged [. . .] and talked into courses of physic’, and a ‘sort of experimental farm, upon which every political
student has been permitted to try his theory'. Such are the costs of progress, and Scotland has borne them disproportionately.

While formal histories of Britain set the union in a concrete story of the nation’s advancement from barbarism to civility, a sort of shadow-history was created through antiquarian collections of artefacts, tales, songs, myths and legends of the nation, which brought a more diverse past into the popular present to celebrate the continuities of national identity. Robert Burns’s tale of ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ was written for Captain Grose’s *Antiquities of Scotland* (1789–91), a companion volume to his already-successful *Antiquities of England and Wales* (1773–87). Walter Scott was an enthusiastic amateur antiquarian, both in the old black-letter books, and as a collector of artefacts. His national fictions were built on foundations of his own or his friends’ research; *The Antiquary* (1815) discusses the relationship between antiquarianism and history in construing meaningful relations with the past, and against a backdrop of threatened French invasion that reinforces the political expediency of union against a common enemy. Antiquarianism was not only a Scottish preoccupation: across the British Isles and in Europe antiquaries searched out and preserved relics of the peculiar and differentiated manners of particular communities. In Scotland’s case, however, the passing of tradition and custom was typically described as a process initiated or accelerated by the Union. Conventions of evidence and authenticity were flexible: James Macpherson’s ‘translations’ of *The Poems of Ossian* (1760–5), Bishop Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802) all existed within a continuum of antiquarian recovery and literary impersonation; the relationship between authenticity and forgery in antiquarianism remains a much debated issue.

Thomson combined both the tropes of ancient origin and historical progress in ‘Spring’ (1728), in which ‘sportive lambs’ ‘sprightly race’ over Druidic remains of ‘ancient barbarous times’ in a pastoral landscape that promised present and future peaceful prosperity. The bleeding world of ‘disunited Britain’ is recovered as the playground of a new British harmony created by political union between Scotland and England in 1707. Following the researches of William Stukeley, the Druids were invoked by Thomson and his later contemporaries William Collins and Thomas Gray, as ancient upholders of British liberty against Imperial Rome. Through the century the evidence of antiquity would be deployed as a calming measure in response to external threat and to anti-Unionist sentiment from within Britain; the Scottish jurist, agriculturalist, philosopher and essayist Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) composed his *Essays on Antiquities* in the shadow of ‘our late Troubles’ – the 1745 Jacobite rising against the Hanoverian monarchy. The author hoped ‘to raise a Spirit among his Countrymen, of searching into their Antiquities,’ in the belief that ‘nothing will more contribute [. . .] to eradicate a Set of Opinions, which, by Intervals, have disquieted this Island for a Century and an Half’.

Not all was sunny in *The Seasons*, however: ‘Winter’ (1726), widely believed to draw on Thomson’s bleak memories of the Borders, described ‘Earth’s universal Face, deep-hid, and chill’, as ‘one wild dazzling Waste, that buries deep/The Works of Man’. In this desolate landscape,

[The Hare . . .] the garden seeks,
Urg’d on by fearless want. The bleating kind [sheep]
Eye the bleak heaven, and next the glistening earth,
With looks of dumb despair [. . .]

The starving animal seeking nourishment in the garden: this was the outcome of the Union most feared by English observers. Not wishing to be left out in the cold, ambitious Scots
flocked to London to partake of the benefits of trade and patronage. ‘Winter’ was published the year after Thomson’s own migration to the capital; over the next two centuries he would be followed by Tobias Smollett, Joanna Baillie, Thomas Carlyle and many more; others, like John Gibson Lockhart, Scott’s biographer and editor of the London-based Quarterly Review, would reside there for longer or shorter periods in search of professional advantage. Scottish artists who spent periods in Italy, from Allan Ramsay and the Adam brothers to David Wilkie and Robert Scott Lauder, forged cosmopolitanism idioms to articulate local and vernacular subjects; writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and John Buchan chose to live abroad while retaining a strong sense of Scottish identity. Stevenson’s The Master of Ballantrae (1888), whose eponymous protagonist plays the exile as a bravura performance in the novel, is introduced by an ‘editor’ who describes himself as ‘an old, consistent exile’ guilty of ‘two unpardonable errors: that he should ever have left his native city, or ever returned to it’. This paradox of attachment, compounded of frustration, guilt and loss, animates post-Union Scottish literature of exile; in Ballantrae, it produced a masterpiece which exerted a profound influence on the idiom of Anglo-American modernist writing.

James Craig’s somewhat self-interested veneration of his famous uncle was by no means unique in late eighteenth-century Scottish literary circles. The Cape Club, to which both Robert Fergusson and his friend the antiquarian David Herd belonged, marked Thomson’s birthday – as it did Shakespeare’s – as a special day in its annual calendar. Fergusson’s poetry is considered in more detail in other chapters in this volume; his accomplished English verse, like that of his admirer Robert Burns, has been programmatically undervalued in relation to his output in Scots. To be sure, a measure of political radicalism was encoded alongside the increasingly familiar nostalgia for a lost Scotland, in Burns’s versions of the old Jacobite songs; equally powerful, though, is the Unionist patriotism given intensely local expression in ‘The Dumfries Volunteers’ when ‘haughty Gaul’ threatened invasion in 1793:

The Nith shall run to Corsincon,
And Criffell sink in Solway,
E’er we permit a Foreign Foe
On British ground to rally.

O, let us not, like snarling tykes,
In wrangling be divided,
Till, slap! come in an unco’ loun,
And wi’ a rung decide it!
Be Britain still to Britain true,
Amang ourse’ls united;
For never but by British hands
Must British wrongs be righted.

The strategically mingled diction exposes the fallacy of a nineteenth-century critical myth about post-Union Scottish writing which still retains some currency: that it can be divided into the anglicised (rational, limited) productions of the ‘head’ and the emotional effusions of the natural Scots ‘heart’. Equally, it marks as futile any attempt to derive the ‘real’ views of any writer on the Union from his or her imaginative writings. It is perhaps more productive to regard the condition of Britishness as offering Scottish writers a range of rhetorical resources with which to explore the implications of ‘being modern’ in the post-Union period. Burns, as closely versed in eighteenth-century English neo-classical tradition as in traditional
Scottish song, turned both to a linguistic account in which the universal and the local are not alternatives, or opposites, but aspects of the same compound fate of consciousness.

This versatility implies no neglect or undervaluing of the conditions in which this complex perspective of British writing was forged. By the mid-eighteenth century, Scots' success in trade, in preferment at court and in government, became a major source of friction. In a letter of 1772, Hume declared that 'being a Scotchman' had damaged his interests in England; Alexander Carlyle records in his autobiographical memoir how he and Smollett were forced to hide in a London alleyway during the vigorous mob response to the Jacobite rising (Carlyle, along with Hume and most of the Edinburgh intelligentsia, took a strongly pro-Hanoverian stance in 1745, even to risking their lives in the city's defence). In the fifteen years following Culloden, a new phase of Scots expatriatism and 'invasion' of London (in itself a mark of the success of the Union, at least as far as Lowland, Hanoverian Scots were concerned) led to renewed English antagonism. Between 1760 and 1790, sixty Scots were elected for seats in English parliamentary constituencies; between 1790 and 1820, over 130 Scots sat for seats south of the border. The 'West Lothian question' has a history as long as the Union.

The London Journal of 1762–3, in which James Boswell set out to form his style, recorded the experiences of a young provincial engaged in an enterprise of cosmopolitan self-fashioning at one of the most unpropitious moments in Anglo-Scots relations during the post-Union period. His arrival in London to seek fame and fortune, or a commission in the British army – or, failing that, at least some form of patronage – coincided with intensifying anti-Scots feeling in the capital. The government, under the Scottish Earl of Bute, was unpopular for its policies and more so for its preferment of Scots. It was both a good and a bad time for an Ayrshire boy in the metropolis. Within a month of his arrival, Boswell's national allegiances were tested at the first night of a new comic opera at Covent Garden. Two Highland officers (in the British imperial force that Boswell himself aspired to join) were jeered from the 'mob in the upper gallery', who roared out ‘“No Scots! No Scots! Out with them!”’ Boswell’s ‘heart warmed to [his] countrymen, [his] Scotch blood boiled with indignation’. What seems a clear moment of patriotic elation is rendered equivocal by an uneasy tense change which separates the composed reflection from the moment of action: ‘I am very sure at that time I should have been the most distinguished of heroes. I hated the English; I wished from my soul that the Union was broke and that we might give them another battle of Bannockburn.’ Boswell’s journal writing repeatedly registers the compound dynamic between the Anglo and the Scot in his British identity.

A similar tension energises other Anglo-Scots writing: Smollett’s first novel Roderick Random (1748) opens with the sentence ‘I was born in the northern part of this united kingdom.’ Roderick Random, like the later Humphry Clinker (1771), contains character-representatives from Wales as well as Scots, northerners as well as Londoners. Like many ‘North British’ eighteenth-century novels, this includes episodes in the trading colonies of the West Indies. There was some audacity in Random’s publication just two years after Culloden, when Anglo-Scots fences were just beginning to mend: in a mock-apologetic preface the author implies the breadth of a ‘North British’ perspective over English prejudice; and though the eventual marriage of Roderick with Narcissa presents the unity of the two kingdoms in time-honoured fashion, her name offers a veiled insult at the moment of reconciliation.

Notwithstanding his preoccupation with independence (a quality he associated firmly with British identity), Smollett was invited to edit a magazine to defend Bute’s policies at the height of anti-Scots feeling in 1762. The Briton – whose title referred to George III’s
profession in his speech at the new session of Parliament in 1760, ‘I glory in the name of Briton’ – prompted immediate retaliation by John Wilkes and others in the form of a rival paper, The North Briton (1763), which attacked Scots’ language and their place-seeking indiscriminately: ‘Though I am a NORTH BRITON, I will endeavour to write plain English, and to avoid the numerous Scotticisms the BRITON abounds with; and then [. . .] he may be taken for a Scotsman, and I shall pass for an Englishman.’ A comic character in Roderick Random, Mr Concordance, personifies the homology between national identity and language use. Scots (and notably Smollett himself) had a vested interest in stabilising English as the dominant literary idiom, against a backdrop of ridicule. Humphry Clinker, which might have been subtitled after an early Unionist work of Daniel Defoe, A Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain, undertook a peregrination of the regions as a means of articulating the unity-in-diversity of Britain. Unlike Defoe’s Tour (1724–6), the integrity of its narrative was guaranteed not by the voice of an empirical, authoritative English voice enquiring into the socio-economic conditions of the different parts of Britain – Humphry Clinker’s story is told in a series of letters from correspondents of different classes, genders and local origins – but as a comic consensus built on the insufficiency of any single viewpoint to know, or to be, ‘the whole story’.

Samuel Johnson’s great Dictionary of the English Language (1755) was essentially a product of mid-eighteenth-century Britain (Boswell tells us that five of Johnson’s six amanuenses on the project were from ‘North Britain’). It had an ideological, nationalistic aspect: emphasising the libertarian basis of English language change as opposed to authoritarian prescriptiveness of the French Académie Française, it institutionalised ‘British liberties’ in semantics and etymology. In the nineteenth century, the authority of Johnson’s dictionary was superseded by A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles – in 1933 renamed the Oxford English Dictionary – initiated in 1857 and brought to first publication in 1884 under the editorship of a Border Scot, James Murray, whose 1872 edition of the Complaynt of Scotlant discovered in this sixteenth-century tract ‘sanction [. . . for] forms and idioms which [he] had thought to be modern “vulgarisms of the local patois”, but which are thus shown to have a pedigree of three and a half centuries to plead’. The OED has been described by John Willinsky as instituting an ‘Empire of Words’ – the title of his book (1994) – substantiating its own claim to be ‘the most authoritative and comprehensive dictionary of English in the world’. The linguistic authority of ‘standard English’ in the world – and its associated cultural values – derived proximately from Anglo-Scots’ desire to eradicate ‘Scotticisms’ from both speech and prose, and simultaneously to find in them a more ancient and purer linguistic authority than the words that had supplanted them. ‘There has been a strange propensity’, wrote James Beattie in the introduction to Scotticisms, his 1787 collection of terms that Scots should take care to avoid,

to debase the purity of the language, by a mixture of foreign and provincial idioms, and cant phrases; a circumstance, which has in other countries generally preceded, and partly occasioned, the decline of learning, and which of course must be matter of regret to those who wish well to British literature.

This linguistic ‘purity’ was another version of the myth of single common origin which sustained Britishness; it was supplemented by an antiquarian desire to record older more various forms now passing into uniformity. More than most languages, ‘English’ (as Samuel Johnson recognised) is in philological fact a hybrid and dynamic compound of multifarious influences. If English and Scots were not identical, neither were they entirely separate;
while eighteenth-century Scots increasingly strove to write a ‘pure’ English untainted by Scoticisms, they retained what was perceived as the natural vigour of Scots idiom in their speech; its cultural value enhanced by the poetry of Fergusson, Burns and their successors, it became an available indicator of national feeling. In 1801 Elizabeth Hamilton’s Memoirs record her ambition was to see ‘the study of gude braid Scotch made part of polite education’. According to J. G. Lockhart (whose Peter’s Letters to his Kinsfolk (1819) assiduously records the linguistic habits of the older generation of Scots), Henry Cockburn used ‘Scottish dialect’ effectively in his own public utterances, but lamented that by 1844 it had ‘ceased to be the vernacular language of the upper classes’.

William Smellie’s entry on language in the first edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1768–71) – whose title indicates its Edinburgh authors’ ambitions to attract a readership well beyond Scotland – compared the ‘British’ tongue to ‘a healthy oak planted in rich and vigorous soil’; like its companion ventures Chambers Encyclopaedia (put together by William and Robert Chambers), Britannica exemplifies a powerful impulse of what might be called ‘pedagogic Britishness’ emanating from Scotland in the post-Union period. An analogous enterprise, the New and Complete British Letter-Writer (n.d.) by David Fordyce, Professor of Moral Philosophy in Aberdeen, was a manual of polite style that included model letters for merchants involved in colonial trade, as well as examples of emigrants’ correspondence suitable to various occasions and social stations. The ethos of self-improvement through intense personal effort, exemplified in the lives of the Chambers brothers (as told by William’s biography of Robert), and in part derived from a Calvinist-inspired striving for moral betterment, was secularised in the nineteenth century in exhortatory manuals such as Samuel Smiles’s Self-help (1859), Thrift (1875) and Duty (1880), whose fictional analogues were popular novels about the rise of ‘lads o’ pairts’ from humble origins to secure social standing and places of influence. The trajectory typically involved a symbolic journey from an obscure Scots village to London, or the colonies, with an additional optional – but equally symbolic – phase of final homecoming, and retirement in Scotland surrounded by loyal retainers. John Galt’s epistolary The Ayrshire Legatees (1814) and the third-person Sir Andrew Wylie of that Ilk (1822) were early but important examples; his The Last of the Lairds (1826) consolidates the hero’s success in the colonies, perhaps (like Fordyce) implying that a true Scot might find the symbolic capital of Britishness in the dispersed, and ‘rising’ centres of Empire, rather than among the corrupting influences of a seat of power irretrievably associated with England.

Half a century before, Henry Mackenzie had been projected from trainee lawyer to celebrated author of the first popular modern novel by his astute adaptation in The Man of Feeling (1771) of the cult of Sensibility popularised in Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy (1759–67) to the inverse case of a young provincial who travels from Scotland to London in search of his inheritance, only to find himself thwarted at every turn by his ignorance of the manners of the metropolis. Taking things at face value, the protagonist Harley is repeatedly rooked, outwitted and victimised; throughout these humiliations he retains the moral advantage by a superior sensibility which, though it called up answering sympathies in an extraordinary range of readers, renders him incapable of either civic or domestic life. Adam Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759) had made clear the need for natural sympathies to be checked by prudent consideration, to enable effective operation of moral behaviour in civil society; The Man of Feeling inflects thoroughly contemporary British concerns with a more local Scottish awareness of the problematics of personal expression in a social context that has moved beyond the reach of local kinship relations.
The Man of Feeling’s theme of provincial at the metropolis had a fragmentary, broken structure (probably inspired by Macpherson’s Ossianic fragments, a cause célèbre in London as Mackenzie, a young legal student in the capital, was composing his early draft) which suggests the hiatus at the heart of the continuous narrative of Britishness. Both Ossian and The Man of Feeling – each written by a committed Unionist with strong Highland ties, both products of the Scottish Enlightenment’s theorising about human sympathy and sociability, equally concerned with personal goodness and ancestral virtue outflanked by the conditions of modern society and the culture of progress – are significant productions of British literature.

Periodical writing was perhaps the most significant vehicle for disseminating British idiom and manners. In the immediate post-Union period, Addison and Steele’s Spectator essays gave a uniformly trusted voice to the rising ‘middling’ classes; their authority was consolidated in Hugh Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres (1783), which subjected The Spectator to sustained stylistic analysis. These lectures, delivered to successive generations of Edinburgh University students from 1762, formed the polite style of the later Scottish Enlightenment, and – exported to the American colonies – exerted similarly powerful influence over the idiom of generations of independent Americans. Other Spectator-inflected Edinburgh initiatives, Mackenzie’s The Mirror (1779–80) and The Lounger (1785–6), promoted the novel as a moral tool; subsequently Scott would expand the form to explore the personal and national complexities of Britishness as a compound of contested allegiances.

Assimilative formulations of North British identity served well the interests of the travelling, trading and talking classes, but cultural uniformity was far from a social reality, even within the regions of England. Richard Finlay has questioned how far down the social scale this ‘process of Britification’ penetrated, how truly ‘national’ the identity it expressed. The ambivalence of ordinary Scots towards the Union was not lost on as astute a cultural historian as Scott in The Heart of Midlothian (1818):

‘[T]his reprieve wadna stand gude in the auld Scots law when the kingdom was a kingdom.’
‘[.. . .] when we had a king, and a chancellor, and parliament-men o’ our ain, we could aye peeble them wi’ stanes when they werena gude bairns – But naebody’s nails can reach the length o’ Lunnun.’

Scott wrote three novels directly concerned with the consequences of the Union for Scotland – and England – in which the Jacobite threat is central to the plot: Waverley (1814), set in 1745; Rob Roy (1817), whose backdrop is the 1715 rising; and Redgauntlet (1824), about an aborted third rising in the 1760s, in which the refusal of Redgauntlet’s anglicised nephew Darsie Latimer to espouse the ancient cause, and of the Hanoverian forces to quell the plot by oppressive means, signals the definitive neutralising of the Jacobite threat to the unity of Britain. At this point, ‘the cause’, as Redgauntlet puts it with melodramatic finality, ‘is lost for ever!’ It is both a tragic moment, and a comic one.

With the effective end of the Stuart threat as a realistic challenge to the throne, it became, in nostalgic cultural memory, a literary growth area even among those such as Scott whose political allegiances clearly lay with the Hanoverian dynasty. If Britishness was a state of being most fully articulated and exploited in writing by Scots intellectuals and adventurers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so too was Scottishness. Language was the most important common counter for Scots in their concentric formations of Scottish and British national identity after 1707. New forms of literary vernacular developed by
Fergusson, Burns, Scott and others expressed the continuing vitality of Scottish identity, and made it a valuable commodity for export. Landscape was another. ‘Everything belonging to the Highlands of Scotland,’ wrote Scott in 1816 in ‘The Culloden Papers’ for the London-based *Quarterly Review*, which he was instrumental in founding, ‘has of late become peculiarly interesting.’

These elements began to transform the neo-classical Britishness articulated in Edinburgh’s claim to be the ‘Athens of the North’ – not, like Rome, the seat of imperial power (that was the prerogative of London) – but the hub of an empire of learning and scholarship, where philosophy, education and art thrived; above all, a place of ideas. The foundation of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802 began a new phase of Britishness in writing emanating from Scotland and based on the constitutional premises inherent in the post-Union state. With its Tory rival *Blackwood’s Magazine* (from 1817), the *Edinburgh Review* brought Scottish-inflected writing back to the centre as arbiter of British taste. However, by 1822 it was Edinburgh’s – and Scotland’s – provinciality that would strike sceptical observers. Robert Mudie’s anonymous *The Modern Athens*, written in the shadow of the spectacular public relations extravaganza choreographed by Scott to welcome George IV to Edinburgh, presented the city as a ‘widowed metropolis’, forever in mourning for the loss of her ‘head’. Scott’s grand historical pageant of clan loyalty included, with breathtaking chutzpah, a specially rewritten Jacobite song, ‘Carle Now the King’s Come’, to welcome the Hanoverian monarch whose great-uncle had routed Charles’s army at Culloden. Although the ironies of this celebration did not go unremarked, Scott’s vision embodied a new phase in Britishness: where, broadly speaking, in the eighteenth century Scots took Britishness to England, in the nineteenth, English visitors brought it to Scotland, and Scots took it to the world. After George IV’s visit, the most influential of these English tourists were Queen Victoria and her consort Albert, who became devoted to Scotland as a refuge from London. Beautiful scenery, plentiful game for shooting and an idealised peasantry brought generations of the English upper class in their wake. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scots developed a bifocal national identity, at once Scottish and British, described by Murray Pittock in *Inventing and Resisting Britain* (1997) as ‘the Victorian duality of localist loyalties within an imperial community’. Not until 1914 was ‘Scottish Nationalism’ articulated in terms of separation from England; before that Scottish civil society existed intact within the British state. Margaret Oliphant’s *Annals of a Publishing House* (1897) gives a lively account of the influential unionist-nationalist politics of the Blackwood imprint in a period when ‘a stream of constant communication flowed between Pall Mall and George Street’; her own extensive contributions to ‘Maga’ include a series of reflections on the cultural politics of Victorian Scotland.

Scottishness within a British perspectival sensibility had been projected on to the landscape since Thomson’s *Seasons* and – more conceptually – Macpherson’s Ossian poems. After the work of Scott and his successors had associated antiquarian recovery of national traditions with precise localities, Scotland’s landscape and its guardians the ‘rural peasantry’ became texts of a Scottishness located strongly in the past: the painter David Wilkie found Scotland most remarkable as a volume of history. ‘It is,’ he wrote, ‘the land of tradition and poetry, every district has some scene in it of real or fictitious events, treasured with a sort of religious care in the minds of the inhabitants and giving dignity to places that in every other respect would, to the man of the world, be considered barren and unprofitable.’ That reference to the cosmopolitan viewpoint is significant: the national associations evoked in the contemplation of landscape gave it a value independent, and to one side, of the acknowledged cultural and commercial imperatives that drove forward Britain’s place in the modern
world, not least in the developing industrial heartlands of Glasgow. In the same year as Wilkie's evocation of landscape as the great treasury of historical Scottish identity, Scott's Bailie Nicol Jarvie declared (in *Rob Roy*) 'Let Glasgow Flourish! [. . .] since St Mungo caught herrings in the Clyde, what was ever like to gar us flourish like the sugar and tobacco trade? Will anybody tell me that, and grumble at the treaty that opened us a road west-awonder? By 1900 Glasgow was not only Scotland's largest city, visited by many international trade delegations that by-passed Edinburgh; in antithesis to the Athens of the North, it gloried in the sobriquet 'Second City of the Empire'.

By then, too, as Angus Calder has put it in *Scotlands of the Mind* (2002), Scottish culture was 'a component, at the very centre, of the British Empire'. Joseph Conrad wrote in a letter in 1907 that 'There isn't a single club and messroom and man-of-war in the British Seas and Dominions which hasn't its copy of Maga.' But as Stevenson, alive to the regionalities of Britain, pointed out in 'The Foreigner at Home' (1882), the English language, 'which will now frank the traveller through most of North America, through the greater South Sea Islands, in India, along much of the coast of Africa, and in the ports of China and Japan, is still to be heard, in its home country, in half a hundred varying stages of transition. You may go all over the states, and [. . .] you shall scarce meet with so marked a difference of accent as in the forty miles between Edinburgh and Glasgow.' Distinguishing between cosmopolitan 'Book English' and the still spoken 'racy idioms of our fathers', he pointed to the imperious presence of 'foreign things at home'. In this essay and its companion pieces of *Memories and Portraits*, Stevenson (like that other self-exiled Scot Thomas Carlyle) modulates without apparent distinction between what is clearly a Scots sensibility, and its equation with the intensely anglicised moniker 'the typical John Bull'. And yet he declares that despite their ancient enmities and different racial stock, the Lowland and Highland expatriates to the British Empire were 'sentimental countrymen' as they were not of their English comppeers. Such unstable elisions and distinctions are characteristic of the Scottish idiom of Britishness in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Burns's martial unionism found an echo in the poet William Allan's imperial version *Rose and Thistle* (1878): 'The Rose and the Thistle thegither are gane [. . .] An' wae to the loons wha their growin' wad mar'. The first issue of Patrick Geddes's *The Evergreen* (1895), whose title referred its reader directly back to the cultural nationalism of Allan Ramsay, insisted that 'because we would not quarrel with brother Bull, nor abandon our part in the larger responsibilities of united nationality and race, we [Scots need not] also sink the older loves and kinships, the smaller nationality wholly'. Geddes promulgated a resurgence of 'Celticism' in Scottish writing, which found kinship rather with other races – the Irish, the Welsh – on the fringes of Britain than with the Anglo-Scots consensus. For much of the nineteenth century 'race' had – often in confused and contradictory ways – an intrinsic place in expressions of 'scientific' Britishness. John Pinkerton, antiquarian collector – and forger – of Scottish ballads, attempted to prove the degradation of the Celtic peoples ('mere savages, but one degree above brutes', as he put it in his *Inquiry into the History of Scotland* (1790)) in relation to the Goths (who in his account included both the Greeks and the Romans). Pinkerton and his successors sought to unite Scottish Lowlanders with English in a common Gothic or Teutonic stock, a position whose literary implications in the identification of a Celtic alternative (more poetical, perhaps, but less advanced in the scale of civilised values) would find expression in the full-blown, and divisive, theory of literary ethnicity advanced by Matthew Arnold in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867).

John Buchan's Richard Hannay and Sandy Arbuthnot are British heroes of Empire; their sentiments and origins are unmistakably Scottish, but (like Thomas Carlyle) they refer to
'England’ as home, and contribute to the stereotype of the intrepid, upper-class, Englishman abroad. Occasionally, at moments of high tension, Scotticisms emerge through the standard English narrative; in danger, the heroes communicate through coded snatches of Scots ballads. As an infiltrator of enemy secrets in *Greenmantle* (1916), Hannay is a virtuoso of idiom, adopting and discarding voices, languages and accents at will, while Arbuthnot has a capacity for impenetrable personal disguise. Buchan's distinctive gift to literary modernism is the representation of a consciousness simultaneously feeling one self, and inhabiting the public role of another. In their expedient pluralities, Buchan’s heroes embody the compound North British identity that escapes racial typing, narrow nationalism and single voices.

**Further reading**


On Saturday, 10 January 1784, James Boswell recorded in his diary a ‘very agreeable dream’ about David Hume, which fastened so strongly on his mind that he ‘could not for some time perceive that it was only a fiction’. He dreamt that he had found a diary kept by the philosopher, ‘from which it appeared that though his vanity made him publish treatises of scepticism and infidelity, he was in reality a Christian and a very pious man’. It is not altogether strange that, seven years after Hume’s death, Boswell should still be troubled by the thought of Hume’s ‘infidelity’. Confined at the time to his house in Edinburgh with yet another bout of venereal disease, Boswell was prey to morbid anxieties; four days earlier he had a horrifying nightmare in which he watched a ‘poor wretch lying naked on a dunghill’ and being flayed alive (Boswell: The Applause of the Jury, 1782–1785, 1982). In the present context, however, the dream about Hume is significant for the special authenticity it attributes to diaries; as evidence of a writer’s true belief, ‘published treatises’ are worthless compared with the countervailing ‘reality’ inscribed in a private diary. This chapter will be concerned with literature not primarily intended for print or wide public consumption (excluding letters and journals written by travellers, discussed by Catherine Jones in Chapter 30 on travel writing), a type of writing practised by Scots with peculiar energy and success between 1707 and 1918.

Religious and secular influences combined to stimulate the growth of private writing in Scotland after 1707. The keeping of personal diaries as a means of moral and spiritual improvement through self-analysis was encouraged by the Scottish Presbyterian Church, and Enlightenment philosophy exerted a less direct but equally pervasive influence. The conjunction of Hume and diaries in Boswell’s mind was not fortuitous. Throughout his life Boswell regarded self-knowledge as the primary goal of diary-keeping. The Stoic precept ‘Know thyself’ is quoted in his London Journal (Boswell’s London Journal, 1762–1763, 1950) as the motive for writing, and repeated in public twenty years later, with a new rationale: ‘because memory is so frail and variable [. . .] it is very necessary to have our thoughts and actions preserved in a mode not subject to change, if we would have a fair and distinct view of our character’ (‘On Diaries’, London Magazine, March 1783). There is a clear link between this conception of diary-keeping as a means of self-conservation and the debate about personal identity stirred up by Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40). Hume overturned received theory by asserting that the sense of self depends on nothing firmer or more unified than ‘a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement’. Subsequent attempts by Scottish philosophers of the Common Sense school to rebut Hume’s argument and restore
the concept of a stable, coherent identity were so permeated by Hume's rhetoric that, as Susan Manning has suggested in *Fragments of Union* (2002), they 'effectively propagated the union-fragmentation tensions in his thought'. In the close-knit intellectual community of eighteenth-century Scotland, it was unnecessary to be a professional philosopher or to have read the *Treatise* – few did – to be aware of this contentious issue. The protagonists in the debate were not reclusive academics but actively engaged in social and literary life; hence speculation about the fixity, coherence and knowability of the self could not fail to gain general currency. Thus the concept of personal identity became problematic at the very time that new conceptions of national identity were emerging in the wake of the 1707 Act of Union. The ensuing 'crisis of identity' was a major factor in the shaping of eighteenth-century Scottish fiction, poetry and drama. That it also gave a powerful impetus to self-writing generally, and was a driving force behind the spate of domestic writings in particular, cannot be doubted.

In Scotland, as in England, the eighteenth century witnessed a huge surge in the writing and circulation of private diaries, journals, letters, family lives, personal reminiscences, autobiographies and memoirs. The Scottish contribution to this body of private literature is both substantial and important, yet it has attracted little critical attention. In the past, few texts were readily available in printed form; Henry Grey Graham, in his study of *Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century* (1901), noted the lack of 'such diaries and voluminous correspondence as abounded in England', claiming that in Scotland 'no diaries were written, little correspondence was preserved'. Graham cannot have looked very hard, for by 1901 a substantial number of diaries, journals and letters had in fact been printed, usually privately by learned societies or aristocratic families; most of these, however, were confined to scholarly libraries or private houses. Among modern literary historians, Maurice Lindsay's *History of Scottish Literature* (1977) is unusual in recognising 'private literature' as a significant Scottish tradition. More recently, Dorothy McMillan has demonstrated the wealth and variety of private writings produced by Scottish women. Yet in critical and theoretical studies of individual genres (autobiography, letters, diaries), Scottish writings, if discussed at all, are treated as tributaries to a cultural mainstream that is routinely configured as 'English'. Boswell, Byron and Scott, for example, are discussed in Robert Fothergill's *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (1974) without any mention of their Scottish origins.

Despite their heterogeneity in character and form, Scottish private writings constitute a loosely coherent whole united by common social and cultural roots. The majority of authors belonged to a small caste of upper- and middle-class men and women, many of them bred or living in Edinburgh and the Borders, and linked by 'those ties of affinity and family connection, which are, in Scotland, the pillars of society', as Elizabeth Hamilton caustically observed in her *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Hamilton* (1818). It is crucial also to remember that unpublished writings were virtually never 'private' in an absolute sense; that is, intended for closet reading by the author or recipient alone. It was common practice for personal letters, journals and memoirs to circulate within families, groups of friends or coteries of like-minded readers. This kind of private dissemination was especially common among upper-class women. While resolutely, sometimes anxiously, shunning the perceived impropriety of appearing in print, they confidently expected their letters and journals to be read by members of their family and social set. By this means, expatriate Scots like Lady Louisa Stuart and Joanna Baillie remained within the community of readers and writers, and a tradition of private writing was transmitted via an intertextual web, sustained especially by the exchange of letters (Scott's correspondence alone embraced almost all the authors mentioned in this chapter), but by other links also. Henry Cockburn, for example,
heard about Henry Mackenzie’s reminiscences and read Lady Anne Barnard’s memoirs while working on his own. Robert Louis Stevenson in turn knew Cockburn’s Memorials (1856) and Thomas Carlyle’s Reminiscences (1881). When Scott started writing his journal in November 1825 (edited as The Journal of Sir Walter Scott by W. Anderson in 1972), he thought of turning it into an extempore ‘memorandum-book’ modelled on Byron’s journals, which Thomas Moore showed him when he visited Abbotsford in the same month.

Letters

By 1707, letters were already ensconced in the emergent bourgeois public sphere. The English ‘familiar letter’, with its recognised conventions of style and content deriving from Cicero, Pliny and Seneca, became a de facto literary genre in the eighteenth century. It acquired de jure status in Scotland when Hugh Blair included it in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres (1783), decreeing that

Writing becomes a distinct species of Composition, subject to the cognizance of Criticism, when it is of the easy and familiar kind; when it is conversation carried on upon paper, between two friends at a distance.

Blair rated the correspondence of Pope and his friends as ‘the most distinguished collection of Letters in the English Language’, singling out Arbuthnot (the only Scottish writer he mentions) for the ‘ease’ and ‘beautiful simplicity’ of his contributions. In addition to the irony and humour characteristic of his published writings, Arbuthnot’s letters, which unlike Pope’s were written with no eye to publication, have a warmth and spontaneity rare in Augustan letters; Samuel Johnson remarked in Lives of the English Poets (1781) that he wrote ‘like one who lets thoughts drop from his pen as they rise into his mind’, in contrast to Pope.

It was only through his friendship with Pope and Swift in London, however, that Arbuthnot’s letters got into print at all. Publication of private letters was strongly disapproved of in Scotland throughout the eighteenth century and beyond. Hume’s efforts to prevent his letters from being published posthumously are well known. John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, whose well-informed, entertaining, gossipy letters were highly prized among his friends and acquaintances, was nevertheless angry when, in 1804, the Earl of Buchan tried to acquire some of them for publication. He ‘esteemed the publishing private, perhaps unadvised letters, without people’s consent to be almost high treason against society’, and thought it ‘a miserable thing for a peer to copy [. . .] Boswell who got nothing by it but hatred and contempt’ (as cited in Letters of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, 1799–1812, 1966). As a young man, Boswell flouted convention by publishing a private correspondence, Letters between the Honourable Andrew Erskine and James Boswell, Esq. (1763), ‘with the utmost boldness too, as we have printed our names at length’, he boasted to his friend John Johnston. In the preface he impudently turned transgression into commercial virtue, arguing that it is the privacy of letters that attracts readers:

Had any man in the three kingdoms found the following letters, directed, sealed, and addressed, with post-marks [. . .] he would have read every one of them; or had they been ushered into the world, from Mr Flexney’s shop, in that manner, they would have been bought up with the greatest avidity. As they really once had all the advantage of concealment, we hope their present more conspicuous form will not tend to diminish their merit.
Although the facetiousness and laddish posturings of the Boswell–Erskine letters appealed to London reviewers, Scottish friends were shocked at the indecorum of publishing such trivialities. Blair urged Boswell to suppress or disown the book, but he was impenitent, bragging to Johnston, as cited in The Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange (1966), that ‘the narrow-minded and censorious Scotch rail at us. The good-humoured jolly English like and praise us.’

Despite the taboo on publication, the art of letter-writing was assiduously cultivated by Scottish authors. Hume’s awareness of epistolary tradition is evident in the self-consciously ‘familiar’ quality of his first surviving letter, written when he was sixteen and to be found in The Letters of David Hume, edited by J. Greig (1932). Although his later letters achieve the unforced wit and conversational ease of his English peers, he continued to take pains over their style and diction. English epistolary tradition in fact impeded as well as stimulated Scottish letter-writing. Ramsay’s remark, ‘I look on ease and nature as the excellency of epistolary writing far superior to elaboration of style’, reflects the standard prescribed in Blair’s Lectures, but attainment of this cultivated spontaneity was hampered by anxieties about linguistic correctness. James Beattie, who, like Hume, worked hard to acquire a fluent epistolary style, pinpointed the problem when he complained in 1766 that ‘we who live in Scotland are obliged to study English from books, like a dead language’, and hence ‘are slaves to the language we write, and are continually afraid of committing gross blunders; and when an easy, familiar, idiomatical phrase occurs, dare not adopt it [. . .] for fear of Scotticisms’. (Beattie’s Letters were published in 1820.) Women letter-writers, however, with no public status to safeguard, were less constrained. Alison Cockburn, Hume’s friend and correspondent, writes with refreshing freedom, intelligence and compassion, her Letters and Memoir of her own Life being published in 1900.

Robert Burns trained himself in letter-writing by zealous apprenticeship to the Augustans, as he explained in an autobiographical letter to his patron Dr John Moore, cited in The Letters of Robert Burns, ed. J. DeLancey Ferguson (1931):

I engaged several of my schoolfellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me – This last helped me much on in composition. – I had met with a collection of letters by the Wits of Queen Anne’s reign, and I pored over them most devoutly. – I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity.

Burns used the letter form extensively for self-evocation; his virtuosity emerges in a mastery of a wide range of idioms and levels of formality matched to the occasion and the image he wished to project. His concern with style and tone are shown in his habit of making drafts of more important letters. These are consummately ‘literary’ affairs: they teem with references, mostly to English rather than Scottish writers, and allusions ranging far beyond the Augustan ‘Wits’. Burns wrote letters of application, of supplication, of defiance and of friendship, on literary topics and on politics, but he is best known as a writer of love letters, ranging from the mannered, sentimental correspondence with Agnes McLehose (‘Clarinda’ to his ‘Sylvander’), to the bawdy. His epistolary style is at its most studied when appearing least composed, as in a vernacular letter to William Nicol in 1787, reminiscent of Smollett’s burlesque transliteration of the epistolary efforts of Winifred Jenkins in Humphry Clinker: ‘I was gaun to write you a lang pystle, but, Gude forgie me, I gat myself sae notouriously bitchify’d the day after kail-time that I can hardly stouter but and ben.’
James Hogg, another working-class poet, and even more determined autodidact, has been undeservedly overshadowed as a letter-writer by Burns. This is partly attributable to accessibility: Burns's correspondence first received scholarly attention in 1931, while Hogg's letters still await a collected edition (currently in the process of being published: both volumes one and two are available as of 2006; the third at a still undetermined later time). Shepherds and bluestockings alike were his recipients, but perhaps even more than Burns, Hogg was the correspondent of the major \emph{literati} of his day: Scott, Byron, Southey, Sir Robert Peel, and the publishers Murray, Blackwood and Chambers. His letters to William Blackwood alone furnish an enthralling snapshot of author–publisher relations in the early nineteenth century, as well as a guide to Edinburgh's social and cultural dynamics. Hogg's epistolary style is less obviously studied than Burns's, but equally skilful, versatile and self-revealing. His command of irony in sensitive situations is notable. In his first letter to Margaret Phillips (27 July 1811) he qualifies a declaration of love with the addition: 'do not be angry with me my dear Margaret – I am not courting you – nay I do not believe I would take you in a present (though it might make you cry to refuse you)'. Double-edged irony delicately bridges the social gap when writing to Scott after his ruin. Hogg consoles him, as quoted in \emph{Sir Walter's Post-bag} (1932), with thoughts of 'the one great blessing that will attend it. It will free you from the endless pressure of fashionable company'; he too, he confesses, is 'exposed [to that pressure] in a small way, and feel it a grievance on a poor man. But mine is as pease and groats to pearls and diamonds.'

The nineteenth century was the golden age of Scottish epistolary writing, as fears of committing linguistic solecisms receded and national identity became a less problematic issue. Together, the letters of Hogg, Byron, Scott, Joanna Baillie, Anne Grant of Laggan, Lady Louisa Stuart, Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle and Robert Louis Stevenson provide a literary resource of absorbing interest and variety. Letter-writing was the sole literary outlet for Jane Carlyle, as discussed by Chris R. Vanden Bossche in Chapter 27 on the Carlyles; for Thomas Carlyle, it was another channel for his powerful rhetoric; for Scott, it was an extension into the private sphere of his restless addiction to writing in general, an issue broached by Fiona Robertson in Chapter 20.

Scott brought to letter-writing a professional interest, as editor, in the private letters of others, and a novelist’s interest in epistolary fiction: \emph{The Fortunes of Nigel} started life as a collection of invented ‘Private Letters of the 17th Century’ (in collaboration with Louisa Stuart). Generations of readers have been attracted to Scott’s own letters partly by the infectious gusto with which he sets out to entertain his correspondents, but above all by the honourable, warm-hearted personality they project. In comparison with Byron and Stevenson, Scott appears self-effacing but he is no more transparent than they are: as is clear from \emph{The Letters of Sir Walter Scott}, edited by H. J. C. Grierson (1932–7), reticence and modesty, rather than self-parade, are his chosen style. He himself recognised that letters, like journals, are forms of self-representation, whether by display or by concealment. Speaking of Burns, he remarked in his journal that letters seldom convey the writer’s ‘real opinion’; the author treats subjects ‘rather so as to gratify his correspondent than to communicate his own feelings’.

Stevenson, whose \emph{Letters} were edited by B. Booth and E. Mehew in 1994, was familiar with Scottish epistolary tradition: he associated Hume with ‘the urbane, cheerful, letter-writing eighteenth century’, and enjoyed the letters of Scott and Anne Grant. In his later years he wrote with an eye to posthumous publication, and his superb letters abundantly display his narrative and descriptive gifts. But his self-absorption, like Boswell’s and Byron’s, is as engaging as Scott’s more extrovert epistolary manner. As Henry James
observed in Notes on Novelists (1914), ‘He is never more delightful than when he is most egotistic, most consciously charmed with something he has done.’

### Journals

As journal-writers, Boswell, Byron and Scott rank alongside the great English diarists – Pepys, John Wesley and Frances Burney – but their productions should be seen in the context of a massive increase in diaries and memoirs in Scotland from the eighteenth century onwards, written by people of all ranks and occupations. The accepted functions of such writing are listed by Adam Mackie of Fyvie, farmer, merchant and innkeeper, in The Diary of a Canny Man, 1818–28 (1991), on his opening page:

1st May 1818. This book is purposed for writing down occurrences, passing events and designed to serve as a refreshment of mind afterwards, and to be a sort of diary wherein I may write what manner I have spent my time whether in labour, study, business, pleasure or idleness. Also to be a taskmaster which I may suppose asks the question every night: What have you done this day?

The relative weighting given to topical happenings, personal memoranda and self-examination naturally varies from writer to writer, but self-analysis for the purpose of personal improvement is especially prominent as a motive. Scott, recalling on 1 January 1828 that he has kept a diary for over two years, adds ‘that it has made me wiser or better I dare not say’. The moral motive provides a rich source of unconscious humour in the delightful journals kept by Marjory Fleming from the age of seven to eight (1810–11). She dutifully confesses and deprecates her lapses, but rebellious nature keeps breaking in. As Mark Twain, quoted in The Complete Marjory Fleming, edited by F. Sidgwick (1934), observes, her ‘perfunctory pieties and shop-made holiness’ cannot ‘squelch her spirits or put out her fires for long’. The freshness, charm and precocious sagacity of Marjory’s journals, enhanced by the pathos of her early death, have captivated readers since they were first published in 1858. Her juvenile perceptiveness about people and social manners anticipates that of two other young Scotswomen: the diaries kept by Helen Graham in Edinburgh in 1823–6, published as Parties and Pleasures: The Diaries of Helen Graham in 1957, and the journal kept by Anne Chalmers on a visit to London in 1830 when she was seventeen, contained in Letters and Journals of Anne Chalmers (1922), bear comparison in acuteness of observation, vivacity and wit with the early diaries of Frances Burney.

Boswell noted the conjunction of journals and letters as modes of self-writing: ‘my book of letters is in effect part of my journal, as it shows how my mind was occupied’ (cited in Boswell: The Applause of the Jury, 1782–1785, 1982). Taken together, his private writings form one of the most sustained, uninhibited and compulsively readable exercises in self-representation in the English language. Boswell’s psychology – a singular mixture of vanity and humility, lecherousness and moral conscience, shrewdness and naivety, reverence and impudence, violent swings from exuberance to depression, chameleon-like adaptability to his audience – is laid bare with unparalleled candour. Margaret Boswell commented that he was leaving himself ‘embowelled to posterity’; to which Boswell retorted, as quoted in Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774–6 (1963), ‘but I think it is rather leaving myself embalmed. It is certainly preserving myself.’ His incessant struggle to establish a durable identity is one of the peculiar fascinations of his private writings.
Shown these ‘strange journals’, Boswell’s parish minister was ‘surprised a lad of sense and
come to age should be so childish as keep a register of his follies and communicate it to others
as if proud of them’. Boswell, however, felt vindicated some weeks later when Samuel
Johnson praised him (in principle) for keeping a ‘fair and undisguised’ journal of his life.
To be sure, Johnson advised him to ‘keep it private’ and to arrange for it to be burnt after his
death, but Boswell preferred to envisage it (see his London Journal, as published in 1950)
‘carefully laid up among the archives of Auchinleck’. The privacy question resurfaced later,
however. In 1779, Boswell took fright on reading the diary of a farmer in which ‘his acts of
profligacy were recorded in plain terms, and his folly and vanity set down’, and resolved, as
quoted in Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck, 1778–1782 (1977), to be more circumspect himself:

Reading this journal made me uneasy to think of my own. It is preserving evidence against
oneself; it is filling a mine which may be sprung by accident or intention. Were my journal to
be discovered and made public in my own lifetime, how shocking would it be to me! And after
my death, would it not hurt my children? I must not be so plain.

Recorded among the self-revelations and indiscretions of his own journals, the incident
should perhaps be read as exemplifying the paradoxical combination of secrecy and reve-
lation that characterises ‘private writing’.

Non-literary diaries and memoirs from the 1707–1918 period are of literary interest in
three ways: sometimes intrinsically, as texts; generically, as revealing the cultural conven-
tions governing their production; and contextually, as providing a rich sub-stratum of
recorded experience on which fictional constructions could draw. Clerical diaries, for
example, chronicling the parochial and domestic lives of church ministers, constitute a
sub-genre fictionalised by John Galt in Annals of the Parish (1821). George Ridpath’s Diary,
1755–1761 (1922), covering six years of his ministry in Stichel, Roxburghshire, gives an
intimate picture of parish life comparable to that recorded by his English contemporary,
parson James Woodforde. John Mill’s Diary, 1740–1803 (1889), part retrospective memoir,
part journal, records the strenuous life of a minister of three parishes on Shetland. Mill is
singularly unimaginative, but his literal-mindedness gives his prose a certain blunt elo-
quence: spiritual crises, tempestuous sea-journeys, parish finances, or the search for a wife
all occupy the same discursive plane. Especially memorable are Mill’s altercations with the
Devil, whom he treats more like a delinquent schoolboy than the Prince of Darkness. Early
in his ministry, ‘Satan raged exceedingly’, taking possession of three of his parishioners.
One woman was mute until

Satan seemed to make use of her tongue and said – The pulpit was upon the South Side of the
Kirk. I said it would continue there as long as God pleased. He said I made lies upon him, for
which I called him (as indeed he was) a damned rascal for his lying impudence, which he cared
not for.

Numerous diaries and memoirs recording the spiritual struggles of faithful Christians
survive from this period. Most are too suffocatingly pious to be readable, but they re-emerge, parodically transformed, in Hogg’s The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a
Justified Sinner (1824). Byron’s journals offer an altogether more patrician insouciance to
the world, the flesh and the Devil, but they present similar ambivalences about human
motivation, and about the appropriateness of the journal as the oxymoronic private–public
space best able to articulate this. His first journal opens on 14 November 1813 with
a Boswellian flourish (Byron was an avid reader of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, but could not have known his private journals):

If this had been begun ten years ago and faithfully kept!!! – heigho! There are too many things I wish never to be remembered, as it is [. . .] At five-and-twenty, when the better part of life is over, one should be something; – and what am I? nothing but five-and-twenty. (Quoted in *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. L. Marchand, 1973–82)

Granted a glimpse of Burns’s letters, then regarded as unpublishable, Byron exclaimed on 13 December 1813: ‘What an antithetical mind! – tenderness, roughness – delicacy, coarseness – sentiment, sensuality – soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity – all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay!’ This celebrated pronouncement has furnished the title of at least one study of Burns; in context, it seems at least as much displaced self-analysis as critical judgement. It is a form of self-characterisation inseparable (as Leslie Marchand makes clear) from that of Byron’s letters. Both are enormously effective rhetorical performances, with an audience most firmly implied (some of Byron’s most accomplished letters were to his publisher, John Murray, another expatriate Scot), even when that audience is himself. On 6 December 1813, for example, reflecting on the self-contradictions which arise out of extempore journalising, he makes virtue out of necessity thus: ‘If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one’s self than to any one else), every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor.’

Scott turned to journal-keeping under duress: his journal is the product of his years of greatest pressure (and arguably greatest personal unhappiness): the collapse of his publishing house, Constable, his personal bankruptcy, the death of his wife and his own increasingly debilitating illness. More than once, in his self-imposed course of grinding productivity to meet the claims of his creditors, he commends himself to the wisdom of the ancient Stoic philosophers. But the ‘Gurnal’ (as he self-deprecatingly styled it) served also as a kind of pressure-valve, allowing him to record – and therefore perhaps to realise – aspects of his punitive daily routine which he was too proud, too private – and too much of a man of the Enlightenment – to confide even to close friends: bad dreams, bodily indignities, irrational fears and angers. In these, Scott aligned himself, as nowhere else in his writing, with that great herald of Romantic self-expression, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The entry for 1 January 1828 opens with the same epigraph as on the title-page of 1825:

As I walked by myself
I talkd to my self
And thus my self said to me.

The reference is to Rousseau’s *Confessions* of 1781, a work first translated into English in 1782, as Scott entered his teens.

**Domestic writing**

The term ‘domestic writing’ describes texts primarily concerned with ‘home’, in the sense of family and household, a particular locality, or Scotland at large. They commonly took the form of personal memoirs and reminiscences but they were not intimate or introspective even when (as in Sir John Clerk’s memoirs, for example) the format was autobiographical.
Although grounded in the personal experience and perceptions of the author, their purpose was to record national, local, or family affairs, characters and manners for posterity, not to explore inner thoughts and feelings. Thus they complemented in private the public efforts of eighteenth-century antiquaries, such as Sir David Dalrymple (Lord Hailes) and Clerk himself, to promote a sense of Scottish nationhood by reconstructing Scotland’s past. Concern with the roots of identity is manifest in the assiduous recording of family histories and genealogies: Walter Scott prefaced the account of his own ancestry in ‘Memoirs’ (1808) with an aphorism. ‘Every Scottishman has a pedigree. It is a national prerogative as inalienable as his pride and his poverty.’ In his memoir, Memoirs of the Life of Sir John Clerk, 1676–1755 (1892), Clerk disingenuously asserted and disclaimed his prerogative at once, by declaring that ‘having nothing to boast of as to the Antiquity of my Family, which by-the-bye, I have always laught at in others, I shall trace my mean Progenitors no farther back than about the [year] 1568’.

The value of domestic writings as historical sources and illustrations is unquestionable, but their literary value is variable. Truthfulness is sometimes their only merit. Private Annals of my Own Time (1914), by Christian Dalrymple, daughter of Lord Hailes, simply reports, with painstaking fidelity, family births, marriages, illnesses, accidents, journeys and deaths. As Samuel Johnson, quoted in Boswell’s Life (1791), said of her father’s Annals of Scotland (1776), they are ‘very exact; but they contain mere dry particulars’. In the reminiscences and memoirs of Alexander Carlyle, Henry Mackenzie, Henry Cockburn and a cohort of talented women writers, however, the dry bones live.

Carlyle, Mackenzie and Cockburn vividly re-create the culture and society of Edinburgh in what they regarded as its most brilliant epoch. For Carlyle, this was a vanishing world; for Mackenzie and Cockburn, in Memorials of his Time (1856) looking back in the 1820s, ‘Old Edinburgh was no more.’ Yet there is little sentimentality in their reconstructions of the past. Carlyle, minister of Inveresk from 1748 to 1805, opens his ‘Anecdotes and Characters of the Times’ with a commitment to fact:

Having observed how carelessly, and consequently how falsely, history is written, I have long resolved to note down certain facts within my own knowledge [. . .] that may be subservient to a future historian.

Though modestly offering only ‘such a faithful picture of times and characters as came within my view in the humble and private sphere of life’, he justifies his subjective viewpoint on universal grounds which reveal his commitment to Scottish Enlightenment principles: in his Autobiography (1860) he observes ‘in whatever sphere men act, the agents and instruments are still the same, viz. the faculties and passions of human nature’. Thus empowered, he writes with a frankness, garrulity and fullness of detail that make his work engaging both as a self-portrait and as a picture of his world. Though many things of a private and intimate nature are not said, no impression of secrecy or suppression emerges: the mask of decorum is impenetrable. Mackenzie’s ‘Reminiscences’ (published as The Anecdotes and Egotisms of Henry Mackenzie, 1927) took a different shape. Written as a disconnected set of texts of varying length, from aphorisms to short essays, and in different modes (description, reflection, pithy comment and personal narrative), their appeal lies in their vivid, kaleidoscopic quality and dry wit. Neither ‘Anecdotes’ nor ‘Egotisms’ were published in Mackenzie’s lifetime, and the lack of polish in both works is part of their informal charm for a modern reader. The raw material for a never-written autobiography, they remained unpublished for a century after his death.
It is evident from the care Cockburn took in his later years to edit his memoirs and journals that he intended them for eventual publication, but he observed the strict conventions of privacy prevalent in Scotland in his day by withholding them from print while he lived. In January 1857, the Edinburgh Review hailed Memorials of his Time on publication for its ‘high artistic merit’, and ‘very just impression’ of the author’s rare powers of conversation. It successfully combines personal memoir with social history and a colourful gallery of character-portraits. After fifty years’ energetic activity in political and cultural affairs as a leading Whig lawyer, Cockburn believed (quoting his Life of Lord Jeffrey, 1852) he had lived through ‘the last purely Scotch age’. Nevertheless, he was acutely aware of the danger of sentimentalising the past; when he discovered in 1824 that Mackenzie was being tempted by a bookseller to write his reminiscences, he ‘hoped the temptation would prevail’, but added,

Yet it is nearly impossible for an old good man to remember truly. Whatever it is amiable to soften or forget, is forgotten or softened, the angularities of nature are smoothed down, and everything is coloured by a haze of tenderness.

The angularities remain unblunted in Cockburn’s own memoirs. In a style which has the force and suppleness without the redundancy of everyday speech, he conveys a richly detailed, affectionate, but far from rose-tinted view of the Scottish society of his earlier days: his criticisms of its rigidities are hard-hitting.

The two primary reasons why domestic writings were not published in their authors’ lifetime were fear of giving offence to people named in the text and literary decorum. The strength of feeling about personal privacy in Cockburn’s generation became apparent when John Gibson Lockhart published his own domestic records, in the semi-fictionalised shape of Peter’s Letters to his Kinsfolk (1819). Masquerading as a Welshman residing in Scotland, Lockhart drew vivacious, sometimes satirical sketches of Scottish society, characters and manners. Although he wrote as a self-proclaimed enemy of Scottish Whiggism, he avoided personal invective and did not probe into the private lives of the well-known people he described. Nonetheless, the book gave offence. In a spirited appendix to a later edition, ‘Peter’ describes how he was accused of violating ‘the rights of privacy’ by writing about named and known individuals. He retorted by deriding the absurd ‘squeamishness’ of his critics, claiming that their real motive was political. This was doubtless partly true, but Lockhart failed to recognise the genuine, if excessive, ‘squeamishness’ of Scots of earlier generations about naming individuals in public (for Mackenzie, a material objection to publishing his reminiscences).

Literary decorum provided an even stronger obstacle. Blair’s strictures on domestic history-writing in Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres (1783) show why the Scottish literati were so reluctant to publish their personal memoirs. He discusses ‘Memoirs’ as one of the inferior kinds of Historical Composition [. . .] in which an Author does not pretend to give full information of [. . .] the period of which he writes, but only to relate what he himself had access to know, or what he was concerned in, or what illustrates the conduct of some person, or the circumstances of some transaction, which he chooses for his subject.

Hence, ‘profound research, or enlarged information’ are not required, nor is the memoirist ‘subject to the same laws of dignity and gravity’ as a serious historian. ‘He may talk freely of himself; he may descend into the most familiar anecdotes.’ The only obligation is to
convey ‘useful and curious’ facts in a ‘sprightly and interesting’ manner. Blair thus grants memoirs some literary merit but no importance, describing them with genial contempt as ‘a species of Writing very bewitching to such as love to write concerning themselves’.

It was precisely the trivial, undignified nature of domestic writings that inhibited Scottish authors from exposing them to public gaze. Clerk left firm instructions on this matter in his manuscript Memoirs; since his intention, he explained, was only to satisfy the curiosity of his relations and dependants, he would write ‘with the same negligence of style that so many trifleing occurences may deserve’, adding, ‘with a view to all this, I absolutely prohibite and discharge any of my Posterity from lending them [heavily emphasised] or dispersing them abroad’.

Mackenzie’s resistance to the repeated urgings of booksellers and friends to publish his reminiscences was based on the same scruple. Such ‘trifles’, he feared, might ‘excite the ridicule of the fastidious, or the censures of the critical’, and he was nervous about ‘risking the little reputation which I have acquired as an author’ (quotations are from Literature and Literati: The Literary Correspondence and Notebooks of Henry Mackenzie, vol. 2, 1999). The aesthetic principle here is obvious: it was a central tenet of neo-classical criticism that art should aim at the dignified and general rather than the trivial and particular. But Mackenzie’s anxiety about his reputation has a specifically Scottish dimension: it reflects the disabling awareness among Scots of his generation of their insecure status in the Anglo-centric public sphere.

Domestic writing by Scottish women arguably flourished because rather than in spite of the protocols which excluded women generally from the public sphere, and the additional social stigma inhibiting middle- and upper-class women from publishing under their own name. Family memoirs provided a channel for talents and energies that under other conditions might have gone into the production of novels or plays. Dorothy McMillan identifies a strong ‘subterranean tradition’ of memoir-writing which developed among upper-class Scotswomen, motivated by attachment to family and class, and ‘a sense of shared values’, rather than national loyalty as such. Addressing a limited circle of relations and friends without thought of publication (even posthumously), they adopt an intimate, high-spirited and forthright style, using dialogue and scene-setting details for dramatic effect, and skilfully control the dynamics of storytelling.

Lady Murray of Stanhope, whose account of the adventurous life of her mother, Lady Grisell Baillie, was written in 1749 and published in 1822 in Memoirs of the Lives and Characters of the Right Honourable George Baillie of Jerviswood, and of Lady Grisell Baillie, disclaimed literary pretensions: fearing that affection for her mother ‘may bias and blind me’, she resolves ‘to set a guard upon myself, to keep strictly to truth, and relate facts which will speak for themselves’. The result is far from the dry, emotionless chronicle this might suggest. Lady Murray’s powers of imaginative reconstruction, coloured by her irrepressible affection, give her story animation, poignancy and a satisfying shape. Lady Anne Lindsay Barnard, better known for her travel letters and journals, writes with more self-conscious craft. In her private memoirs (lengthy extracts from which were published in The Lives of the Lindsays, 1840), Barnard positions herself ironically as heroine of the narrative, making her appearance in 1750 as her mother’s first infant. ‘That child was the Anne Lindsay who now addresses you, and in the arms of my nurse I promised to be a little heiress, perhaps a heroine worthy of having my name posted on the front of a novel.’ She was robbed of her prospects, however, when her parents, ‘having nothing else to do in the country’, persisted in their ‘laudable aim of peopling the castle of Balcarres, till their family consisted of eight boys and three girls’. With a mixture of astringent humour and rueful honesty, Barnard
describes a privileged childhood made miserable by the punitive regimen presided over by their mother:

our house [. . .] was often a sort of little Bastile, in every closet of which was to be found a culprit, – some were sobbing and repeating verbs, others eating their bread and water – some preparing themselves to be whipped.

The talents of a novelist manqué are equally conspicuous in Lady Louisa Stuart’s biographical memoirs, especially her *Memoire of Frances, Lady Douglas* (1985), and sparkling ‘Account of John Duke of Argyll and his Family’ (in *Lady Louisa Stuart: Selections from her Manuscripts*, 1899). She turns character-portrayal into high art, excelling both in set-pieces, like the superb portrait of Lady Mary Coke, and in the satirical unfolding of character through situation and action. Jane Warburton, Duchess of Argyll, emerges from a string of appearances as a creature of incurable vulgarity and stupidity, her placid unawareness of her own deficiencies giving her a comic integrity that prevents the portrait from becoming mere caricature. Elizabeth Grant’s appealing *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (1898) is a later development of this ‘subterranean tradition’ into full-blown autobiographical narrative. 

By this time, and partly under the impetus of Byronic rhetorical self-dramatisation, conceptions of the boundaries between private and public discourse generally had changed. A critical year was 1838, when the publication of two works brought the issue of privacy into the foreground. These were an anonymous *Diary illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth* and Lockhart’s *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*. The author of the Diary reflects on 10 February 1811 on ‘the many times in which I have commenced writing a journal’ when something has thrown upon it that check, which diminishes the pleasure of writing and renders the matter less interesting. If nobody is ever to read what one writes, there is no satisfaction in writing; and if any body does see it, mischief ensues.

Publication of the diary did indeed cause ‘mischief’. Although it appeared anonymously, under the editorship of John Galt, and was disguised internally as the work of a man, it was immediately recognised as the product of the novelist Lady Charlotte Bury. As Lady Charlotte Campbell, daughter of the fifth Duke of Argyll, she had been lady-in-waiting to the ill-fated Caroline Princess of Wales from 1809 to 1818. The *Diary* provided a spicy potpourri of gossip, anecdotes, conversations and private letters from aristocratic and literary friends and sketches of well-known society figures. Published in the first year of Victoria’s reign, it revived memories of the scandals surrounding the marriage of George IV and Queen Caroline which had electrified the nation during a previous reign. Its reckless indiscretion and vivacious narrative style won it instant success with ordinary readers, but it was ferociously denounced in the leading literary journals as a disgraceful betrayal of private confidences. Henry Brougham, writing as spokesman for the Scottish literati in the *Edinburgh Review* in April 1838, made it the centrepiece of an eighty-page diatribe on ‘Abuses of the Press’. He poured vitriol on every aspect of the work, sneering at its errors, inconsistencies, slapdash style and ‘vulgar’ colloquialisms, but reserved his loudest thunder for ‘this high-born gentlewoman’s treachery’ as an egregious example of the ‘detestable conduct’ of someone, in a privileged position,

keeping minutes of every unguarded expression, notes of each thoughtless and careless action, and copies of hasty or unreflecting letter, for the purpose of afterwards coining the whole into money, by exposing all to the public gaze.
As if prescient, Lockhart in the same year laid down his code of practice as Scott’s biographer, stipulating that he would give no detailed record of Scott’s familiar talk because ‘I never thought it lawful to keep a journal of what passes in private society’. Nor, though Lockhart had defended Boswell’s biographical methods some years earlier, was it his intention to ‘Boswellise Scott’. He was criticised nonetheless for revealing unnecessary and indecorous details of Scott’s life: according to Thomas Carlyle, Lockhart was accused of recording ‘much that ought to have been suppressed’, and worse, of breaching the ‘sanctities of private life’. Ironically, Lockhart had condemned Hogg’s published account of Scott’s private life (1834) for its frankness. Social prejudice doubtless played a part, as Hogg’s modern editor, Douglas Mack, suggests in editing *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott* (1972): Lockhart would have been offended to see his father-in-law ‘discussed in print by a man of Hogg’s lowly background’.

By mid-nineteenth century, the society reflected in earlier domestic writings was extinct, but the urge to preserve its character for posterity stimulated new forms of non-fictional writing, both public, as in Hugh Miller’s autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (1854), and E. B. Ramsay’s *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* (1857), and private, as in Thomas Carlyle’s *Reminiscences* (compiled 1866–8). Carlyle continued the earlier tradition of domestic writing even as he transformed it. Portraits of individuals are the building blocks for a work which is at once a series of elegies, a powerful evocation of the Scotland of his youth, and an impassioned revisiting of his early life and his marriage. Carlyle intended his reminiscences to be published, after suitable edition, and versions based on his manuscripts duly appeared in 1881 and 1887; but it was only when Carlyle’s complete text was published in 1997 in *Reminiscences*, edited by K. Fielding and I. Campbell, that its organisation, method of composition and autobiographical character were fully revealed. The central and longest section, ‘Jane Welsh Carlyle’, was written in 1866 in the rawness of Carlyle’s grief and self-accusations after her death. It is flanked by ‘James Carlyle’, a memoir of his father (written in 1832), recalling Thomas’s childhood, and portraits of Edward Irving and Francis Jeffrey (written 1866–7), recalling his Edinburgh years. The three 1866–7 chapters were composed in diary form, giving them a compelling immediacy as memories of the past are interrupted by present concerns and feelings. Carlyle commented on the Irving and Jeffrey chapters that it ‘was her [Jane Welsh’s] connexion with them that chiefly impelled me’. Carlyle himself is the dominant subject, however, as he is intermittently aware: the Irving chapter, he notes, ‘turns out to be rather, of myself and Irving’.

*Reminiscences* and *My Schools and Schoolmasters* provide rare accounts of Scottish working people’s lives in this period (James Carlyle, like Miller, was a stonemason). Miller sent a copy of his book to Carlyle, who praised it enthusiastically in a letter to Miller of 9 March 1854: ‘Luminous, memorable; all wholesome, strong, fresh and breezy.’ *My Schools* does indeed breathe fresh life into Scottish domestic writing, boldly inverting the tradition of private memoirs as a record of upper-class society. It was publicly addressed to ‘working men’, to teach them the value of ‘self-culture’ in contrast to school education, but also offered readers of ‘higher’ classes ‘glimpses [. . .] of the inner life of the Scottish people’ and a ‘journey through the districts of society not yet very sedulously explored’.

Late in life, Henry Cockburn burnt all his old letters, ‘seeing’ – as he observed in his *Journal of Henry Cockburn; being a continuation of the Memorials of his time, 1831–1854* (1874) – ‘the future use that is often made of papers especially by friendly biographers who rarely hesitate to sacrifice confidence and delicacy to the promotion of sale or excitement’. He thus simultaneously protected his privacy and advertised to future readers of the published journal his control over his posthumous self-representation. The perennial fascination of letters,
journals and domestic writing lies in their conscious and artful renegotiation of the boundaries between private and public spheres.

Further reading


Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment

Ian Duncan

The term ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ was coined by W. R. Scott in 1900 to designate the great eighteenth-century flowering of moral philosophy and the human sciences in the university towns of Lowland Scotland. Recent critiques have challenged the category’s exceptionalism, arguing that Scotland already enjoyed a thriving literary and scientific culture in the decades before the Union, or that the attention lavished on Scottish developments has obscured the larger, general field of a ‘British Enlightenment’. Nevertheless the Scottish Enlightenment, as traditionally conceived, retains its integrity as a distinctive and coherent epoch of intellectual modernisation, its local achievements closely enough interlinked to constitute a general ‘project’. That project, which David Hume called ‘the science of man’, includes the establishment of human nature as both foundation and object of philosophical enquiry. Although many of its proponents were affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the thrust of this ‘science of man’ was essentially secular, towards the articulation of modernity as a historical, socio-economic and cultural condition. Inaugurated with Francis Hutcheson’s enquiry (after Shaftesbury) into the sentimental and aesthetic grounds of morality, the Enlightenment took off with Hume’s masterwork, A Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40). However few people read the Treatise in its original form, and Scottish philosophy in Hume’s wake – led by Thomas Reid – devoted itself to refuting his most radical argument: that our knowledge is founded on the imagination, and its objects are works of fiction. Nevertheless, Hume set the terms for the scientific projects that followed, and provided a philosophical matrix for the emergent (Romantic and modern) equation of ‘literature’ with fictional discourse – with novels, plays and poetry. This chapter will begin by looking briefly at the institutional formation of literature in the Scottish university curriculum, before going on to consider the new account of the status and function of the imagination in the Enlightenment science of man. By recognising the imagination as the ‘sensitive faculty’ upon which all knowledge of the world and of ourselves is founded, Scottish philosophy opens theoretical space not only for a heightened and amplified social realism but also for fiction as the authentic discourse of that realism.

The anti-Jacobin reaction of the 1790s effectively stifled the liberal projects of Enlightenment, although an Edinburgh-based revival took place in the early nineteenth century, in the booksellers’ genres of periodicals and fiction. What distinguished the Scottish Enlightenment proper both from this post-Enlightenment sequel and from the contemporaneous London-based literary culture of ‘the Age of Johnson’ was its civic and academic rather than purely commercial infrastructure. Particularly after 1746, when the
failure of the Jacobite challenge to the Hanoverian succession renewed political ability in the Lowlands, post-Union Scotland supplied the conditions for philosophical autonomy in an improving urban habitat with ‘national’ institutions that sustained a strong professional-class intelligentsia (professors, lawyers, clergymen), and the hospitable ideological climate of a Moderate ascendancy in the Church of Scotland. Its enquiries occupied the curricular domains of natural philosophy and mathematics as well as the emergent disciplines of the ‘natural history of man’: history (Hume, William Robertson), sociology (Adam Ferguson, John Millar), anthropology (Lord Kames), political economy (Sir James Steuart, Adam Smith), and rhetoric (Smith, Hugh Blair, George Campbell). Its printed works, such as Smith’s Wealth of Nations (1776) and the histories of Hume and Robertson, were incubated in the universities and accessory institutions (such as, in Edinburgh, the Speculative Society and Faculty of Advocates Library) and published in London by the Scottish booksellers who dominated the metropolitan trade (Strahan, Miller, Cadell).

Lecture courses on ‘Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres’ initiated the study of English literature as a university discipline. Adam Smith’s pioneering course (in Edinburgh and then Glasgow, 1748–63) framed literacy in English as a repertoire of techniques of self-fashioning for Scotsmen ambitious to enter careers in imperial administration and the professions opened up by the Union. Literary examples, drawn from modern as well as ancient writers, constitute a stock of resources for stylistic imitation. More than that, reading and writing in English — a linguistic medium formally distinct from everyday life — furnish moral habits of attention, reflection, representation and self-discipline premised upon a capacity for self-observation. Smith’s lectures specify the techniques of mixed narration, ‘indirect’ discourse and sympathetic identification perfected in the ascendant genre of the novel. Hugh Blair (appointed Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres at Edinburgh, 1762: the first chair in the new discipline) shifted the emphasis further towards the formation of taste, an aesthetic training in techniques of appreciation and discrimination. Influential as these lectures were, both as published texts (especially Blair’s, 1783) and as pedagogic models exported to the British colonies for well over a century, they stood in a problematic relation to the literary canons and values shaped through Romanticism. The rhetoric curriculum valued metropolitan English, and the normative authority of Anglo-British writers, at the expense of Scots, which it banished to a ‘rustic’ and ‘barbarous’ hinterland. At the same time, the principles of an Enlightenment natural history of society which informed the discipline brought primitive cultural states into a newly meaningful, anthropological focus — casting poetry itself, for example, as the characteristic invention of societies close to nature. The new rhetoric cut indigenous traditions off from modernity even as it opened up philosophical space for their appreciation and revival. The resulting ambivalence is exemplified in Blair’s interventions in two of the major literary sensations of the age. Blair promoted James Macpherson’s controversial translations of ancient Gaelic poetry into English prose, defending their authenticity on the grounds of their faithful rendition of a pre-feudal warrior culture. And, as Robert Burns’s mentor during the poet’s sojourn in Edinburgh, he encouraged Burns’s writing in Scots.

The university rhetoric courses instituted a ‘Scottish invention of English literature’ that was disciplinary in every sense. The Scottish Enlightenment also contributed to the theoretical formation of modern literary discourse. Humean empiricism produced a philosophical account of ‘common life’ and its representational basis in the imagination that would govern the practice of nineteenth-century realist fiction in Scotland and beyond. ‘Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres’ frames literary discourse as a historical object and a socialising practice. Hume stages the subjective emergence of the literary voice, as expressive
utterance of ‘the human’, in the famous conclusion to the first book of the Treatise of Human Nature. The author, hitherto a sheerly notional, conventional figure, suddenly enters the field of reading as Hume turns from philosophical argument to a fictional, dramatic, confessional mode of representation. ‘I’ becomes the signature of a psychologised, reflexive, contingent self, afflicted by ‘philosophical melancholy and delirium’:

I am at first affrighted and confounded with that forelorn solitude, in which I am plac’d in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell’d all human commerce, and left utterly abandon’d and disconsolate. Fain wou’d I run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but cannot prevail with myself to mix with such deformity. I call upon others to join me, in order to make a company apart; but no one will hearken to me. Every one keeps at a distance, and dreads that storm, which beats upon me from every side.

Not only will the philosopher’s heretical conclusions make him a ‘monster’ in the view of society – a view that the pressure of sympathy, or social conditioning, obliges him to share – but they churn up a vertiginous confusion within himself, as he strives to reconcile the self-subverting work of reason with the ‘illusion of the imagination’ that constitutes experience. The crisis resolves itself in a spontaneous re-entry into ‘the common affairs of life’:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour’s [sic] amusement, I wou’d return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them further.

Here then I find myself absolutely determin’d to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.

Intercourse with others, ‘the commerce and society of men’, produces the reality in which we live. The force of ‘nature’ is constitutively social and customary. The world is recharged with the positivity of social and emotional exchange.

In The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759) Adam Smith describes a kind of white noise of affective gratification through which ‘common life’ keeps itself going:

It is decent to be humble amidst great prosperity; but we can scarce express too much satisfaction in all the little occurrences of common life, in the company with which we spent the evening last night, in the entertainment that was set before us, in what was said and what was done, in all the little incidents of the present conversation, and in all those frivolous nothings which fill up the void of human life. Nothing is more graceful than habitual cheerfulness, which is always founded upon a peculiar relish for all the little pleasures which common occurrences afford. We readily sympathize with it: it inspires us with the same joy, and makes every trifle turn up to us in the same agreeable aspect in which it presents itself to the person endowed with this happy disposition.

Such language describes a reality that is customary and continuous, reproduced by microscopic transactions of exchange, so smoothly as to go unremarked. A subconscious
sympathetic medium ‘makes every trifle turn up to us’, or reflexively constitutes the texture of everyday life as present and self-evident. Smith’s language also acknowledges the absence of a metaphysical ground beneath this phenomenology. The transactions of ‘commerce and society’ are ‘frivolous nothings’ that ‘fill up the void of human life’: we glimpse the abyss of scepticism behind Smith’s bourgeois mimicry of a gentlemanly sprezzatura.

Why ‘nothings’, why a ‘void’? Because Humean scepticism posits this continuous, habitual world of ordinary relations as a work of fiction. ‘The memory, senses, and understanding,’ Hume insists in the Treatise, are ‘all of them founded on the imagination.’ The imagination fills in the gaps between discrete ‘impressions’ and writes phenomena into an intelligible text of experience. Less a ‘cogitative’ than a ‘sensitive’ (aesthetic) faculty, it provides the framework for cognition, as it structures an empirical reality empty of metaphysical forces. Articulating the relations of resemblance, contiguity and causality which constitute (in Susan Manning’s phrase) its ‘grammar’, the imagination produces the necessary illusions of spatial and temporal continuity, and – by extension – subjective as well as objective identity in space and time. The identity of an object over time is a ‘fiction of the imagination’; ‘we have a propensity to feign the continu’d existence of all sensible objects; and as this propensity arises from some lively impression of the memory, it bestows a vivacity on that fiction; or in other words, makes us believe the continu’d existence of a body’. ‘The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to bodies.’

This imaginary production of reality is customary, that is, habitual and social, rather than solipsistic. ‘[All] our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv’d from nothing but custom’: custom alone – repetition and habituation – produces the effects of continuity and consistency that weave together an intelligible, familiar world and our identities in it. In the second and third books of the Treatise Hume explores this domain of the social and customary, representing the basis of morality in the emotions rather than reason. Adam Smith, Hume’s friend and disciple, devoted his career to a systematic mapping of the domains and disciplines that make up the ‘sphere of common life’: moral psychology, rhetoric, jurisprudence and political economy. Smith identifies exchange as the foundational principle of social life, and makes it the key trope of his philosophy. Economic exchange (commerce), linguistic exchange (conversation) and sentimental exchange (sympathy) provide the structures of mediation and continuity that sustain a shared empirical world. Smith’s essay on ‘the first formation of languages’ (drawn from his rhetoric course) offers a conjectural account of the primal scene of linguistic usage:

Two savages, who had never been taught to speak, but had been bred up remote from the societies of men, would endeavour to make their mutual wants intelligible to one another, by uttering certain sounds, whenever they meant to denote certain objects.

Language comes into being as dialogue, the utterance of ‘mutual wants’. The Theory of Moral Sentiments shows how sympathetic exchange generates the ethical and social imagination. And if, according to The Wealth of Nations, there exists a fundamental ‘propensity in human nature [. . .] to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another’, then commercial society, the economic form of modernity, represents human nature’s fulfilment rather than its corruption.

Smith’s account of modernity may be contrasted with another major Scottish Enlightenment analysis, Adam Ferguson’s Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767). Ferguson and Smith share the view of modernisation as a structural amplification and
complication of economic and social relations: the ‘separation of arts and professions’, the ‘division of labour’. For Ferguson, the sheer aggregation of different functions and competing interests threatens the coherence of the social body, disintegrating ‘the national spirit’. Smith, however, replaces the human body as the figure of a social totality (the ‘body politic’) with the abstract principle of exchange. The ‘propensity in human nature [. . .] to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’ renders abstraction from the body in terms of gain rather than loss. Smith represents socio-economic modernisation as a geometrical, ‘metaphysical’ increase in formal complexity which brings, instead of fragmentation and atomisation, a multiplication of connections and mediations, binding together a potentially planetary totality. The first chapter of *The Wealth of Nations* unfolds a remarkable meditation on the condition of the object in a commercial society. The philosopher’s vision illuminates the ‘coarse and rough’ woollen coat of the humble workman with an aura of almost infinitely extensive and intricate relations of production:

Observe the accommodation of the most common artificer or day-labourer in a civilised and thriving country, and you will perceive that the number of people of whose industry a part, though but a small part, has been employed in procuring him this accommodation, exceeds all computation. The woollen coat, for example, which covers the day-labourer, as coarse and rough as it may appear, is the produce of the joint labour of a great multitude of workmen. The shepherd, the sorter of the wool, the wool-comber or carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, the dresser, with many others, must all join their different arts in order to complete this homely production. How many merchants and carriers, besides, must have been employed in transporting the materials from some of those workmen to others who often live in a very distant part of the country! How much commerce and navigation in particular, how many ship-builders, sailors, sail-makers, rope-makers, must have been employed in order to bring together the different drugs made use of by the dyer, which often come from the remotest corners of the world!

Wealth has become an imaginary condition, generated by a global network of relations of production and exchange that remains invisible to the subject on the ground, although it is legible in the register of the political economist. What appears present to the senses – the primitive simplicity of the woollen coat – is an illusion. Reality inheres in a fantastic glamour of complicities and connections, in a sublime, dynamic system rather than in solid bodies or objects. It is (and thus Smith displaces the work of weaving from the labourer’s coat to his own representation of it) textual and figurative.

Scientific methodology itself is ‘founded on the imagination’, Smith argues in an early, unpublished essay on ‘The principles which lead and direct philosophical inquiries: illustrated by the history of astronomy’. This gives a more explicitly Humean account of the mode of representation licensed by philosophical empiricism. ‘Philosophy is the science of the connecting principles of nature.’ But nature in its raw, empirical state consists of ‘solitary and incoherent’ phenomena that ‘disturb the easy movement of the imagination’:

Philosophy, by representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination, and to restore it, when it surveys the great revolutions of the universe, to that tone of tranquillity and composure, which is both most agreeable to itself, and most suitable to its nature. Philosophy, therefore, may be regarded as one of those arts which address themselves to the imagination.
Historically, ‘different systems of nature’ gain cultural acceptance to the extent that they ‘sooth the imagination, and [. . .] render the theatre of nature a more coherent, and therefore a more magnificent spectacle, than otherwise it would have appeared to be’. Aesthetic principles of ‘Wonder, Surprise, and Admiration’, appealing to and informing a social consensus, govern the development of scientific knowledge.

The Theory of Moral Sentiments analyses the subjective equivalences of the economic principles of exchange-value and the division of labour that constitute commercial society. The enquiry into social knowledge – the reciprocal inventions of self and other – produces an extraordinarily refined account of the imagination as morally constructive faculty that has had a formative effect on modern psychology. Following Hume, Smith identifies sympathy as a work of imaginary exchange that forges intersubjective bonds in a modern (implicitly urban) society of strangers and regulates the boundaries between self and other. But where Hume emphasises the involuntary, contagious force of a sympathy activated by physical expression, Smith invests sympathy with a disciplinary will gained on abstracting passion and sensation from their chaotic origins in the body. Sympathy is a moral technology that maintains society as the ‘cool’, affectively weak or neutral domain of ‘propriety’. It ‘flattens’ and ‘brings down’ (in Smith’s musical metaphor) the potentially violent and anarchic energy of the passions by passing them through the imaginary medium of another mind. Sympathy thus consists not of ‘the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer’, but the spectator’s own ‘consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same [. . .] situation’. Our senses ‘never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are [another person’s] sensations’. As a work of the imagination, sympathy finds inadequate material in those ‘passions which take their origin from the body’ and moulds itself, rather, upon ‘the shape and configuration of the imaginations’ of others. The ‘imaginary change of situation’ involves a complex set of reflections on ‘the whole case’ of the other person’s condition:

In all such cases, that there may be some correspondence of sentiments between the spectator and the person principally concerned, the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded.

Sympathy abstracts the companion’s suffering through a kind of virtual reading and writing – making it into a ‘case’, a text.

For the process to be morally productive, however, it turns out that the ‘sufferer’ has first to have sympathised with the ‘spectator’: bringing down the expression of his distress to match the latter’s basic condition of ‘insensibility’, since human nature will recoil from a violent outcry. Only then, through this prior act of moderation, will the spectator be capable of extending to the sufferer the solace of his sympathy. Reciprocally, we form our conduct by imagining ourselves as objects in another person’s point of view. Society is a ‘mirror’, or, rather, an imaginary hall of mirrors: ‘When I endeavour to examine my own conduct [. . .] I divide myself, as it were, into two persons’, spectator and agent, self and other. The sympathetic act that appropriates other to self at the same time converts self into other, doubling and dividing. Smith’s argument insists that this imaginary alienation, the formation of conscience through the exchange between self and other, is morally salutary as well as functionally necessary to social life.
The doubling or dividing of consciousness turns out to be crucial to the modern theory of fiction wrought through Humean empiricism. In the conclusion to Book I of the *Treatise of Human Nature* Hume insists on the dialectical structure of the thinker's fall into 'philosophical melancholy' and his sentimental recovery through a reattachment to 'the commerce and society of men'. The return to common life is not conclusive. If 'nature' drives the philosopher to seek relaxation in social cheer, nature will also eventually, just as surely, drive him to resume his lonely ratiocination – since the motive for philosophical enquiry, the desire to think through the fabric of everyday life, is no less pleasure-oriented. Truth belongs neither to alienated reflection nor to forgetful habituation, nor to some cognitive synthesis of the two, but to the open-ended, temporal oscillation between them. 'A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them.' Instead of a higher wisdom, Hume's 'mitigated scepticism' offers (with ironical modesty) a melancholic enjoyment in the lesson that 'pleasure' drives the turn to philosophical reflection as well as the return to common life.

Hume tests this dialectical scheme in an account of what he calls the hypothesis of 'the double existence of perceptions and objects', the strategy by which thoughtful persons reconcile their reflections with the practice of everyday life:

This philosophical system [. . .] is the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other. The imagination tells us, that our resembling perceptions have a continu’d and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by their absence. Reflection tells us, that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted in their existence, and different from each other. The contradiction betwixt these opinions we elude by a new fiction, which is conformable to the hypothesis both of reflection and fancy, by ascribing these contrary qualities to different existences: the interruption to perceptions, and the continuance to objects. Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack'd by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear in the point, that there is no possibility of disguising her. Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands, and by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires.

This is not merely an ideological delusion entertained by other, mystified thinkers. Hume’s irony, characteristically, implicates himself and his readers in the 'monstrous' conceit he exposes. The ‘new fiction’ allows us to ‘elude’ the contradiction opened up by reflection – not by closing it but by mentally occupying it, in the equivocation between reflection and belief. Consciousness, ‘feigning a double existence’, becomes doubled itself – at once interrupted and continuous, renewing the commitment to an illusion upon the knowledge of its illusoriness. Recognition of its fictive status makes the difference between this ‘philosophical system’ and Hume’s commentary. The recognition does not deliver us to an objective point of knowledge outside the system. Instead, it affords us a view – intermittent, itself subject to the temporal logic of ‘double existence’ – of our condition inside it. Our sentimental investment in common life and in the authority of custom is framed by the fitful, uneven knowledge of their fictiveness.

This doubled consciousness – oscillating between alienated reflection and absorption in the ‘illusion of imagination’, mediating rather than resolving a radical contradiction, generating a melancholy enjoyment – characterises the subjective effect of a work of
fiction. Readers of a realist novel ‘identify’ with the characters and accept the substantiality of their world at the same time as they know it is all a verbal invention. In Hume’s account, the traditional association of fiction with the falsification of reality recedes into the mist of a pre-modern, metaphysical world-view. Hume provided theoretical legitimacy for fiction as the mode of representation authentic to social reality at the very moment when ‘the rise of the novel’ was consolidating itself in Britain with the achievements of Fielding and Richardson. Yet the gap remained open between Hume’s theory and the status of the novel in eighteenth-century culture. Novels continued to claim for themselves the legitimating title of ‘history’, just as history retained its prestige among literary genres. Hume himself, when it came to applying his philosophical principles to writing narrative, turned to history and not the novel as the authoritative discourse of social reality.

The continued preference for history over fiction reflects the status of ‘belief’ as the scandalous crux of Hume’s philosophy. Hume’s claim that belief consists in the superior degree of ‘vivacity’ with which an impression strikes the imagination, according to his critics, eroded the categorical distinction between truth, especially revealed truth, and error. Another sceptical associate of Hume, Henry Home, Lord Kames, in his Elements of Criticism (1762), conflated the subjective realisation of a fiction, which he called ‘ideal presence’, with the psychology of belief; but this was an exceptional view. Kames enthusiastically grants fiction imaginative dominion by virtue of its technical command of the ‘vivacity of ideas’, but in doing so obliterates the crucial doubled consciousness between absorption and reflection activated in Hume’s theory. A more influential position was staked out by Thomas Reid, who made the question of belief central to his ‘confutation’ of Humean scepticism. In An Inquiry into the Human Mind (1764) Reid attacks Hume’s argument that all knowledge proceeds from the imagination. Far from expressing only a more intense degree of imaginative vivacity, belief is an original, intrinsic faculty of human nature, ‘a simple act of the mind’, irreducible to other terms or operations and immediately available to everybody. The evidence of our senses is authentic, and sceptical reflection the inauthentic delusion of philosophers out of touch with common life. Reid thus reaffirmed the traditional antithesis between reality and fiction that Hume had destabilised.

Hume’s theory of fiction would find its influential realisation in a later generation, in the novels of Walter Scott. Scott’s novels resolve the traditional antithesis between ‘romance’ and ‘real history’, and claim discursive autonomy for the work of fiction, by their dialectical embrace of both categories. Fiction and history are mutually constituted through the fictional re-creation of historical scenes and events. Through Scott, Humean empiricism generated a ‘novelistic’ model of the imagination that posed a fertile alternative, as Cairns Craig has suggested in Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism (2004), to the Kantian–Coleridgean transcendental model, associated (in modern academic criticism) with English Romantic poetry. Affirming the imagination’s epistemological primacy and endowing it with socially productive and normative functions, Hume established the philosophical matrix for the ascendancy of fictional realism in British literature.

**Further reading**


Urban poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries articulated the experiences of modern city life. It was also involved in the imaginative construction of the city, contributing to the formation of languages in which to imagine urban spaces and urban lives. Treatments of the city often focused on the changing economic situations of its inhabitants, and on social, political and cultural conditions perceived as specifically urban.

In his preface to the anonymous first publication of *The Battel, or Morning-Interview* (1716), Allan Ramsay (1684–1758) made an early plea for urban poetry: ‘This City, as Narrow it is, is the Scene of many Adventures which may be proper Subject for both Poet and Philosopher: But the Humour of undervaluing Home-Manufactory, discourages Publications.’ Linking the representation of urban scenes to the consumption of local or regional products, Ramsay promoted Edinburgh’s spaces and inhabitants as proper subjects for literature, and as subjects of national importance and interest. This contention set the mood for much of the poetry about cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Ramsay himself followed his declaration with the publication of several elegies on Edinburgh characters (such as the ‘Elegy on Maggy Johnston’) in 1718. His strategy of mixing traditionally elevated poetic forms with subjects conventionally perceived as vulgar subsequently served as a model for Robert Fergusson, James Thomson (‘B.V.’), John Davidson and other writers with particular interests in urban subjects as they attempted to find languages adequate for the representation of city environments.

Pastoral developed in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries into a preferred poetic mode for the representation of these emerging concerns. Outwardly portraying a more or less idealised view of the lives and loves of shepherds (independent from and frequently scornful of the societies and economies of the city), pastoral implicitly renegotiated the boundaries of urban and rural spaces. At the same time, it developed as a means for city-based writers to critique their environment by contrasting it with a supposedly simpler, more natural life in the countryside. Some poets also utilised pastoral in order to celebrate rather than condemn the city. ‘Urban pastoral’ set out to discover (human) nature, its life cycles and influences within urban societies. The pastoral eclogue became a favoured form for rendering disparate urban voices, mediating and potentially resolving their contesting views, while allowing each side to stake its claim independently. During the eighteenth century, this urban multiplicity of views and voices found its equivalent in the traffic of verse epistles between urbane writers, and in the communication networks set up and performed in these exchanges.
Ramsay has been credited with the transformation of the Scots verse epistle for the needs of metropolitan social commerce. Born in Leadhills, Lanarkshire, he moved to Edinburgh around 1700; by 1718 he had established himself as an important bookseller and publisher. Ramsay also became sufficiently renowned as a poet for William Hamilton of Gilbertfield to commence an epistolary exchange with him in 1719, which was published independently that year and included in Ramsay’s *Poems* of 1721. Ostensibly engaged in scurrilous, self-mocking praise, the seven epistles revived both the seventeenth-century poetic form called ‘standard Habbie’ (first employed by Robert Sempill of Beltrees in his mock-heroic elegy ‘The Life and Death of Habbie Simpson’) and the Scots language for the formation and display of sociable interchange between individuals of polite tastes and metropolitan understanding. Since the relocation of the Jacobean court to London in 1603, Scots as a poetic language had been relegated to the popular forms of ballads and songs, and to occasional comic writings such as Sempill’s ‘Habbie Simpson’. Ramsay, in collaboration with correspondents like Hamilton, showed that Scots could still be a language of elevated poetic diction, and at the same time modified both language and poetic form to suit the needs and interests of emerging Scottish urban middle classes with pretensions to British sociality and cosmopolitan sophistication.

These poetic exchanges represented the prototype of social and cultural networks that Ramsay not only gladly participated in but also actively sought to establish. In his poems to Hamilton he adopted the Horatian epistle’s idealisation of the writer’s rural retreat from the vagaries of city life, yet at the same time placed strong emphasis on the joys of urban sociability: cities function as centres of polite cultural commerce as well as of trade and politics in Ramsay’s poetry. Ramsay endeavoured to connect Edinburgh and Scotland to metropolitan, imperial and colonial hubs of power, and at the same time return to the city some of that consequence it had lost between the southward migrations of crown and parliament. Not only the verse epistles exchanged with poetical correspondents throughout the British Isles and North America, but also lyric poems addressed to Scottish nobility and gentry, to English poets like John Gay and Alexander Pope, or to sociable associations like the Whin-Bush Club, attested to this desire. *The Ever Green* (1724), an important antiquarian collection that made available to the public a large number of Middle Scots poems for the first time in three centuries, participated in both ventures by asserting the vibrancy of a specifically Scottish literary tradition in a publication designed for a pan-regional, British market.

Ramsay’s urban visions had always incorporated Edinburgh’s relations with the surrounding countryside and its local or regional, social and economic infrastructures. In ‘Edinburgh’s Address to the Country’, ‘Edina’ encourages rural inhabitants to ‘forsake the withered grove’, to shelter from the elements and seek sociable entertainment within her walls. The poem specifically targeted landed gentry and nobility, for the entertainments represented in the poem – among them ‘witty Clubs of Mind’ and ‘Schools of Law’ – were decidedly those of a cultural and economic elite. Ramsay here also inverted the Horatian ideal, painting the countryside as the source of (meteorological) disturbances, and the city as a haven from its vicissitudes.

Ramsay’s apostrophes to groups and individuals identified sociable interaction as a central element of city life. ‘To the Phiz [Club] an Ode’ and drinking songs like ‘Up in the Air’ celebrated urban sociability as they gestured towards the convivial atmosphere of urban social gatherings. Throughout the eighteenth century, clubs and societies in fact played an important part in the civilising mission and the process of cultural sophistication that urban sociability was supposed to bring about. Ramsay himself had helped found the Easy Club in 1712, where members adopted first English and subsequently Scottish
literary figures as pseudonyms and cultural patrons, in order to signal their distinguished, polite social and cultural status. The publication of Ramsay's four-volume collection of Scottish and English songs *The Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724–37) further linked this ideal of conviviality to the development of private entertainments organised around the performance of traditional tunes and lyrics, which were designed for an urban, bourgeois or aristocratic social elite eager to signal its rootedness in regional as well as national cultures.

Ramsay also demonstrated a keen interest in the 'Improvement' of Edinburgh through expansion and modernisation of the city in the cause of a contribution to the larger advancement of civilisation (such urban developments would contribute to Edinburgh's reputation in the early nineteenth century as the 'Athens of the North'). His struggles in the 1730s to establish a permanent and recognised theatre can be understood with reference to this ideal; though initially frustrated by kirk opposition in pulpit and court, Ramsay's efforts turned out to be first steps in the founding and wider social acceptance of a professional theatre in Edinburgh. He had displayed his general interest in Scottish improvements in poems such as 'The Pleasures of Improvements in Agriculture' and 'The Prospect of Plenty', and more specifically in Edinburgh's urban improvement in 'The Address of the Muse, to the Right Honourable George Drummond, Esq., Lord Provost; and Council of Edinburgh'. Ramsay had celebrated Drummond in a number of his earlier poems, and Drummond appeared with other city worthies in the lists of subscribers for Ramsay's *Poems* of 1721 and 1728. Ramsay's concern in 'The Address' lay primarily with the imagination and exposition of future projects: if enough money were set aside for urban improvements, the poem suggested that Edinburgh might be able to compete with Britain's metropolitan centre and 'bring the Best and Fairest down, /From England's Northern Counties, nigh as far/Distant from Court, as we of Pictland are'.

The same Lord Provost whom Ramsay had identified as an emerging leader in Edinburgh's improvement represented for another Edinburgh poet an ideal, or at least idealised, paternalistic civil servant, who had sent the city of Edinburgh on its path to national prominence with the projection of the New Town and other improvements. Born in Edinburgh in Cap-and-Feather Close (a lane that had to give way to the building of the North Bridge to connect the Old and New Towns), Robert Fergusson (1750–74) lived just long enough to witness and celebrate the beginnings of the New Town. At a time when the Old Town remained home to the vast majority of Edinburgh's inhabitants, however, his poetry dealt primarily with the energy and sociability of life in that quarter.

Fergusson's position in *Auld Reikie: A Poem* (1773) is mainly that of a reviewer appraising and praising Drummond's posthumous achievements. Most of the poem is dedicated to the spectacle of Edinburgh's social harmony and cultural greatness, produced and realised by the urban improvements Ramsay, Drummond and others had envisioned and initiated in the preceding five decades. The various appearances and voices of 'Servant Lasses', chairmen, lawyers and traders, 'WHORES and CULLS', tavern revellers, church-goers and 'dandring Cits' all combine to form a motley yet integrated image of social community and commerce. Incongruous voices and spaces remain, but, as with Fergusson's representations of urban communities and revelries in 'Hallow-Fair', 'The Daft-Days' and 'The King's Birth-Day in Edinburgh', discord merely serves to produce alternative forms of sociability, which are then reintegrated into national society through their literary representation. Towards the end of *Auld Reikie*, Fergusson even revives the trope of Edinburgh as a shelter from 'canker'd biting Show'r' and rural solitude. As in 'The Daft-Days', the city provides spaces for the enjoyment of social commerce, organised around the sociable conviviality of Edinburgh's taverns and urban crowds. In a section added to *Auld Reikie* after its initial publication, however,
Fergusson accused Drummond’s successors to the office of Lord Provost of corruption, and of their neglect of communal in favour of personal interests. Local and national social cohesion falter when individual interests are pursued at the expense of urban improvements, and when selfish commerce supersedes the demands for social responsibility.

Fergusson may be read as the poet of an improving, modernising Edinburgh, with its growing New Town, its developing theatrical scene (he contributed songs and a prologue to plays staged at the Canongate and Royal Theatres) and its increasing commercial and cultural importance within the consolidating British nation and its empire. Yet he noted as well the losses sustained by Edinburgh (and more generally by Scotland) in the processes of improvement, not least in his fiercely regionalist poems such as ‘The Rivers of Scotland’, ‘Hame Content’, or the unambiguously named ‘Elegy, On the Death of Scots Music’. His poetry made clear that urban improvements entailed the displacement of older structures: the demolition of Old Town buildings like the Luckenbooths and the Netherbow, and the gradual obsolescence of popular rituals and customs. Like his contemporary James Wilson (c.1730–87), who published mock-elegies on Old Town edifices under the pseudonym ‘Claudero’, Fergusson’s burlesque poem ‘The Canongate Play-House in Ruins’ fondly memorialised a disappearing cityscape, while marking its outdated incongruity with Edinburgh’s new urban spaces. A similar effort of comic commemoration underlay Fergusson’s carnivalistic poems – ‘The Daft-Days’, ‘Hallow-Fair’, ‘Leith Races’ and ‘The Election’, among others – not least because in all but the first of these he employed the Middle Scots ‘Christis Kirk’ stanza. These representations of annual raucous fairs and celebrations also retained a seasonal rhythm, another reminder that the modern city remained involved in or incorporated rural and traditional forms of sociability and commerce. Pastoral lyrics like ‘The Town and Country Contrasted’ or ‘On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street’ wittily rehearsed the conventional condemnation of urban vices and the praise of rural virtues, sentiments that also informed the georgic domestic idyll presented in ‘The Farmer’s Ingle’.

Fergusson’s view of urban sociability in his carnivalistic poems was less that of a polite than of a raucous, rebellious and at times violent community. ‘Hallow-Fair’ represents voices and spaces that escape the homogenising effects of polite social commerce and instead establish social cohesion on alternate terms. The tensions between individual desires and social interests might be held in suspension in the production and representation of urban sociabilities, but Fergusson’s popular gatherings were frequently at odds with official notions of social order, and led to clashes with the City Guard and the tastes of polite readers alike. This is most apparent in ‘The King’s Birth-Day’, in which the city celebrates the holiday in orthodox fashion, with ringing of bells, military salutes and parades calculated to instil a sense of national social belonging and community. The riotous Edinburgh mob, however, soon disrupts these activities, throwing fireworks and dead cats at city worthies, ‘Which lays his honours on the ground/As flat’s a flounder’. Class antagonisms turn into bloody brawls with the City Guard, in the course of which the mob consolidates itself in narrative and print as an articulate and coherent social body.

Fergusson also adapted the pastoral eclogue by joining it with the Middle Scots ‘flyting’ tradition, to render the contesting voices of urban debates over social and cultural, national and regional issues. In ‘The Ghaists: A Kirk-yard Eclogue’, the ghosts of Edinburgh philanthropists George Watson and George Heriot condemn in unison contemporary economic politics detrimental to Scottish charity schools. ‘A Drink Eclogue’ and the ‘Mutual Complaint of Plainstanes and Causey, in their Mother-tongue’, on the other hand, present speakers who are strongly at odds: ‘Whisky’ and ‘Brandy’ decry each other’s detrimental effects on Scottish culture, while the pavement and the cobbledstone street each claim their
particular suffering at the hands (or feet) of Edinburgh’s population and city council in the ‘Mutual Complaint’. Although each text clearly promotes a specific attitude towards its central issue, the sometimes extremely disparate opinions of their speakers are generally left unchallenged by any interventions of an authoritative narrator. Although ‘Brandy’ is unmasked as an impostor bottle of ‘WHISKY tinctur’d wi’ the SAFFRON dye’ to pass for a more expensive liquor, his charges against ‘Whisky’ are not necessarily negated by this discovery. The complaints of ‘The Ghaists’, too, though similar to each other in tone and sentiment, retain an element of divergence that is never quite resolved.

This contest and balance of opinions resembled the publication context of Fergusson’s poetry, most of which first appeared in Walter Ruddiman’s *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement*. Readers found his poems between advertisements, news items, opinion pieces and reports; his writings had to contend for readerly attention with those other articles, but also attracted a potentially wider, more socially and culturally varied urban readership than they would in their later incarnations in book form. The journalistic multiplicity of voices found in the *Magazine* corresponded with the poetic multi-vocality of Fergusson’s macaronic compositions, texts that combined elements of neo-classical English and vernacular Scots diction. He announced this linguistic strategy explicitly in the dog-Latin subtitle of ‘The Election’ and the epigram for ‘The King’s Birth-Day’, taking the latter from William Drummond of Hawthornden’s macaronic *Polemo-Middinia* (1642–50?). The macaronic mode here draws attention to the confusion of voices during these urban festivities, as the lines of ‘The King’s Birth-Day’ switch back and forth between elevated English and colloquial Scots expressions: ‘O Muse, be kind, and dinna fash us’. The form also emphasises Fergusson’s position as an Anglo-Scots poet, perpetually renegotiating tensions between regional and metropolitan languages, at a time when Scots was increasingly identified with provincial or pastoral topics, and a newly standardised English was becoming the linguistic norm for social, cultural and political elites in a British Empire. Interweaving the two idioms, Fergusson’s poetry often refused exclusive identification with either regional or national voices; it rather signalled the position of the Anglo-Scot astride a linguistic and cultural divide, seeking simultaneous advancement in the metropolitan centre and recognition at home.

Like Ramsay and Fergusson, many Anglo-Scots remained in Scotland, pursuing flourishing careers in its towns and cities. For a considerable number of young ambitious writers, however, economic success and cultural significance seemed inextricably tied to London, and to their acquisition of a linguistic presence appropriate for their residence in the heart of the nation and the Empire. David Malloch (1705–65) (whose move to London was deplored by Ramsay in his *Poems of 1728*) not only reformed his literary style, but also changed his name to Mallet and eradicated his regional accent entirely. Others were less fastidious: while James Thomson (1700–48), Joanna Baillie (1762–1851) and John Davidson (1857–1909) developed their writing according to contemporary metropolitan normative styles, and in the process helped evolve new poetics for a British nation and empire, they retained more or less pronounced Scottish accents in their everyday speech.

Thomson’s poetry has by now become almost synonymous with the writing of a British national and cultural compromise. In his long narrative poem *Liberty* (1735–6), he envisioned the rise of the British state largely in terms of urban development, of an expansion and aggrandisement of the city that demonstrated not only the funds available for projects of urban improvement, but asserted and signified the cultural prominence and civilising mission of Britain more generally. This is the optimistic, historically and materially progressive perception of the city that Ramsay had already hinted at in ‘The Address of the Muse’, and on which Fergusson drew in *Auld Reikie*. Yet Fergusson also tempered this
enthusiasm for improvements with images of corruption, poverty and decay, thereby anticipating topics identified by succeeding generations of poets with urban environments.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Romantic poetics and aesthetics (themselves in part a reaction to the increasing industrialisation and urbanisation of the 1780s and 1790s), urban poetry was affected in two ways. On the one hand, an increased focus on settings and subjects in the countryside made the city, even as a repository for negative elements of society and human nature, less of a poetic topic. The Horatian view of the city was displaced by a general disregard of urban spaces, although Baillie sought to contradict this trend in her poem ‘London’ by representing ‘England’s vast capital in fair expanse’ not only in the conventional language of improvement, but also by discovering signs of a divine order in this human-created space, ‘Of restless, reckless man, and years gone by, /And time fast wending to Eternity’. On the other hand, the attention of poets and other social commentators was increasingly drawn to the plight of the urban poor, to the conditions of work and life in and around factories and inner-city slums across Britain. Next to these attitudes, the concept of the city as a marker of the progress of civilisation remained current, though in a society gripped by theories of evolution this notion could encompass images of decline as well as of improvement.

Scotland’s rapidly urbanising areas were no exception. In the Lowlands, Janet Hamilton (1795–1873) commented in poems and essays of the 1860s on the drastic changes to landscape and social relations brought to her native North Lanarkshire by the establishment of iron mills, and condemned the influence of alcohol on workers and their families. William Thom (1798–1848) wrote satires and scathing social critiques on the conditions of Aberdeenshire weavers in the 1840s, while Ellen Johnston, ‘The Factory Girl’ (c. 1835–73), did the same for weavers and other factory workers between Dundee and Glasgow in her Autobiography, Poems and Songs (1867). A decade later, the Glasgow-based writers Marion Bernstein (fl. 1876) and Jessie Russell (b. 1850) were analysing women’s conditions in the domestic spaces of the city and in society at large, topics also of considerable interest to Edinburgh-born Isabella Craig-Knox (1831–1903), who began publishing her poetry in The Scotsman under the pen-name ‘Isa’ and continued to focus on women’s rights and the plight of industrial workers after her move to London in 1859.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, poets like these came to express sentiments and opinions that could be shared by an increasing number of readers. Not only did a rising literacy rate enable and depend on a growing number of newspapers and magazines with ever-expanding circulations, most of which were published out of urban centres, but life in the city became the defining experience for a majority of British subjects for the first time. No wonder then that many aspiring poets, especially those based in the metropolis, decided to begin their careers with submissions to such papers and magazines.

James Thomson was born in Port Glasgow on 23 November 1834; around 1840 his family relocated to the East End of London, where he received an education at the Royal Caledonian Asylum and the Royal Military Asylum in Chelsea. Around 1862 he began to write for the National Reformer, a radical weekly paper run by Charles Bradlaugh. Thomson had been publishing poems and literary reviews since 1858 in the Investigator (another of Bradlaugh’s projects) and Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine, but it was with his contributions to the Reformer that he made a name for himself under the pseudonym ‘Bysshe Vanolis’ (a tribute to Percy Bysshe Shelley and the German Romantic poet ‘Novalis’), which he later shortened to ‘B.V.’. It was also in the Reformer that his most famous poem, The City of Dreadful Night, was first serialised in 1874 (he later revised and published it in book form in 1880, two years before his death).
Thomson’s poetry furnishes some of the strongest examples in nineteenth-century urban poetry of the alienating and isolating effects of city life. Indeed, the loneliness of the individual among urban crowds or in nocturnal urban spaces is one of the defining images in his writings. It can already be discerned in his description of ‘anxious crowds’ and ‘That ceaseless uproar’ of busy streets in ‘The Approach to St Paul’s’ of 1855, and reappears as late as 1882 in ‘Insomnia’, a peripatetic nightmare vision of the city similar to the one he had already offered in The City.

The trope of the ‘dark city’ as it appeared in Thomson’s writings had been part of the repertoire of urban poetry from at least the 1850s onwards, although it was an element in a much larger development of the representation of cities across the nineteenth century: William Blake had offered glimpses of this vision in his Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1794), while T. S. Eliot would adapt many of the themes in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ (1917) and most famously in The Waste Land (1922). Thomson’s particular imagery, however, resembles most closely the productions of two Glaswegian writers, Alexander Smith (1830–67) and James Macfarlan (1832–62). Smith published his poem ‘Glasgow’ in 1857, in which he praised ‘Another beauty, sad and stern’, of an alternately twilit and nocturnal city in the persona of a lonely visitor walking its streets. Macfarlan, in his poem ‘The Ruined City’ (1882), anticipated both title and mood of Thomson’s ‘Doom of a City’ (first published incomplete in 1884, but written in 1857) in its part-theological, part-Darwinian description of the devastation of a civilisation, and of ‘this city’s blasted heap’ that remains as its only memorial. In both poems, the ‘dark city’ functioned as the signifier of a modern era and its society: for Smith it was an opportunity for the creation and acceptance of a new aesthetics and a new way of life, for Macfarlan an apocalyptic expression of its religious scepticism and cultural decline.

Thomson combined both versions of the ‘dark city’ to present his particular interpretation of urban existence as a general condition of society and its individuals in this new era. His treatment of ‘this sordid, restless life of ours’ (‘St Paul’s’) shifted over the course of his career, from a representation of emotional isolation motivated by the individual’s lack of social contact within an urban crowd (as he characterised it in ‘The Approach to St Paul’s’) to a more symbolic portrayal of physically, emotionally and spiritually deserted urban spaces in his later poems. Throughout, however, he figured the dissolution of social and cultural connections between individuals in terms of spatial isolation.

Thomson’s most sustained, most intricate contemplation of this urban experience is certainly his long poem The City of Dreadful Night. Thematically and structurally, the poem dramatises the dissolution and simultaneous reconstruction of a fragmented urban society and its cultural narrative. It presents individuals and narrative sections isolated and alienated from each other, an assembly of poetical figures suspended in their attempts to narrate themselves into coherence. At the same time, the ‘Night’ and its deserted streets represent a disordered mental state more than any realistic markers for the temporal and spatial settings of this poem. Robert Louis Stevenson would represent London in similar ways and for similar effects in The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886). Thomson’s poem, simultaneously a symbolic vision of urban material conditions and the literary embodiment of a modern attitude to (urban) life, conflates references to exterior and interior topographies in order to produce a patho-psychologised image of urban realities:

The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

[...]
But when a dream night after night is brought
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

This understanding of city life received perhaps its most extreme treatment in Thomson’s 1872 poem ‘In the Room’, in which the anthropomorphised furniture of a bedroom recounts the last moments of a suicidal poet. Urban life has been transposed entirely on to personified objects, while metropolitan inhabitants become spectral memories that continue to haunt their living quarters long after life has left their bodies: ‘It lay, the he become now it [. . .]/ Unanxious how its parts might flit/ Through what new forms in time and space’.

In this vein, The City declares its simultaneous rejection and transformation of conventional theologies. If Thomson’s city is a conglomeration of features gleaned from a variety of actual cities such as Glasgow, London and Venice, it also takes elements from Dante Alighieri’s Inferno (written c.1300, first printed 1472). The city represents a materialist Hell that forces its inhabitants to relive perpetually the deaths of their faith, hope and love, of socially connective, redeeming ideals that would enable them to overcome the depressive mindset the city also denotes. At the same time, the poem declares the death not only of faith, but also of metaphysics itself: the city constitutes the only grounds for life, and death represents both an escape from this life and its fundamental condition, ‘Death-in-Life’.

James Young Geddes (1850–1913), a native of Dundee, would elaborate on this juxtaposition of religious and materialist doctrines in The New Inferno (1879), where a hell-turned-bustling-metropolis has become the only source of hope for the social and historical progress of a Scotland stagnating under the influence of religious rigidity.

Urban alienation and isolation were only part of a nineteenth-century concern about the effects of urban existences. The demands of modern life were simultaneously seen to preclude any possibility for the formation or conception of private individuals, and to dissolve them instead into a malleable, easily controllable crowd. John Davidson’s urban poems were strongly influenced by such an understanding. Born in Barrhead, Renfrewshire, and growing up in Greenock, Davidson knew about industrialisation and urbanisation at first hand. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Greenock had quadrupled its population, and had become the largest seaport in Scotland by the time Davidson was born. When he moved to London in 1889, the change in urban settings was more in degree than in kind, although he would still hark back to Scottish settings around Greenock for descriptions of rural landscapes in early poems like ‘A Ballad in Blank Verse’ (1894) and ‘In the Isle of Dogs’ (1898). For his representations of urban landscapes and their inhabitants, however, London appears to have provided him with the majority of his poetic materials.

In ‘Railway Stations’ (1909), Davidson outlined his sense of city dwellers as ‘a brimming human flood’ of exploited labourers, whose lives were led according to the dictates of an industrialised capitalist society. The city’s inhabitants and workers lose any semblance of selfhood, agency or individuality in this poem, and metamorphose into labouring forces assembled and organised, physically and mentally, for the benefit of equally faceless agents of capitalist accumulation and exploitation. The observer of this urban scene, on the other hand, is conspicuously individualised, by virtue of his dissociation (within his own narrative) from the economic yoke of the masses, and his ability to supervise and recognise the movements, motivations and restrictions of that crowd by virtue of a ‘vision, penetrant as chemic rays’. This journalistic flâneur, a man-about-town frequently chosen by Davidson as his narrative persona, uses the crowd as his mirror and canvas.
This attitude towards mass culture and its consumers persists throughout Davidson’s poetry. The observers in ‘Holiday at Hampton Court’ (1898) and ‘The Crystal Palace’ (1908–9) ridicule the crowds of visitors by commenting on their automatic, ritualised enjoyment of tourist attractions that remind more of the rote movements of factory work than the release of a holiday: ‘They can’t tell why they come; they only know/They must shove through the holiday somehow’ (‘Crystal Palace’). Davidson understood the commercialisation of society to reach beyond the workplace and urban public spaces, into the times and spaces of leisure and the most personal, private activities. In such diverse poems as ‘Crystal Palace’, ‘Hampton Court’, ‘Thirty Bob a Week’ (1894) and ‘In a Music hall’ (1891), dancing, eating, smoking, sports, education, and the very conditions for an urban existence are subordinated in his descriptions of festivity and pastime pursuits to a culture of commerce, ‘The business and the office of the day, /The eating and the drinking’ (‘Crystal Palace’). By extension, Davidson represented journalists as quintessential urban subjects, since they inhabited a position where they might comment on the vagaries of their society, while writing for and depending on the markets of a consumer culture.

In his city eclogues of 1893–6, he appropriated and modified pastoral dialogue in order to comment on urban lives and events. In the choices of their titles and settings – ‘New Year’s Day’, ‘Michaelmas’, ‘Midsummer Day’ and ‘St George’s Day’ among them – the eclogues reintroduced a seasonal and spiritual organisation of life to the stratified temporality of industrialised urban landscapes, and thus offered his journalistic observers an individualisation of urban identities that he rejected for the average urban dweller in his poems of popular holiday entertainment. In the frequent disagreements and quarrels of the various journalistic figures in the eclogues, Davidson also rendered the fragmentations and realignments he understood an urban existence to force on its subjects. The collection of diverse performers’ voices in ‘Music hall’ may have a similar effect, and music hall performers undoubtedly found themselves in comparable economic and social circumstances to the majority of journalists (including Davidson himself and many other prominent contemporary writers). The discordant chorus of London vagrants in The Testament of a Prime Minister (1904) represents another such element of an urban community: its members appear socio-economically alienated and marginalised, yet at the same time they pass judgement on their society from a central position within the poem and its urban landscapes. Davidson also liked to present his readers with a figure now often characterised as a ‘heroic underdog’. Refusing to succumb to the trials and hardships of an urban life, this figure has been most often linked to the speaker of ‘Thirty Bob a Week’, now Davidson’s most frequently anthologised poem, but it also appears in poems like ‘Ayrshire Jock’ (1891), ‘Music hall’, ‘A Loafer’ (1894), and in some of his Testaments of the early 1900s. The current popularity of ‘Thirty Bob’ may arise from its tensions between a fatalistic determinism – ‘I don’t allow it’s luck and all a toss’ – and a grim resistance to the blows dealt by life, combined with a muted threat of insurrection against the guardians of the established order.

Davidson disappeared in March 1909, probably after committing suicide; his body was recovered at sea in September of the same year. He thus did not witness the cultural and social changes induced by (and inducing) the Great War, and the fundamental transformations Scottish urban poetry underwent in its duration. Urban themes seemed to all but disappear from explicit poetic treatment during the war. Instead, Scottish writers like Charles Murray (1864–1941) and John Buchan (1875–1940) frequently discussed the influences of the war on the Scottish countryside. It was also primarily at the home front that the stresses of war were deflected into the production of frequently nationalistic or patriotic texts. Violet Jacob (1863–1946) and Marion Angus (1866–1946) returned to the
traditions of (urbanely polite) songs and ballads to render the domestic experiences of war and connect them to modes of Scottish national expression. Neither was this an enterprise exclusive to women writers: Neil Munro’s (1864–1930) jingoistic ‘Hey, Jock, Are Ye Glad You “Listed”’ profited from the popular demand for enthusiastic pro-war songs.

Soldier poets like Harold Monro (1879–1928), Ewart Mackintosh (1893–1917) or Patrick MacGill (b.c. 1890) also mattered greatly to urban Scotland. Not only was much of their poetry published in the metropolitan centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as in London, but the poets themselves frequently returned from the war to the cities. In the case of the Craiglockhart Military Hospital near Edinburgh, this connection was especially salient: from April 1917 to June 1918 the magazine The Hydra was edited and published there, running for most of its existence (from August 1917) under the editorship of Wilfred Owen and featuring a number of his poems as well as some by Siegfried Sassoon.

The relations of Scottish poetry during the First World War to urban issues and city life were more indirect and allusive than they had been in much of the urban poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whether out of an evasive response to the destitutions of the war, or out of a sense that the pressing problems of the moment lay somewhere else (in the perceived decline of a Scottish culture distinct from English and British forms, or in the production of a transregional British culture based on values of the home and of the land), Scottish representations of urban spaces and problems had to wait until after the war, when writers of the Scottish Renaissance, notably Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978) in his long narrative poem A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926), elaborated on urban imageries and settings in order to produce an urbane and metropolitan, yet at the same time decisively Scottish poetry.

Further reading

Williams, Raymond (1973), The Country and the City, London: Chatto and Windus.
The Ossianic Revival, James Beattie and Primitivism

Dafydd Moore

James Beattie (1735–1803) and James Macpherson (1736–96), the man responsible for The Poems of Ossian (1760–5), make an interesting pair. Near exact contemporaries, and both educated at Marischal College, Aberdeen, under the influence of such luminaries as Thomas Blackwell, Alexander Gerard and Thomas Reid, their careers, and apparently temperaments, could not have been more different. Both had limited interest in poetry, though their alternative careers contrasted starkly: the one professor of philosophy and darling of the establishment; the other polemical historian, controversialist and political fixer. Samuel Johnson was inordinately fond of one, and nearly came to blows with the other in a famous row over the authenticity of Ossian that for so long overshadowed considerations of Macpherson as a poet. One was granted a government pension for his philosophical assault (as part of the so-called Common Sense school of Scottish philosophy most notably associated with Thomas Reid) on the blasphemous writings of Hume; the other for services rendered in the altogether murkier world of Georgian party politics. Between them they wrote two of the most important and influential primitivist works of the eighteenth century, but again these works could hardly be more different.

The Poems of Ossian represent a defining moment in the engagement between Gaelic and anglophone culture, and a crucial influence not only in the revival of the Gaelic heroic literature surrounding the legendary hero Fionn and his legendary poet son Oscian, but also in the development of Romanticism across Europe and the world, from Goethe to Walt Whitman and most stops in between. The ‘Ossianic revival’ might have happened without Macpherson, but we would not, perhaps, apply or indeed possess the adjective Ossianic without him. In its fullest version, Ossian offers a large-scale depiction and valorisation of a world of Celtic noble savages supported by as full an array of primitivist aesthetic and political-cum-sociological theory as Macpherson’s Scottish Enlightenment sponsors and inspirations could muster. Beattie’s poetic vision is altogether more modest (at least in intention if not effect). While Macpherson attempts the construction of an entire culture and to ride roughshod over conventional understandings of the nature of social progress, Beattie offers a personal account of the growth of the poet’s mind foursquare behind the ultimate benefits of civilisation and culture.

Yet for all these differences, Ossian and Beattie’s The Minstrel (1771) are important syntheses of Scottish primitivist thinking, and before moving to discuss each in turn it is worth making some broad observations about primitivism itself. Primitivism ascribes value to early states of human society free from the stultifying and spirit-crushing grip of sophisticated society and the corrupting temptations of luxury. Though it has a pedigree stretching back
into the classical world (and therefore into cultures later primitivists would value for being themselves primitive), primitivism is in the eighteenth century part of Enlightenment philosophy’s understanding of humankind in an earlier, ‘natural’ state, as being something other than bestial and corrupt. To primitivists, modern civilisation was not the crowning achievement of human civilisation, or even a necessary safeguard from humankind’s own nature, but the very thing which alienated humans from their state of natural benevolence, vigour and energy. Accordingly primitivists sought out and privileged those societies in which they could perceive the qualities of natural man.

The motivation for such engagement, and the sorts of locations in which natural man was to be found, differed from individual to individual across Europe and through the course of the century, from Macpherson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 1760s through to Wordsworth and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s. Perhaps uniquely, in Scotland commentators had only to cross the Highland Line to feel themselves (regardless of the realities of the case) engaging with a primitive culture. Primitivism differs for example in its political dimensions from the overt (Rousseau) to the implied (Macpherson and Wordsworth). That said, primitivism is always something more than nostalgia for a lost golden age and a vague confidence that ‘things’ were different and better ‘then’. Eighteenth-century primitivism is what we might recognise as an interdisciplinary concern. It interests itself in such literary matters as the rhetoric of primitive language and the recovery and rehabilitation of ‘primitive’ literatures via antiquarian research and a historicising and culturally relative literary criticism at odds with a belief in the timeless verities of neo-classical aesthetics. Thus not only works such as Thomas Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) but also Thomas Warton’s History of English Poetry (1774–81) can be seen as partaking in the spirit of primitivism, as well as the more enterprising, if reckless, activities of Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton. Primitivism is also interested in conjectural or ‘philosophical’ history – a history of how things ‘would have been’, constructed from non-conventional sources (such as literature) – and through extrapolation and inference from known cultures and manners – sociology, linguistics and political philosophy. Eighteenth-century Scottish thinkers in a range of fields formulated models of development and social change in which the category of the primitive finds a special and often privileged place, from the social theory and political philosophy of Adam Ferguson’s Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767) to the literary criticism of Hugh Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres (1783), from the linguistic theories of James Burnet to the literary–historical studies of Thomas Blackwell and Lord Kames.

Primitivism also stands at a nexus of potentially competing cultural and political frames of reference. Most great statements of primitive aesthetics are also statements about the Sublime as an aesthetic idiom, but equally primitive social values of spontaneous natural affection are heavily implicated in the cult of feeling. Accordingly, rhetorics of the sublime and sentimental collide in interesting ways in, for example, Ossian and in critical writings upon the poems, notably Hugh Blair’s Critical Dissertation (1763–5). Within primitivist thought the discourse of dispassionate scientific enquiry and historiographical investigation is brought into contact with a rhetoric of genius and the imagination, as well as with the polemical ‘patriot’ Whig, high Tory or Jacobite critiques of the eighteenth-century political and commercial settlement. These last three hardly make comfortable bed-fellows. Though apparently paradoxical, it is somehow typical that Macpherson’s critique of the Whig settlement via crypto-Jacobite rhetoric of commercial corruption and social decay takes its place in the primitivist pantheon alongside Rousseau’s sacred texts of republican revolution. Overall, then, while it is possible to say that primitivism seeks to rehabilitate and
recondition the past for its own purposes, to understand how that past became the present, and to articulate the links between the two, the functions of such rehabilitation, reconditioning and understanding can be varied and indeed contradictory.

Macpherson’s *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), *Fingal [. . .] and Other Poems* (1762) and *Temora [. . .] and Other Poems* (1763) introduced the anglophone world to the body of Gaelic verse concerned with the doings of the legendary hero Fionn Mac Cumhail, or, as Macpherson has it, Fingal. Two hundred or so years of scholarly controversy has settled to most scholars’ satisfaction the once hotly disputed provenance of the poems. The fact that Macpherson, a Gaelic-speaking Highlander, had at his disposal a large quantity of Gaelic poetry (some of it of considerable antiquity), both from manuscript and oral tradition, makes charges of straightforward forgery too simplistic; indeed, specific sources for specific poems are, even in the context of a protean oral tradition, thin on the ground. Macpherson also violated many of the norms of the Gaelic tradition. Where an exact source for an entire poem can be identified (for example ‘The Battle of Lora’), alterations in plot and sensibility make it closer to imitation than translation, even by eighteenth-century standards. In a way characteristic of the primitivist mode more generally, Macpherson seems to have interpreted Gaelic song culture through the literary theories of his age concerning primitive sensibility and poetry, and in terms of the historical model he sought to impose on the early history of the British Isles. A disparate ballad tradition was built into a recognisably epic one, originating in one epic poet, which demonstrated not only that the Scottish Highlander had once possessed the manners and virtue deemed ideal in the eighteenth century but that the Irish were colonists from Scotland rather than vice versa. This last point was crucial to Macpherson’s project of valorising Celtic Scotland: he simultaneously denied the Irish claim on Fingal by depicting him as a Scottish king fighting what amount to colonialist wars in Ireland, supporting clients against competing powers (be they Scandinavian in the epic *Fingal* or rival British factions in *Temora*), and creates a mainland British pan-Celticism that owes nothing to Irish descent.

This process of construction is inscribed, as it were, in the very form and history of Ossianic publication. Macpherson moves from a modest pamphlet of fifteen ‘fragments’ (sixteen in the second edition) containing only two pieces by ‘Oscian’ – albeit a pamphlet decked out in the formal manner of an eighteenth-century translation and with a big-talking preface supplied (anonymously) by Hugh Blair – to two quarto volumes containing two full-blown, quasi-neo-classical epics and numerous mini-epics by the poet Ossian. These epics were underpinned by an impressive arsenal of footnotes, classical and other literary references, scholarly dissertations on matters antiquarian from literary style to the origins and decay of nations. Both volumes were dedicated to the prime minister Bute. While some things remain constant in this process – be it the support of Blair and the Scottish *literati* or Macpherson’s adherence to his distinctive prose-poetry form and distinctively Ossianic gloom – it is nevertheless unwise to be too teleological, or to claim that Macpherson’s aims and ambitions remained absolutely constant over the three years of composition.

Macpherson’s activities played an important role in British antiquarianism. Not only did he retrieve important artefacts himself, but his claims for Ossian also motivated others to find evidence to disprove or reinforce his claims. Furthermore, he purported to create a complete picture of early Scottish history. However, Ossian tells us more about ideas of the primitive current within mid-eighteenth-century scholarship than it can about early Celtic Britain. We can find in Ossian the various influences of Thomas Blackwell’s *Enquiry into the Life and Writing of Homer* (1735), Robert Lowth’s *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), Edmund Burke’s
Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), as well as the literary theories of David Hume, Adam Smith and most notably Hugh Blair, who provided perhaps the most influential reading of Macpherson in his Critical Dissertation.

Primitivist linguistic theory sees early language as simple, muscular and fiery, but also highly metaphorical. This metaphorical exuberance is due to the unpolished and unrestrained nature of primitive man, but also to a paucity of available vocabulary: few words have to do the work of many. In contrast, more sophisticated languages develop larger and therefore more specific vocabularies. Furthermore, primitive man spends his time doing simple and muscular things such as hunting and fighting, and the combination of this style and the desire to record this subject matter lead to the characteristic literary production of primitive man: warrior epic written in the sublime style of fire and inspiration. As language and society develop, they both become more polished, restrained and (in the case of language) accurate. Literature now has models to emulate, and so offers less emphasis on imagination and genius. Overall, then, the message is that development away from the primitive cuts man and his literature off from the wellsprings of poetry as understood in primitivist terms.

Ossian embodies this theoretical understanding in its rhythmic prose, its simple paratactic sentences, its use of a limited vocabulary and set of images, its repetitive, incantatory phrasing, and its elemental, sublime vigour. This poetics proved highly popular and spawned countless imitations across Europe (though it should be noted that others expressed their admiration for Ossian by putting it into heroic couplets). For example, a Fingalian battle-charge is

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as a hundred winds on Morven; as the streams of a hundred hills; as clouds fly successive over heaven; or, as the dark ocean assaults the shore of the desart [sic]: so roaring, so vast, so terrible the armies mixed on Lena's echoing heath—The groan of the people spread over the hills; it was like the thunder of night, when the cloud bursts on Cona; and a thousand ghosts shriek at once on the hollow wind.
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This description goes on to conclude with Ossian's observation that 'My locks were not then so gray [sic]; nor trembled my hands of age. My eyes were not closed in darkness; nor failed my feet in the race.' This represents another important component of Ossianic primitivism, one which draws on the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility and equates moral feeling with retirement and defines it in opposition to 'the world'. Adherence to moral feeling and the simple dictates of the heart is located in the world of the primitive noble savage, whether this is conceived of in terms of rural culture (as it would later be by Wordsworth), or the past. Equally, the threatened and imminent extinction of the noble savage made him the ideal object for the exercise of the sympathetic faculties. Furthermore, Adam Smith, in his Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), suggested that the vigorous world of civil unrest and primitive violence was the most conducive to cultivation of the stoicism essential for the truly feeling subject, even if he also maintained that such times are not in themselves conducive to the practice of the sympathy that stoicism should inform.

Ossian articulates these insights and reconciles their contradictions in its polite ancient warriors and their tearful loves, its tales of melancholy battles of long ago, and in the figures of Fingal and Ossian, sentimental hero and sentimental poet respectively. Ossian's battles, fought in honourable causes, are vague in detail, and lack the bloodthirstiness of either Homeric epic or Gaelic heroic balladry. The concentration in the poems on the (frequently domestic) consequences of battles – more specifically of lost battles – rather than
on battlefield exploits, leads to an insistence on tearful reflection rather than martial ardour. Moreover, the presiding presence of the aged Ossian, relating these events from long ago, and the double perspective this affords, mutes any triumphalism. This figure of the last bard (which Macpherson’s poems shared with such works as Thomas Gray’s ‘The Bard’) was highly influential, in tone and effect, on writers such as James Fenimore Cooper well into the nineteenth century.

A specifically primitivist edge is provided to this sentimentalism by Macpherson’s insistence that the state of primitive grace is divorced from and destroyed by the forces of progress. In good Scottish Enlightenment historiographic style, Macpherson’s ‘Dissertation on the Aera of the Poems of Ossian’ posits three stages of human society organised successively around ‘consanguinity’, ‘property’ and ‘the laws and subordinations of government’:

As the first is formed on nature, so, of course, it is the most disinterested and noble. Men, in the last, have leisure to cultivate the mind, and to restore it, with reflection, to a primæval dignity of sentiment. The middle state is the region of compleat barbarism and ignorance.

While the return to nature outlined here may make room for what have come to be known, due to their sustained advancement in the pages of The Spectator (1711–12), as Addisonian notions of the interdependence of politeness, sentiment and the commercial advancement and sophistication of the state, Macpherson is adamant that no improvement on the original can be achieved. Throughout his dissertations on Ossian Macpherson emphasises that property and commerce do not affirm, but are in themselves destructive not only of the world of moral sentiment embodied by Fingal, but also of the literary culture that expressed and furthered it in the Caledonian past.

This leads to the third plank of the primitivist Ossian: the political-cum-sociological emphasis on the autonomous patriot citizen as opposed to later times of property and commerce. Fingal is determinedly pre-commercial, pre-propertied, in (for example) his pointed refusal of war reparation. A Jacobite rhetoric of commercial corruption brought about by the Hanoverian revolution – a corruption both of the individual and of the Scottish Lowlands by English gold – reminds us of the specifically Scottish provenance of this primitivism. Macpherson was himself from a relatively prominent Jacobite clan (albeit an illegitimate branch of it), and the Gaelic literature associated with Fionn by which Ossian is (however loosely) inspired is heavily involved in Jacobite iconography and myth-making. As a result, a number of critics have, with varying degrees of sympathy, read Ossianic primitivism as Jacobite wish-fulfilment. But just as Macpherson’s understanding of the heroic poetry of his youth was likely to have been in part shaped by exposure to primitivist critics such as Blackwell, so the Jacobite critique of Lowland commercialism articulated in the Gaelic culture of his youth was reinforced by the ideas of noble savagery and the disastrous effects of society of the luxuries and vices brought about by progress, as understood by the moral philosopher Adam Ferguson. Ferguson played a pivotal role in the Ossian affair; as a Gaelic speaker, he was one of the few who saw and understood the manuscripts from which Macpherson worked. Macpherson’s prose apparatus surrounding the Ossian poems bears a close resemblance to Ferguson’s ideas of community, of social cohesion and of the cause of corruption most notably laid out in his Essay on the History of Civil Society. That said, Macpherson demonstrates little explicit sense of Ferguson’s belief not only in the inevitability, but desirability, of social and economic progress, despite the risks and threats attendant upon it.
Indeed, Ferguson’s social theory, along with the poetic theories of Blackwell, Blair and Burke, contains a crucial balance between an appreciation of what an idealised primitive state might offer – vigour, simplicity, community values based around family and friends – and an understanding that no sane person would in reality exchange them for the advantages of a settled state, polished manners and the opportunity for philosophical enquiry. Macpherson’s prose does not explicitly acknowledge this paradox, and as such he pushes the discourse of primitivism to the point of logical contradiction. Ultimately the ‘return to nature’ doctrine of his three-stage history is not flexible enough to hold both his abhorrence of property and commerce, and his otherwise startling assertion that ‘commerce, we might prove, from many shining examples of our own times, is the proper inlet of arts and sciences, and all that exalts the human mind’. The contradiction is also encapsulated by the formal distinction between the poetic and supporting text, as the primitive Ossian is ushered on to the eighteenth-century stage with as big a blast of Enlightenment political and literary thought and scholarly apparatus as Macpherson can manage.

The poems themselves do, however, bear witness to this central primitivist insight and paradox, that noble savages are doomed to fall by virtue of their very holding out against forces that will make them less noble. The poems chart the self-obsolescence of the dream of the noble savage. The insistently belated nature of the poems (as old Ossian narrates the deeds of his youth and the pomp of Fingal in a way constantly shadowed by the doom that is to come) and the insistently prophetic nature of the narratives and characters that Ossian creates – they forecast the reduced future when the fields of their battles will be silent – produce a sustained depiction of the glory, the cost and the emptiness of the life of the noble savage. Like Ossian, Fingal knows he is doomed to have no successors, that his heroic life amounts to very little in the face of the inexorable forces of nature and time: ‘my renown is only in song [. . .]’.

Indeed, such an analysis reminds us that Macpherson’s primitivism can be seen in terms of particular Scottish events and cultural developments and in response to the pressures placed upon Scottish, and, in particular, Highland, civic culture after the Union of 1707. Macpherson’s endlessly doomed Celtic heroism, his sense, despite himself, that heroic Celticism is to be elegised and consigned to the past, is a response to the reverses inflicted on Gaelic soldiery and culture through the century. It is perhaps important not to overlook this in our eagerness to stress the international impact of Ossianic primitivism.

James Beattie tied himself up in no such knots on the subject of the relative merits of the primitive and the civilised. He was willing to allow that a savage may be a ‘finer animal’ than the civilised and display ‘a more animated picture of the undisguised energies of the human soul’ but his Essay on Poetry and Music as they Affect the Mind (1778) was equally confident that

the manners of polished life are beyond comparison more favourable to that benevolence, piety, and self-government, which are the glory of the Christian character, and the highest perfection of our nature, as rational and immortal beings.

Thus the primitive state might be ‘the best subject of epic and tragic poetry’ but the polished supplies ‘the means of real happiness here, and of eternal felicity hereafter’. Furthermore, Beattie’s preference for the time of Homer as an epic age rests not its moral qualities – though he does refer to Homeric ‘appetites unperverted by luxury’ – but on the fact that at this time men and manners ‘will approach to the nature of poetical or general ideas’ and be most suitable for universal, transhistorical appreciation. Beattie’s notion of
‘natural language’ is one not to do with the absence of social conditioning, but to do with decorum, with what ‘is suitable to the speaker and to the occasion’. The qualities Beattie admires in language – brevity, 'strength or energy of language', 'strength of expression' – are akin to those admired by the rhetorician of primitivism Blair, but he is silent as to the qualities of primitive language itself and snobby on the subject of the language of 'savages, illiterate persons, and children'. Most strikingly of all, his essay 'Illustrations of Sublimity' (1783) does not contain the nigh-on formulaic observation one finds in Burke, Blair or Macpherson on the relationship between primitive language and the sublime. Sublimity might be best vouched for by simplicity; it is also for Beattie fundamentally about elevation, and 'mean phrases', ‘barbarianisms’ and dialect can, he feels, never be sublime.

Beattie’s primitivism is less half-hearted than ahistorical. Where Macpherson seeks to posit a specific Scottish primitive culture existing in a specific time and (Scottish) place, and seeks to place this culture within the framework of literary and social theory, Beattie – at least in The Minstrel as we have it – reaches for a more internalised form of primitivism. That is not to say that The Minstrel lacks a specifically Scottish dimension – Beattie had projected to Thomas Blacklock in 1767 that Edwin is born ‘in the South of Scotland; which you know was the native land of the English minstrels; I mean of those minstrels that travelled into England’ – but that it is not insisted upon to the degree found in Macpherson. This might have been different had Beattie finished the projected third canto of the poem, in which Edwin is forced to become a minstrel on account of a (possibly) English invasion, but as it stands the poem does not concern itself with the fate of nations and dynasties, or even have a particularly heightened national consciousness. Beattie did have specific antiquarian interests – his essay ‘On Fable and Romance’ (1783) shows a thorough engagement with medieval culture and literature – and his primitivism does rely on external stimulus in the shape of the sublime Scottish landscape (though it is hardly insisted on as such), but the characteristics most essential to his primitivism have nothing to do with historical schema of development and everything to do with the development of the individual.

To take one example, Ossian purports to be a literal translation of Gaelic into English prose. The reader is meant to feel that this is as unmediated an access the non-Gaelic speaker is ever likely to get to Gaelic poetry. By contrast, The Minstrel makes no attempt to depict the language of the Middle Ages. The Spenserian stanza, revived earlier in the eighteenth century by William Shenstone in The Schoolmistress (1737–48) and most famously by Beattie’s fellow-Scot James Thomson in The Castle of Indolence (1740), may lend the poem a rustic air, but in fact Beattie wished The Minstrel to be viewed as a rehabilitation of the form from charges of anachronism. Spenser is imitated, Beattie observed to Blacklock, for the ‘harmony, simplicity and variety of his composition’ and for the flexibility it allowed to be ‘either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humour strikes me’.

The Minstrel represents the first two cantos of a poem whose aim was ‘to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a Minstrel’. The preface to the first edition made clear that the poem was inspired by Percy’s ‘Essay on the Ancient English Minstrels’, in the third part of his Reliques of Ancient English Poetry in 1765 (a work intended as a response to Macpherson’s theories of bardic society; its title disguised the substantial presence of Scottish ballads in the collection). However, there is very little to date the poem we have to a particular ‘rude age’, and the temptation to see the poem as autobiographical has proved too much for most readers.
The first canto tells of the education in nature of Edwin, the son of a Scottish shepherd, among 'bleak and barren Scotia's hills'. While Edwin wanders through sublime and dangerous scenery, his activities are geared towards observation, reflection and the moral lessons taught by the natural world and the cycle of the seasons, not the 'exploit of strength, dexterity, or speed' or the 'huntsman's puny craft'. This marks a denial of the muscular primitivist Macpherson, who, in the vein of Thomas Blackwell, saw the active lifestyle of the primitive poet as key to the primitive poetic sensibility. For Beattie's primitivism, authentic value lies in the humble simplicity of the rural life, uncluttered by luxury, avarice and the ‘sophists [. . .]/Who spread [their] filthy nets in Truth's fair fane’. Indeed, along with a confidence in the blessings of the humble life, which emerges from an opening reminiscent of one of the most celebrated of English poems in the elegiac mode, Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’ (1751), avoidance of 'cold-hearted sceptics' is the single most consistently invoked boon of Edwin’s primitive life. It is no coincidence that The Minstrel was composed at the same time as Beattie's Common Sense attack on Humean scepticism, The Essay on Truth (1770).

Canto Two (1774) makes the simple equation of Canto One (which, given the interjections of a much older narrator, was perhaps not that simple anyway) significantly problematic by staging a debate between innocence and experience. Edwin’s rural idyll, and some of his illusions, are shattered by overhearing the song of a hermit, a (not at all Ossianic) bard, who has escaped 'Fortune's rage' and bearing 'the scars of envy, spite and scorn' has retreated to the bosom of nature. The hermit questions Edwin’s reliance on the ‘gay dreams of fond romantic youth’ and advocates an engagement with life, the abandonment of ‘Fancy’s flowery ways’ in favour of the inspiration of those who ‘have born the load ourselves are doomed to bear’ and the study (in good Scottish Enlightenment style) of the liberal arts of civilisation, from law and government to philosophy, medicine and agriculture. A meaningful poetic voice, the hermit insists, combines a regard for nature which, unrestrained by experience of life, had threatened to become self-indulgent and overblown, with a consciousness ‘of the services man owes to man’. Beattie's view of the utility of nature is the recognisably neoclassical one formulated in Alexander Pope's Essay on Criticism as 'nature methodised', but it is combined with a self-conscious version of the paradox whereby the primitive only has meaning as a category of valued experience from a position of civilisation, and an early version of the key Romantic engagement with the conflict between retreat and engagement with humanity. The Minstrel makes clear that while the primitive state offers an instinctive moral grounding, the move to self-consciousness is inevitable and desirable since the cultivation of the primitive mindset is a limiting and potentially solipsistic disengagement with the social realities of human experience. Edwin must hold on to the psychological value and spiritual strength supplied by nature, the primitive state, 'those forms of bright perfection' that will provide a basis to his life, within the context of a full and healthy engagement with the challenges and disappointments of social life.

Overall then Ossian and The Minstrel offer versions of primitivism that together trace some of the distinctions, definitions and variations offered within the discourse as a whole. The challenges posed by writing about these figures, particularly in the context of a Scottish literature seeking to identify itself in its own terms within a context of Britishness, suggest two conclusions.

In terms of creating a history of Scottish literature, the primitivist discourse is vulnerable to charges of bad faith. In its choice of the elegiac mode, it is assimilative; it cultivates an attitude of tearful stoic indifference to events that might otherwise be resisted; it seeks to make impersonal and inevitable forces and changes that are neither but which originate
in specific political moments. Macpherson has been repeatedly accused of foisting a false image of Gaelic culture on the world in an argument that wonders how different notions of Gaelic poetic traditions would have been, had the spiky invitation of the Jacobite poet Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair) to study Gaelic poetry in his *Ais-eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich* (1751) been taken up.

The second observation concerns the process of rehabilitation. There is a temptation to seek to revise our sense of the importance of both men in terms of their influence on later, usually English, Romantic writers. While both men have indeed been elided from mainstream literary historiography in a way that needs serious interrogation, efforts to reinstate them must be handled with care if they are not to end up reductive and mired in circularity. The usual point of Romantic contact cited in relation to *The Minstrel* is *The Prelude*, the definitive Romantic statement of the influence of nature on the growth of the poetic sensibility. What Wordsworth may or may not have learnt from Beattie (or Macpherson for that matter) is of considerable interest and importance to all concerned, but neither of them hold the key to Wordsworth any more than the value of and interest in *Fingal* or *The Minstrel* is reliant on either text's influence upon the later writer. The importance of Scottish primitivism and its international cognates in providing Romanticism across Europe and the world with an important structure of feeling and expression is undeniably a crucial part of the story of both Macpherson and Beattie. However, too frequently in the past this undeniably important part of the story has stood in for genuine engagement with these figures and their works in properly historicised terms. Ultimately the exclusive or overhasty playing of the influence card unbalances our sense of the nature and importance of these poets in themselves; it does nothing to unsettle the central assumptions about the received literary canon that interest in such figures might otherwise discomfort.

**Further reading**


Scottish–Irish Connections, 1707–1918

Gerard Carruthers

Though Scotland has often been read as a place of confused and conflicting national identity following the Union of 1707, it might as well be read as a cultural melting pot. An instance of this phenomenon was found in the Irish dissenters who flocked to the Scottish universities during the eighteenth century, where, unlike the universities of England, they were not debarred by an oath of allegiance to the Church of England. James Arbuckle (1700–34?) from Belfast forms connections with all three of the most influential writers in the early decades of eighteenth-century Scotland. These three, Allan Ramsay, James Thomson and Francis Hutcheson, all of whom have been read as strong markers of a fissured Scottish culture, were involved in collaborative projects with Arbuckle which cumulatively tell an interesting alternative story of cultural consensus. Arbuckle, Thomson and others including David Malloch and Robert Blair contributed to the *Edinburgh Miscellany* (1720), an anthology attempting to assert Scotland's Augustan literary credentials; Arbuckle's own offering comprised half-a-dozen translations of Horace. Arbuckle, an arts student at the University of Glasgow at the time of publication (just as Thomson was a divinity student at the Edinburgh College), was part of a youthful impetus towards the reinscription of literature in Scotland in the face of 'official' hostility. A telling episode was Arbuckle's participation in a production of Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane* at Glasgow Grammar School in December 1720, which earned him the censure of the city university authorities. The prologue and epilogue to the performance written by Arbuckle rail against the university with which he had a long-running dispute over what he took to be a parcel of mismanagement, most especially under Principal Stirling. At root, Arbuckle felt at odds with an unbending Calvinist mentality, going into print in a pamphlet to complain of the treatment that he and others had received from those in authority who interfered with their staging of *Tamerlane* and also of Addison's *Cato*. In *A Short Account of the Late Treatment of the Students of the University of G——W* (Dublin, 1722) he writes that he and his colleagues 'have been called wicked and ungodly, for endeavouring to raise in [the audience's] Minds, the most beautiful sentiments of Liberty and Virtue'. The *Prologue and Epilogue to Tamerlane* had already compared the university authorities to the Jacobites, tarring both as 'a tyrannizing faction'. In such ways Arbuckle defined himself as a moderate, cultured Whig and Presbyterian true to the principles of the Glorious Revolution initiated by William III, for whom Rowe's *Tamerlane* stood in allegory.

We find a chiming moderation in politics, religion and lifestyle, telling of the new cultural dispensation men like Arbuckle were attempting to establish, in Allan Ramsay's 'An Epistle to Mr James Arbuckle' (1719). Ramsay, culturally a Jacobite in his outlook, had
composed his poem for Arbuckle after the Irishman had written ‘To Mr Allan Ramsay on the Publication of His Poems’ commending the Scottish writer’s wit and his ability in the pastoral mode. Here as elsewhere, Arbuckle heralds the revival of literature in Scots: ‘‘tis so long since Scotia’s Plains/Could boast of such melodious Lays?’ In Glotta: A Poem (1721) Arbuckle reminded Scotland of its previous literary heritage, ambidextrously invoking both the medieval poet Gavin Douglas (a Jacobite, Catholic and Episcopalian cultural icon in the circle of Thomas Ruddiman and Allan Ramsay in the early eighteenth century) and George Buchanan (seen in most orthodox terms in the early eighteenth century as a ‘Whig’ figure). As ‘Hibernicus’ writing a series of discursive letters in the Dublin Journal (which he also edited) during the mid-1720s, Arbuckle maintained his status as an activist on behalf of Scottish literature. In a letter dated 10 July 1725 and printed in 1734, he writes: ‘I have also seen large Fragments of a Ballad called Hardiknute, wherein there is a Life, and a Nobleness both of Design and Expression, that might have become the Augustan Age.’ He associates the transmission of the poem with ‘an old woman in Scotland’ and laments the fact that more such material might have been available ‘had it not been for an unaccountable Humour which prevailed in that Nation about twenty or thirty Years ago, of extirpating their old Women, and burning them for Witches’.

As part of a circle generally under the philosophical influence of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Arbuckle came into contact with another Irishman working in Dublin, the Ulsterman Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), who, as Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow from 1729, is often described as the ‘father’ of the Scottish Enlightenment. A loved and much-admired lecturer for many years, his ideas reached a larger, and more influential, audience than was touched by Arbuckle’s earlier pronouncements. In 1725 Arbuckle published six letters by Hutcheson (later named his Reflections Upon Laughter) in the Dublin Journal, in which the philosopher can be seen developing his notion of a generous aesthetic sense as an important component of the moderate or ‘New Licht’ view of humanity that comes to impact progressively upon eighteenth-century Scotland. Hutcheson was the first professor in a Scottish university to lecture in English rather than Latin; he, like Arbuckle, was officially confronted during his time at Glasgow University when elements of the Presbytery of Glasgow took exception to his ‘moral sense’ teaching that heathens had access to virtue even though ignorant of Christian Revelation. The charge of heresy, however, was thrown out. Men like Hutcheson and Arbuckle clearly demonstrate a liberal Irish (or perhaps Scots–Irish) Presbyterian mind at work to the benefit of eighteenth-century Scotland, as they make a contribution to the opening up of cultural and literary space.

Oblique reference to the arrival of Columba from Ireland is made by James Thomson in the ‘Autumn’ section of his The Seasons (1726–30). While William Wallace was fulsomely included in Thomson’s pantheon of ‘British’ historical icons, the problematic pre-Reformation Irish figure in the Christianising of Scotland somehow occupied a more controversial niche. Thomson, who more than anyone popularised landscape poetry imbued with spiritual and physical holism, in ‘Winter’ found in the synthesising moral and empirical apprehensions of the philosophy of Francis Hutcheson, a strong propulsive force:

Then would we try to scan the moral world,
Which, though to us it seems embroiled, moves on
In higher order, fitted and impelled
By Wisdom’s finest hand, and issuing all
In general good.
Although the versions of the ‘Ossian’ legends promulgated in the poetry of James Macpherson in the 1760s acknowledge an Ulster-Scots locus of action, the appropriation of this mythic material by the activists of the Scottish Enlightenment completed the homogenised ‘British’ literary landscape largely begun by Thomson, papered over a multitude of historical evils both in Ireland and Scotland. For Tobias Smollett in The Expedition of Humphry Clinker (1771) the British landscape populated by various disconnected drifters was a much less harmonious reality than for Thomson. These include the suitors to the Anglo-Welsh gentlewoman Tabitha Bramble, Lismahago (Scottish soldier of Covenanting stock) and Sir Ulic Mackilligut, an Irishman, who may simply be posing as impecunious Irish minor gentry. Whatever the case with Mackilligut, his devious fortune-hunting and rude manners are not in doubt, and he stands in contrast to the grotesque, but honest, Lismahago, who eventually wins Tabitha’s hand. If the national stereotyping here is obviously open to critique, Smollett’s novel nonetheless reflects some reality: the Scots of the eighteenth century are embraced in the bosom of the southern centre of power, while the Irish can largely be written off.

Among James Boswell’s literary friendships, two with Irishmen Edmund Burke (1729–97) and Edmund Malone (1741–1812) highlight the eighteenth-century metropolitan culture-nexus. Malone had a significant hand in revising for publication Boswell’s Journal of the Tour of the Hebrides (1785), including the regulation of a style purged of Scotticisms. Enthusiastic about Boswell’s Highland material, Malone was, nonetheless, alongside Boswell, infatuated by the cultural locale of London in the late eighteenth century. Symptomatic of both Irish and Scottish linguistic inferiorism, the Irish actor Thomas Sheridan (1721–88) had lectured in Edinburgh to rapt audiences (including Boswell) on the most correct manner of pronouncing English during 1761. Boswell had probably heard Adam Smith lecture on Burke’s theory of the sublime at Glasgow University, and took satisfaction from Burke’s installation as Lord Rector of his alma mater in 1784. Burke’s presence as a provincially cultured figure also prominent at the centre of British political life made him someone whose friendship Boswell was keen to cultivate, though the correspondence between the pair was punctuated periodically by Burke’s disappointing silences. In a letter of 6 November 1778, Boswell writes plaintively to Burke, desperate to establish physical as well as literary ‘correspondence’:

Dear Sir: While I am here on a visit to my Father at the romantick seat of our Family which lyes upon the western side of Scotland opposite to Ireland I think of Mr Burke in all his splendour of mind. But it is not pleasing to me to recollect that you have not been so good as to let me hear from you.

Burke, like Johnson although to a lesser extent, was for Boswell a potential father figure, whose attention he craved.

Very different in his attitude to the Irishman was Robert Burns. He may have been the author of (or at least approvingly copied from a reformist periodical) the satirical ‘Epigram on Edmund Burke’ (1794). Notwithstanding recent attempts to argue to the contrary, Burns’s uncertain engagement with Burke mirrors a similar situation in his outlook on Ireland. In May 1861 a sales catalogue for the London firm Puttock and Simpson advertised a manuscript version of a work of two stanzas, ‘Ode for Hibernia’s Sons’ in Burns’s hand, an ‘early copy’ variation on the poet’s four stanzas of ‘Ode [For General Washington’s Birthday]’ (1794). Burns would seem to have changed subject matter from the revolutionary events of Ireland in the cancelled version of his poem to those of America, presumably
because the latter held greater interest for him. Burns’s most direct poetic encounter with any aspect of Ireland occurs in ‘The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer’, which appeared in 1786. This work opens ludicrously with an appeal for fairness in the regulation of the Scotch whisky business directed to the Irish Lords who have Scottish seats in parliament. Written at a time when some of the Scottish aristocracy is denied the same privilege in spite of a stronger claim, the poem diagnoses the comprehensive political corruption of the British Isles. Burns’s large influence on the Scots-Ulster reformist poets of the 1790s such as James Orr and Samuel Thomson has recently been demonstrated, though there was disappointment in this grouping at what was taken to be Burns’s eventual apostasy through involvement with the Dumfries loyal militia. Much more openly radical than Burns was his admirer, John Lauderdale (born c.1740) from County Antrim, who settled in Kirkinner, Wigtonshire, from where he published his mediocre Poems chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (1796). Lauderdale’s republican views on Ireland and his anti-war stance with regards to Britain’s aggression against revolutionary France are mirrored in Alexander Geddes. Geddes, a controversial Catholic priest from Aberdeenshire highly active in the reformist circles of London, penned his poems ‘The Irish ça ira’ and ‘Ode to Hibernia’ at some point in the mid-1790s, urging on the United Irishmen to act as the French had recently done. Geddes’s ‘Ode to the Honorable Thomas Pelham, occasioned by his speech in the Irish House of Commons on the Catholic Bill’ (London, 1795) is a fine castigation of the hypocritical use of religion for the purposes of political power.

One of the many inspirations pointing Walter Scott towards the depiction of Scottish national life in his fiction was the example of what Maria Edgeworth had done for Ireland. Writing to Matthew Weld Hartstone on 18 July 1814, Scott was delighted, even while denying the attribution, to be identified as the author of Waverley; he always gave credit to Edgeworth for the invention of the novel about national event and character: ‘The Author must have had your inimitable Miss Edgeworth strongly in his view, for the manner is palpably imitated while the pictures are original.’ Besides Edgeworth, Scott was also interested in Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) whose O’Donnel: A National Tale, published in the same year as Waverley, similarly peddles, in Katie Trumpener’s words in Bardic Nationalism (1997), ‘an antiquarian and bardic version of nationalism that is already thirty or forty years old’.

(Extensive comparative criticism of Scott and his Irish contemporaries, to explore properly the contending hypotheses that the ‘regional’ historical novel in this period is sentimentally conservative, or alternatively begins to open up a decentralising critique of metropolitan power that has its roots in the revolutionary impulses of the 1790s, still remains to be done.) In this connection also, the warm sense of kinship between Scott and Thomas Moore, each held to be their nation’s most essential writer in the Romantic period, warrants further consideration. While Moore’s Romantic national imagery is often seen as a force towards the formation of the modern Irish state, Scott’s presentation of the same has been predominantly read as impeding the development of a modern Scottish national consciousness. It is interesting that in 1829 Scott was struck by how spectacularly well the magnum opus edition of his novels was selling in Ireland. If Mark Twain could half-seriously blame Walter Scott as an emotion-stirring influence towards civil war in the United States of America, might it not be the case that Scott’s tales of romantically delineated strife had an impact upon the pulsing revolutionary consciousness of nineteenth-century Ireland?

The earliest literary apprehension of the post-1750s Irish influx into Scotland is registered by John Galt in Annals of the Parish (1821), in which Father O’ Grady arrives in Ayrshire in 1804 to minister to the growing number of Irish labourers. The elderly parish minister, Micah Balwhiddler, is scandalised by this interloper while he is not so consciously
perturbed by the much larger signs of social and cultural turmoil which reverberate through
the period of his ministry such as political and Industrial Revolutions. In the ironically
intelligent mind of the Presbyterian Galt we see the beginnings of a new Scotland which,
if not always welcoming to the increasing flow of immigration from its western neighbour,
found no real sanction, intellectual or otherwise, to impede this movement. Even more
remarkable is the celebration of common Irish–Scottish endeavour by John Mitchell in
one of the best Scots poems of the nineteenth century, ‘A Braid Glow’r at the Clergy’
(1843). The hero of this intellectually panoramic poem, Patrick Brewster, Presbyterian
minister of Paisley Abbey, holds deeply entwined political and religious principles that
embrace comprehensive church disestablishment and universal freedom of conscience:
these cause him to welcome as a speaker to his town the Irish nationalist leader and pro-
ponent of Catholic emancipation, Daniel O’Connell. Both the real-life event and
Mitchell’s poetic celebration of the liaison of Brewster and O’Connell in his poem demon-
strate a vein of sympathy for the plight of the Irish that flies in the face of usually assumed
Scottish indifference during the nineteenth century.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, two of Scotland’s most notable writers were
of recent Irish descent. William McGonagall has been read as a quintessentially Scottish
entity in his time and has been made to represent regionality and topicality. Although his
clunking verse marking great public events of the day truly represents a Victorian sens-
ibility at its most sonorously vacuous, the strain of pathos in McGonagall’s work might be
related to the poet’s Irish family-background and its strain of lachrymose folk song. And
Arthur Conan Doyle, embarrassed by his alcoholic Irish father and his Catholic back-
ground, became both in life and through his fiction an impeccable Briton. While his
medical training in Edinburgh underpins the creation of Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle’s
other national identity of Irishness is largely written out of his work; it might even be
argued that the debunking of the supposedly supernatural canine in The Hound of the
Baskervilles (1902) represented a deep denial of the Celtic (Irish and Scottish Highlands)
folk tradition from which it is sprung. Infrequent subject matter in late nineteenth-century
Scottish literature, Ireland was typically portrayed in garish, stereotypical terms such as in
Robert Williams Buchanan’s 1860s production of the poem ‘The Wake of Tim O’Hara’,
replete with drinking and comic violence. Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Dynamiter (1885)
expressed much more forcefully than is found elsewhere in the novelist’s work a moral
revulsion in the face of the Fenian bombs set off in England during 1883. This is
Stevenson’s most explicit expression of the fear of anarchy, as the work reads the Fenian
cause. Castigating Charles Stewart Parnell for his silence in the face of such outrages,
Stevenson made no attempt otherwise to enter into any kind of critique of the political
situation of Ireland at the time.

The concrete links between Ireland and Scotland in the ‘Celtic Twilight’ movement
were slight. Patrick Geddes published in his periodical Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal
(1895–6) Douglas Hyde’s vaguely portentous verse, ‘From the Irish-Gaelic of Tadhg
Gaolach O Suillibhain’, a short prose piece by Standish O’Grady on the twelfth-century
kings of Ireland, ‘Dermot’s Spring’, and Rosa Mulholland’s poem, ‘Under a Purple Cloud’.
Geddes’s own essay ‘The Scots Renascence’ includes under a vaunted ‘reviving Literature
of Locality [ . . ] the wilder dreamlands of Galway and Cader-Idris, of Man and Arran and
Galloway’, a collocation wispily lacking in contemporary purchase. Patrick MacGill
(c. 1890–1963) provided an altogether harsher Scoto-Irish lens prior to the Great War.
Born in Glenties, County Donegal, MacGill worked from his teens as a labourer in the west
of Scotland and his novels, Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy (1914)
and The Rat-Pit (1915) document, respectively, the travails of Dermod Flynn and Norah Ryan (Flynn’s girlfriend) as they suffer the intense squalor of the Irish immigrant in Glasgow and elsewhere. Here we find a withering view both of the British creation of the Irish underclass and the Irish Catholic clergy that minister to it. MacGill’s work was an early example of the ‘condition of Scotland’ novel that was to be spawned more completely in the 1920s and 1930s, at which point also, the matter of Ireland would begin to be given more sustained and focused attention in Scottish writing. Scotland’s engagement with Ireland between 1707 and 1918 was a diffuse one that often reflected Scottish national uncertainty in the context of Britain and the emergence of the modern period as much as the problematic condition of Ireland itself.

**Further reading**


Scottish Song and the Jacobite Cause

Murray Pittock

The preservation of a distinctively Scottish literature in the eighteenth century can be attributed to two major factors. The first is the interrogation of classical and high cultural genres by domestic language and models, as practised by Allan Ramsay in pastoral and elsewhere or as in Robert Fergusson’s redefinition of high culture as local, for example in his adoption of the themes of Milton’s *L’Allegro* to the robust particularisms of ‘Leith Races’. The second is the literature and typology of oppositional poetry and song, whether transmitted orally, or by broadside, chapbook and printed collection. In the eighteenth century, such poetry and song was heavily Jacobite, partly no doubt because of Jacobitism’s identification with a domestic Scottish nation and its tongues. Jacobite leaders apparently spoke Court Scots (the speech of the nobility of Scotland, used in court culture and strongly linked to Edinburgh-based usages) as late as 1745, and Lord Balmerino, one of the most famous Jacobite ‘martyrs’ of 1746, sported a tartan blindfold on the scaffold, tartan of course being part of a complex set of linguistic and material discourses which underpinned both Scottishness and anti-Union Jacobitism in eighteenth-century representation.

Unsurprisingly there is a confluence between these factors: Ramsay began by publishing broadsides, Fergusson distributed them, and many songs attributed to Burns have a huge hinterland in street literature and the songs of balladeers. For example, ‘It was a’ for our Rightfu’ King’ has its earliest recorded beginnings as a 1690 street ballad (itself arguably having earlier roots in the 1630s), where the hero leaves ‘My Dear’ (the beloved or the feminised nation) to fight for King James in Ireland. In 1746, it was printed as the chapbook ballad ‘Molly Stewart’, while the equation between woman and nation is explicit in a slip-song, possibly sold at fairs or markets in central Scotland. There appear to have been other variants in circulation too, which can update the action to 1745 (‘But I hae parted frae Lewie Gordon/Never to see him again’): these were still being composed in the 1780s. Most intriguingly, there appear to be parallel songs in Gaelic from the early eighteenth century, and it is possible that the anglophone original itself draws on Gaelic typologies. In 1819, John MacDonald of Kingsburgh (b. 1726) wrote a letter to Sir John Sinclair in which he recalled learning a Gaelic song related to Burns’s chapbook antecedents from a Breadalbane man eighty years earlier. The issues of authenticity, use and distribution attendant on the Jacobite song are thus far more complicated than some previous scholarship has made them. To take another example, ‘Syke a Parcell of Louns in a Nation’ has its first recorded occurrence in a volume apparently presented to James VII in 1700, and thus refers in its first manifestation to the 1689 Edinburgh Convention which confirmed his deposition, rather than to the Union of 1707.
Tessa Watt has estimated that there were at least 600,000, and possibly millions of copies of ballads in circulation in England in the Renaissance period. Despite significant surviving ballad and chapbook collections, the fugitive (and in the case of Jacobite and other oppositional ballads, this is especially true) nature of these productions means that the vast bulk have perished. We do not know much about their means of effective circulation either (though we know something: the London Jacobite Francis Clifton, for example, printed runs of c. 700 ballads to be sold in the street by a team of balladeers who had twenty-four each to sell, a kind of Jacobite Big Issue). What is increasingly recognised is the strong confluence between the oral and the written in this early age of print, and what deserves to be more fully investigated is the longstanding reputation of balladeers as a class for conservative oppositionalism. They were viewed as a danger in Reformation Scotland; their royalism was a thorn in the side of Cromwellian Ireland; and in the eighteenth century, their support for the Stuarts and (in Scotland) opposition to the Union rendered them a source of frequent irritation to the government, its proxies and supporters, who helped provide a Whig song culture. Most of this was distributed through printed collections, though also transmitted orally at the ‘mug-houses’ of government supporters, after 1714 in particular. The opponent of the Whig song was the Jacobite song tradition, particularly the Scottish tradition. This was capable of extending its range south of the border not only because of the strength of Scotland’s role as the Jacobite heartland, but also because of the long-established popularity of Scottish songs or songs with Scottish subject matter among the London broadsides, a popularity that seems to date back to the reign of James VI (earlier surviving evidence is in any case very scanty).

Jacobite literature was often (though by no means always) poetry or song. This was in part because of the means of transmission of these genres, in part because playing an air could signify political solidarity, while remaining beyond the reach of seditious word or similar prosecutions. The playing of airs was perhaps used as a signal to muster, as recorded in ‘The Piper o Dundee’:

He play’d ‘The Welcome owre the Main’,
And ‘Ye’se be fou and I’se be fain’,
And ‘Auld Stuarts back again’,
   Wi’ muckle mirth and glee [. . .]

It’s some gat swords, and some gat nane,
And some were dancing mad their lane,
And mony a vow o’ weir was ta’en
   That night at Amulrie.

For similar reasons, material culture was also a popular means by which to display Jacobite sentiments. The songs and poetry of the Jacobites coalesced around certain major themes. First, there was the portrayal of the absent monarch as a messianic deliverer whose return would awaken the nation to new life. This awakening might be religious, or it might take the profane form of the returning monarch (or his surrogate, the ‘Highland Laddie’) as an agent of ungoverned sexuality, Scotland’s true lover. In songs such as ‘The Blackbird’, ‘Tho Georthis Reigns in Jamie’s Stead’ and many others, the woman-nation, ostensibly speaking in her own voice, laments the absence of her royal lover (whose martial and amatory equipment are closely analogous), and longs for his return. In the equivalent Irish aisling (dream vision) tradition, the woman-nation and her complaint are conveyed through the reportage
of a male poet. This is often the case throughout the Irish rebel-song tradition, from ‘Roisin Dubh’ to ‘The Bold Fenian Men’–even in ‘Four Green Fields’ the voice of the ‘poor old woman’ is reported, not directly heard. In Scotland, by contrast, the nation usually speaks in her own voice. Often this voice, even when not explicitly female, is distinctlyively domestic, as in ‘This Is No My Ain Hoose’, where the usurpation of the kingdom is realised through the metaphor of eviction. The association of domestic virtue with Scottish authenticity went on to be a major theme in national literature from ‘The Farmer’s Ingle’ to the Thrums fiction of J. M. Barrie and beyond. The more general link between eviction and the Scottish experience hardly needs to be spelt out.

A second theme, linked to the first, presents the absent monarch as a social bandit, a criminal hero or lord of misrule who is able to reverse the cultural categories of the Whig state and restore customary rights. The image of the king as fellow-rebel in the struggle to restore true rights was reflected in Jacobite criminal subculture, chief among whom were the smugglers who evaded the post-Union taxation regime. In the first half of the eighteenth century smuggling was increasingly a politicised crime in Scotland, and many core smuggling areas, such as Montrose, were hotbeds of Jacobite support. The link between the 1736 Porteous Riots and the legal attitude to smuggling was one of the reasons that it was possible to link them with disaffection towards the Crown. In Ireland, Catholic gentry who had ‘turned Tory’ became actual, not merely metaphorical, bandits in opposition to the state; in Scotland, smugglers distributed Jacobite high cultural propaganda such as medals, prints and portraits.

Third, Jacobitism might be portrayed in sacramental terms, as loyalty to a sacramental monarchy who could exercise miraculous powers, such as the Royal Touch, and whose Episcopalian supporters had been betrayed by hypocritical and simoniac Presbyterians. This Jacobite critique had its beginnings in James VI’s weak efforts to save his mother, Mary, in 1586–7, and more particularly in Charles I’s ‘sale’ by the Covenanters in 1647 and the rewards offered for James VIII and his son: sacred monarchs with a market value. Dr Johnson’s dislike of Scotland largely rested on the grounds that it was a simoniac Presbyterian culture with a great future behind it. The Reformation destruction of church architecture, despised by high Anglicans at least since the time of Archbishop Laud, played a major part in Johnson’s attitude to the country.

Fourth, classical analogy (for example, James = Aeneas = the true Augustus restored, the nation will be reborn in terms of the Golden Age of Vergil’s Fourth Eclogue) was widely used, though more often in prose literature and personal commonplace books than in street ballads. For the seventeenth-century Latin poet James Kennedy, Charles II was ‘Aeneas Britannicus’; Archibald Pitcairme’s (1652–1713) presentation of Viscount Dundee as the last patriot Scot, ‘ultime Scotorum’, modelled on Tacitus, was matched by James Philp of Almerieclose’s (c. 1654/5–?1714/25) The Grameid, the last Latin epic written in the British Isles, which combined the images, language and approach of Lucan’s Pharsalia (possibly chosen as a model because it was a favoured book of the famous Marquis of Montrose, to whom Philp was related on his mother’s side) and Vergil’s Aeneid to portray Dundee as a Roman patriot fighting off the barbarian Belgae (William and the Dutch). Philp also presented the Highlander as a synecdoche for Scottish patriotism as a whole, and portrayed Scotland as sold for foreign gold, both very popular later themes. In similar classical vein, Lord Belhaven’s (later versified) 1706 speech to the Scottish Parliament against Union presented the female nation as expiring in the Senate under the penetrating blows (and hence rape) of those she thought her sons and friends, a re-gendered Caesar. Belhaven hammered home the point with Caesar’s last words from Plutarch, ‘Et tu quoque, mi fili’ (‘you too, my son?’), best-known in this version, although probably originally spoken in
Greek (καὶ σὺ τεκνό). Rape of the nation was also found as a theme in the Irish aisling. Both traditions shared an intensely feminised vision of the patriot/exploited/authentic nation, made famous in Ireland by the Gaelic revival, and visible in Scotland in characterisations such as Katrine Yester in John Buchan’s Witch Wood (1927) and J. M. Barrie’s Farewell, Miss Julie Logan (1932).

Jacobite songs thus tended to be voiced either as calls to arms, love song, personal abuse of the domestic usurper/false lover/foreigner/stranger (for example, ‘Geordie Whelp’s Testament’: the term 'whelp' was also used in the Irish Jacobite aisling, which shared these typologies) or sacred verse. They were sung in the street (where the ballads would be hawked), in pubs and clubs, and at private dining or drinking parties. Even the music societies springing up around Scotland from the 1720s on may have been a source for the performance of Jacobite-leaning material, which survives in broadside, chapbook, printed collection, MS collection, fiddle air books and dance music, inter alia. Sometimes printed versions disguised their tracks: the earliest surviving chapbook of ‘Charlie is My Darling’ (from the 1770s, thus not by Burns or Lady Nairne) sports a big portrait of Charles II: politically controversial, but completely out of keeping with the true subject of the accompanying song.

One of the reasons for the spread of Jacobite song-culture lay in the extent to which it made use of earlier popular melodies and themes. The ‘Highland Laddie’ song cycle of Jacobite culture in its turn depended on an older tradition of the abduction of well-born girls by gypsies (for example, Johnny Fa) or Highlanders. In these, the seduced woman exchanges wealth and sterility for poverty and virility; in their Jacobite equivalent, the exchange is much the same (corrupting gold for patriot purity), but the virility is also military. This is particularly symbolised in the penetrative blood-shedding broadsword of Gaelic heroic tradition, the quintessential Jacobite weapon, but one in fact rather marginal in tallies of Jacobite battlefield equipment. Moreover, the woman quite often is not seduced, but goes in search of the ‘Highland Laddie’, being tired of the effete values of a nation ‘bought and sold for English gold’, and ready to exchange them for the ‘tocher’ of sexual abandonment, military success and national fulfilment.

Similarly, ‘Over the Hills/Sea and Far Awa’ songs multiply from the early eighteenth century. Such a song appears in the seventeenth century, and its features can be found in the song ‘The Recruiting Officer’ in the Irish dramatist George Farquhar’s play of that name in 1706. Shortly afterwards, large numbers of Jacobite variants appear, and John Gay’s use of it and other Jacobite-linked material in The Beggar’s Opera is an underdeveloped aspect in criticism of the play, for Gay very likely used the songs of his light opera as an additional taunt towards Walpole. Gay’s friendship with Ramsay, whose Jacobitical Gentle Shepherd was descended from his own Shepherd’s Week, provides an additional intriguing dimension.

Other well-known songs such as ‘The Broom of Cowdenknowes’ were turned to Jacobite purposes. Tom D’Urfey’s ‘The Blackbird’ of 1700 may resurface in part in ‘Jamie the Rover’; ‘Down Among the Dead Men’ is possibly originally a Jacobite song, nicely ambiguated; ‘Aikendrum’ likewise. ‘James, come kiss me now’ grew out of a sixteenth-century (if not earlier) song, ‘John, come kiss me now’, itself given sacred overtones after the Reformation. Nursery rhymes such as ‘Rock a bye baby’ also take colour from this great political conflict of the first half of the eighteenth century. Ballads on the Earl of Derwentwater (executed in 1716) migrate from Jacobitism to depictions of English corruption and Scottish purity, though the historic Derwentwater was no kind of Scot. As late as 1793, ‘The White Cockade’ was being used as a call to Irish radicalism, while the odd Jacobite song was likewise redeployed in Scotland in support of the French Revolution. ‘God Save the King’ in its modern version was modelled on its Jacobite challenger.
There were also a number of poets whose names we know who wrote in the anglophone Jacobite tradition, and were indeed sometimes its officers. Explicit Jacobite poetry was more common among Gaelic or Latin writers, as most poets in Scots or English (like Ramsay) had to skirt or ambiguate direct statement for obvious reasons. But there were exceptions, among them Alexander Robertson of Struan (1670–1749), the only Jacobite officer to fight in 1689, 1715 and 1745. Struan's attainder of 1690 was never fully reversed, but he nonetheless spent much of the rest of his life on his estate, where he wrote poetry whose veneer of politesse can mask savage political sentiments, and which can adopt the genteel Cavalier forms of Carew to express the values of Gaeldom.

William Hamilton of Bangour (1704–54) was another prominent Jacobite, who acted as a kind of propagandist for Prince Charles in 1745. His classical ode on Prestonpans (‘Over Gladsmuir’s bloodstained field/Scotia, imperial goddess, flew’) being his most noteworthy production of the campaign. Like other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish writers, Hamilton proved adept at producing imitations of traditional forms, and he remains (thanks in part to Wordsworth’s admiration of the poem) best remembered for ‘The Braes of Yarrow’. Other lesser figures include William Meston (c. 1679–1745), sometime Aberdeen professor and Jacobite governor of Dunottar, and the balladeer Charles Leslie (‘Mussel-mou’d Charlie’) (c. 1667/77/87–1782), a possible model for Skirling Wattie in Violet Jacob’s novel Flemington (1911).

In after years, the classicism, the nostalgia and the glamour of Jacobite literary imagery made it a fit victim of sentimentality and the inflationary emotion of regret. ‘Fuimus Troes’, the Jacobite watchword from the Aeneid, spoken by Aeneas in mourning his flight and the city’s fall, marked no longer the territory of an epic struggle, but rather the sentiment for an age vanished in the incipient industrial era, when ‘we have been Trojans’ was not a call to solidarity, but yet another comforting foundation myth, properly exploded by Enlightenment history. That explosion itself depended on characterising Jacobitism (and thus the native, domestic and linguistically distinct Scotland it represented) as a lost cause, a subject for poignant nostalgia rather than political action, a set of objectives and beliefs no longer taken seriously. Jacobite tableaux were mounted at Balmoral; and in a thousand Victorian drawing rooms the allies of Scott’s Flora MacIvor lulled patriotism away from the politics that had once inspired it.

Further reading

Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and the New Gaelic Poetry

Ronald Black

There is something approaching a consensus that our two greatest Gaelic poets are Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (‘Alexander son of the Rev. Alexander’, Alexander MacDonald, c. 1698–c.1770) from Moidart and Sorley MacLean (1911–96) from Raasay. When attention is focused more narrowly on the eras in which they lived, the claims of others tend to be put forward, principally Rob Donn MacKay (1714–78) from north-west Sutherland, Duncan Macintyre (Donnchadh Bàn, 1724–1812) from Glenorchy in Argyll, Derick Thomson (b. 1921) from Lewis, and – a little mischievously perhaps – those anonymous women who made some of the finest songs in this or any other language.

What sets MacDonald and MacLean apart is their originality. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that MacDonald’s innovations unleashed a spirit of creativity which survived through the following century until we reach MacLean, who recommenced the innovatory cycle. To do this a series of forays will be made through time, each beginning with MacDonald or his seventeenth-century predecessors and reaching forward to the late eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth century.

Alasdair spent his life variously as a legal representative of the Clanranald family, a Jacobite agent, a schoolmaster in Ardnamurchan and a captain in Prince Charles’s army. He was the first Gaelic poet to publish his work – a radical innovation in its own right. His Ais-eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich (‘Resurrection of the Ancient Scottish Tongue’) appeared in 1751 when he was Clanranald’s factor in Canna. Prior to this the written register had failed to break through from manuscript, other than in John Carswell’s translation of Knox’s Book of Common Order (1567), successive editions of the catechism from 1631 and the Psalms from 1659, and Robert Kirk’s transliteration of Bedell’s Irish Bible (1690), the only secular verse to appear in print being four poems published by Edward Lhuyd in Archaeologia Britannica (1707). Religious and secular works in Gaelic leapfrogged each other into print on the heels of the Ais-eiridh, beginning in 1752 with David MacKellar’s hymn or hymns (at least so we are told, for no copies survive), and continuing almost annually with a new edition of the catechism, in 1753 with Solomon’s Proverbs and Alexander Macfarlane’s Psalms and paraphrases, in 1763 with Macpherson’s Seventh Book of Temora, in 1764 with a second edition of the Ais-eiridh, in 1765 with a second edition of Macfarlane’s Psalms, in 1767 with the New Testament and Buchanan’s hymns, in 1768 with Donnchadh Bàn’s poems, in 1770 with Duncan Macfadyen’s hymns, another edition of the Psalms and Lachlan MacLachlan’s little collection of poems, and in 1776 with the first of many poetry anthologies – Comh-Chruinneachidh Orannaigh Gaidhealach (the so-called ‘Eigg
Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair

Collection’) by Alasdair’s son Ronald, a work proposed by Alasdair himself in his introduction to the Ais-eiridh.

Alasdair exploited the possibilities of print to the full. Two of the longest poems in the Ais-Eiridh, ‘Moladh Móraig’ (‘The Praise of Morag’) and ‘Mìomholadh Móraig’ (‘The Dispraise of Morag’), are in a new verse form, pìobaireachd metre, which, though no doubt perfectly singable and acceptable to ceilidh-house audiences, was complex enough to require the helping hand of the new medium. Its immediate inspiration seems to have been ‘Cumha Choire an Easain’ (‘Corriennesan’s Lament’) by John MacKay from Gairloch (Am Pìobaire Dall, the Blind Piper, 1656–1754), which was made about 1697. The ‘Cumha’ has twenty-nine quatrains in an everyday metre which is varied slightly towards the end to cope with a torrent of descriptive adjectives, thus subliminally evoking the climax of a pìobaireachd. Alasdair’s two poems, almost certainly composed in the 1730s, are erotic, though in different ways. They are divided into sixteen-line stanzas, of which the ‘Moladh’ has twenty-one and the ‘Mìomholadh’ fourteen, designated ùrlar (‘theme, ground’), siubhal (‘variation’) or crùnluath (‘crowning movement’). Each of these three types of stanza has its own metre, consisting of a complex but consistent pattern of rhyming words. Each poem begins with an ùrlar; the ùrlar returns intermittently during the siubhal stanzas to hold back the pace; then an exciting pair of crùnluath stanzas finishes off the poem. The cumulative effect is to seize and hold the attention.

Curiously, the stanzas of Alasdair’s ‘Moladh air Pìob Mhóir MhicCruimein’ (‘In Praise of MacCrimmon’s Bagpipe’) do not vary in this way: he creates a fascinating metrical pattern and sticks to it. Pìobaireachd metre seized and held the attention of other poets, however. Rob Donn set ‘Iseabail NicAoidh’ (‘Isabel MacKay’) to the air of ‘Fàilte a’ Phrionnsa’ (‘The Prince’s Salute’), with an ùrlar followed by two siubhal stanzas, a taobhluath (‘side movement’) and a crùnluath. It is metrically exciting but verbally repetitive and by no means erotic. ‘Iseabail NicAoidh’ was composed in 1745–47, which shows that Rob Donn, for one, had not had to wait for the Ais-Eiridh to become acquainted with Alasdair’s work (he was non-literate anyway); the late Ian Grimble, in The World of Rob Donn (1979), reckoned that ‘the booming voice of Macdonald penetrated his thought and helped to form his art’. Rob’s other poem in the mode, ‘Pìobaireachd Bean Aoidh’ (‘Hugh’s Wife’s Pipe-Tune’), underlines perfectly the difference between him and Alasdair: in a single set of one ùrlar, one siubhal and one crùnluath he depicts an adulterous relationship, but in a pedestrian tone of mocking disapproval.

Is suarach an t-uidheam
Do ghrugach no nighinn
Bhith pronnadh ‘s a’ bruidheann
’S cab oirre gàireachdaich.

(It’s unacceptable behaviour/For any woman or girl/To be bonking and talking/With her mouth open laughing.)

In what looks like a deliberate inversion, sex features in the ùrlar and siubhal but the frantic crùnluath is all about dealing with the shameful consequences. Originality – of a kind.

Donnchadh Bàn’s response to the new genre could not have been more different. He is the best loved of poets, and his ‘Moladh Beinn Dóbhrain’ (‘The Praise of Ben Dorain’), which dates from about 1766, is one of the greatest poems in the language. In 554 lines of extraordinary word-power he describes the mountain, the deer and the hunt, but there is
more to it than that: the eerie absence of human beings suggests subtle criticism of the ear-
liest Highland clearances. Nature’s function in traditional Gaelic verse is to provide
symbols for praise and dispraise of human beings, and all previous poems in piobaireachd
metre had been about men and women: here then is the irony of a ‘piobaireachd’ in which
the teeming community that works, plays, runs, feeds and makes love is that of the deer,
and in which the only sounds are the rippling of a burn, the belling of a stag, the bark of
hounds and the report of a gun.

It is not easy to know what to make of the work of Kenneth MacKenzie (1758–c.1837),
a sailor-poet from Inverness who brought three books to read in his hammock – the Bible
his mother gave him and the poems of Alasdair and Donnchadh Bàn. He tackles his sub-
jects with vigour and when he keeps his aims simple, as in ‘Moladh na Luinge’ (‘The Praise
of the Ship’), he succeeds. But there was a ‘new verse’ and try his hand he must. The result
is the 312-line ‘Òran don Luing ’s do dh’Fhear Obair a’ Chuain’ (‘A Song to the Ship and
to the Man who Works at Sea’), which he subtitled ‘Seònaid’ (‘Janet’). It looks splendid,
but falls apart a little when read more closely. Anxious to fulfil the technical demands of
piobaireachd metre, the poet sometimes fails to use the right word, semantically or syn-
tactically. Worse, he falls into symbolistic traps. In a genre with sex as its first focus he
should have taken care to avoid this one:

B’e suaitheantas mo chaileig-sa
Dubbh is geal le chéile
Ri crann geal dìreach gallanach
Air eàrr mo chaileig spéseil —
Suaitheas riogail Breatannach
Aig fir nach diobradh seasadh leis
Nuair dhéanadh gaoth dearrasan air.

(The symbol of my girlfriend/Would be black and white together/On a mast erect and
straight/At my darling girlfriend’s stern – /The royal British ensign/Of men willing to
defend it/When a wind would rattle it.)

The crew tightens the mast and sails to relieve pressure on the rigging –

’S nuair rach’ an séd ud thairis oírr’
Gum b’ tharast i fo bhréidein.

(And when that puff had passed her by/She rode smoothly under sailcloth.)

Unfortunately bréid – of which, for metre’s sake, the poet uses a derivative – is a common
word in love songs, meaning not merely the sails of a ship but the voluminous ‘ketch’ of
starched linen worn by a married woman on her head. It reinforces the impression that
MacKenzie has chosen to describe the ship in terms of female rites of passage. This seems
to be accidental. A few lines later he pays tribute to his sources of inspiration, describing
the ship as fleeter even than ‘Eelten Bhèinn Dorain’ (‘the hinds of Ben Dorain’, his spelling
and italics) and ‘[a’] cheile bh’ aig Mòrag’ (‘Morag’s spouse’, evoking a line in ‘Moladh air
Piob Mhóir MhicCruimein’).

MacKenzie’s intervention serves to illustrate the complexities of the new poetry, for when
done well it seems easy. In the siúbhal of ‘Duan do dh’Oídhche na Bliadh’ Uire’ (‘A Ditty
for New Year's Night’) by the scholar-poet Ewen MacLachlan from Lochaber (1773–1822), in which the ethnographic influence of Burns may be perceived, we find the device of substituting a disyllable and a monosyllable for the trisyllabic line-endings employed by the two great masters of the genre. In this description of the discordant hammering of the ‘Hogmanay lads’ on the walls of the houses during the annual ritual of expelling the devils of the Old Year from the township, it works well.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{’Chollainn seo, ’challainn siud,} \\
\text{’Fhearaibh mo ghaoil-sa!} \\
\text{Buailibh am balla le} \\
\text{Deannal nan gaoirdein —} \\
\text{Sàr-bhuillean streallanta} \\
\text{Troma nan gellant bhier} \\
\text{Dìosgan is faram air} \\
\text{Darach nan taobhan.} \\
\text{Critheadh an astail le} \\
\text{Sitheadh nan cnapaibh bu} \\
\text{Neartmhoire slachdraich ri} \\
\text{Clachan an aolaidh!} \\
\text{Feadartaich sadaidh nan} \\
\text{Cleithannan seaaidh bheir} \\
\text{Cnead air gach aisne do} \\
\text{Dh’aitribh na faoileachd.} \\
\end{align*}\]

(O Hogmanay this, O Hogmanay that, /O my favourite lads!/Bang on the wall in your/Contest of muscle-power – /The great whacking walloping/Blows from your cudgels set/The oak of the rafters off/Creaking and groaning./Dwellings are shaking from/Blows being inflicted whose/Impact’s most powerful on/Stones set in lime!/The juddering whistle of/Well-dried-out clubs makes each/Rib of the generous/Houses start groaning.)

The shift to ethnography is continued in the last – and, at 793 lines, the longest – example of piobaireachd metre, ‘MacPhàil is MacThómais’ (‘MacPhàil and MacThómais’) by Donald Macintyre (1889–1964) from South Uist. Macintyre had the misfortune to create this superb poem at a point in history – the 1920s – when the ceilidh-house network which should have transmitted it orally was breaking down, world war and depression were bringing swift change and manpower loss to the islands, and Gaelic printing presses were being monopolised by poets of a newer wave. Were he alive to produce it today he would be lionised. The poem is in the Rob Donn mould – MacPhàil and MacThómais are an uncle and nephew who make little effort to improve their lot. Surrounded as they are by the bounty of land and sea, their sloth is systematically mocked: deploying words and witticisms with consummate skill, the poet describes the poor state of their personal appearance, clothing, house, livestock and fuel supply. As a piper he disapproves of ‘Úrlar’, ‘Siubhal’ and ‘Crùnluath’, preferring ‘A’ Cheud Rannaghal’, ‘An Dàrna Rannaghal’ (‘Canto First’, ‘Canto Second’), and so on, but the metre is what we know as ‘piobaireachd’. Canto Fourth, 409 lines long, is the heart and soul of the poem. In it, the poet tells MacPhàil and MacThómais exactly how to cut peats and make creels, and describes the
horse that should carry them. As in the ‘Birlinn’ (see below), this is the dignity of labour: if Alasdair is a socialist, Macintyre is a stakhanovite.

Bidh builgean air lùdaig
’S bidh plùchadh air òrdaig
Aig cabair gan lùbadh
Gu diongmhalta, tionndaidhte,
Paidhrichte, bùthaichte,
Dùnadh na tòineadh,
’S iad daingnichte, dlùthaichte,
Caignichte, cùirnichte,
Cagnadh ‘nan rùsg
Leis cho dlùth ’s théid am pòsadh.

(Pinkies are blistered/And thumbs will be squashed/From bending the rods/Firmly, well-
turned,/In pairs and in curves,/Closing the rear end,/Binding them tightly,/Coupled and
covered,/Chafing their bark/From how tightly they’re married.)

The rest of the poem is devoted to ploughing, seaweed-gathering, fishing, shellfish-gathering and a statement of purpose in which the poet’s advice is làmh thoirt air an talamh,/’S ged a bhiodh e car beag fadalach,/Tha mathas ann nach saoil thu: ‘to work the land,/And though it may be slightly tedious,/It has goodness you don’t realise’. This is his message, but he himself was swept away in the great Depression to spend the second half of his life as a bricklayer in Paisley; his political views are well expounded in the rest of his poetry.

The tradition inherited by Alasdair was of praise and dispraise. Màiri nighean Alastair Ruaidh showed how to do it with fire in the belly, Iain Lom reported on events as they happened, and Sìleas na Ceapaich contributed discussion of political and moral issues, but poets were still measured by how successfully they could bend and stretch existing codes of praise and dispraise. The best analogy is painting: until Alasdair’s time painters were largely restricted to praising God and heaven, disparaging the Devil and hell, and testing how far they could stretch the conventions of formal portraiture. The artistic problem was insincerity; the practical one was the shrinking pool of patrons in a world that had been changing rapidly since the abortive rising of 1715. Alasdair’s answer was little short of revolutionary: with certain exceptions, he turned his back on the praise of famous men. His ‘Moladh a’ Chaimbeulaich Dhuibh’ (‘The Praise of the Black Campbell’) is actually a satire; the real exceptions were forced on him by circumstances. As a Jacobite propagandist he could hardly refuse to praise Prince Charles, and from 1745 to 1751 he did so with enormous vigour. The same applies to his elegy for Simon, Lord Lovat, who went to the scaffold in 1746; the eulogy he made for young Clanranald in 1747–48 was dictated by the need for a job. What throws all this into relief is his eagerness to praise women, creatures, things, concepts: Mórag, Màiri Shugaideach, Cuachag an Fhàsaich, his pet dove, the lion of Clan Donald, whisky, a good penis, MacCrimmon’s pipes, the Gaelic language, Highland dress, the seasons. In his elegy to the dove he faces the issue of insincerity, pointing out that what matters is death itself, not its trappings, literary or otherwise.

Chan e gun chiste no anart bhith còmhach do chré
Fo lic anns an úir
Alasdair’s approach to his revolution was organic. What had hitherto been an item in the code of praise and dispraise – the chief as a lion, for example – he promoted into the subject of a poem. One such innovation was the feathered friend which he thrust forward to take centre stage as spokesman for his kindred in ‘Smeòrach Chlann Raghnaill’ (‘The Mavis of Clanranald’). His contemporary and fellow-Jacobite Hector MacLeod from South Uist (fl. 1745) echoed some lines of this poem in his ‘An Taisbean’ (‘The Vision’) and composed a ‘Moladh do Choileach Smeòraich’ (‘The Praise of a Cock-Thrush’). John MacCodrum (1693–1779), a very fine poet and satirist from North Uist, composed a ‘Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnaill’ in praise of the Sleat MacDonals. Blind Allan MacDougall (c.1750–1828) from Glencoe, whose work was edited for publication by Ewen MacLachlan, made a ‘Smeòrach Chloinn Dùghail’. MacLachlan himself made a ‘Smeòrach Mhic Lachainn’. And Donald MacLeod (1787–1873) from Skye made ‘Smeòrach nan Leòdach’. A little bird had become a big genre.

Once the genie of innovation is out of the bottle it cannot be stopped. Heavily influenced as he was by the native satirical tradition and the newfangled Presbyterian morality of the Kirk session of Durness, Rob Donn developed a third type of eulogy, the critical assessment of character from the standpoint of Christian ethics, and the best of his praise and dispraise is far more thoughtful than ‘Pìobaireachd Bean Aoidh’. Dugald Buchanan (1716–68) from Strathyre in Perthshire, a missionary preacher who found himself in Rannoch after the ‘45 surrounded by hordes of cattle-lifting Mac Mhaighstir Alasdairs, made a series of magnificent hymns for them in simple, singable metres. Although influenced by English hymn-writers like Isaac Watts, he drew the strength of his imagery from the Rannoch environment and tackled the problem of praise in his own way. Alasdair’s icon had been the Marquis of Montrose, a soldier-poet who symbolised a united Scotland; Buchanan’s in ‘An Gaisgeach’ (‘The Hero’) is a Christian warrior.

Perhaps Buchanan had Morag in mind when he added:

‘S ged a sgaoil an striopach lion  
Gu ghlac’ le innleachdaibh a mais’,  
Cha drúidh air dealanach a sùil’  
‘S cha leagh i ‘rùn le ‘miannaibh laist’.

(And should the whore have spun her web/To catch him with her beauty’s wiles, /The lightning of her eyes won’t touch him/Nor will her burning passions melt his will.)
In the seventeenth century formal Gaelic praise had been hugely enriched by tapping the resources of women's poetry – especially those of ‘waulking songs’, which were sung chorally to a strong beat as freshly made woollen cloth was pounded in urine to bring up the nap. Màiri nighean Alastair Ruaidh had brought this important demotic tradition with her when, by force of character, she made herself the favourite court poet of Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray; nor was she a stranger to Dunvegan Castle itself. Alasdair was the first man to make a full-blown waulking song, turning the mode – with its simple metres, throbbing rhythm and female agenda – into a powerful instrument of propaganda. Suddenly the woman at the head of the table who gave out the line was Prince Charles, the waulking-girls were his soldiers, the cloth which they were pounding was his red-coated enemies, and the urine was blood and gore. Charles was referred to by his code-name Morag. Alasdair made two songs like this, ‘Òran Luaidh no Fùcaidh’ (‘The Waulking or Fulling Song’) and ‘Clò MhicilleMhicheil’ (‘Carmichael’s Cloth’).

Donnchadh Bàn wrenched the genre back to its roots in the arts of peace, but in perusing his four waulking songs we discover a drift back to violence which tells us something about the times in which he lived. ‘Òran Luaidh’ (‘A Waulking Song’) depicts the cloth-making process and a contented rural community for whom it was part of the rhythm of their lives. ‘Òran do Chaora’ (‘A Song to a Ewe’), set in Glen Etive, does likewise, but there is a leitmotiv – the poet has hit hard times, symbolised by the killing of his pet sheep by a fox. In ‘Òran nam Balgairean’ (‘The Song of the Foxes’), by now profoundly angry, he takes the side of the fox against the hordes of brindle-faced sheep which have deprived the people of their land. And in ‘Òran na Gàsaid’ (‘The Song of the Gazette’), which dates from 1799, economic hardship strikes him again at the age of seventy-five when his ‘dad’s army’, the Breadalbane Fencibles, is disbanded. Given the history of the genre, the ending is ironic.

Is bòidheach ar gunnachan glasa
‘S ar còtaichean daithte màdair.

Chan eil sinne ’g iarraidh sìochaimh
Gus an ciosnaich sinn ar nàmhaid.

(Our steel-grey guns are beautiful/As are our colourful red coats./We have no desire for peace/Till we have beaten our enemies.)

Rob Donn employs waulking metre in an inconsequential way, but for thoughtful application of the genre we must turn to the love-poet William Ross (1762–91) from Gairloch. He used it twice to discuss the coming to the Highlands of people whom he called bodaich – ‘boors’, ‘philistines’. The fifteen couplets of his ‘Iorram’ are split into a curse on the bodaich (who are anns an àm seo cogadh òirnne, ‘at this time making war on us’) and a traditionally-sounding love lyric. These bodaich wear breeches and coats, hunt deer with hounds and have money in their pockets; the poet clearly wears Highland dress, for he describes how he spreads his plaid over his sweetheart and makes love to her. However, we are not to take the scenario literally, for the well-liked Sir Hector Mackenzie of Gairloch was firmly in control of his estate throughout the poet’s adult life, and Colonel Inge, the pioneer of English sporting activity in the north, did not rent the deer-stalking in Gairloch until about 1832. Ross was hopelessly in love with a beautiful woman, a cousin several years his senior, called Mór (Marion), who fell under the gaze of a young English sea-captain, Samuel Clough.
(1757–1815). Clough met her in Stornoway at some point during the winter of 1781–2, married her in February 1782, lived with her for about a month, left her a fortune in his will, then sailed for Jamaica. He does not appear to have brought her home to Liverpool until 1783, and throughout 1782 the poet poured his emotions into song after song, employing more or less coded language in deference to Marion's feelings. The title 'Iorram' ('Boat-Song') is primarily a reference to his rival's profession, and when he hopes that the result of the philistines' hunt will be *call an cuspair air gach eild* ('missing their aim at every hind') and *gun srad theime bhith 'nan òrdaibh* ('without a spark of fire in their hammers'), the hind in their sights can only be Marion herself. Evoking at once the spirit of ’45, Alasdair's waulking songs and his cousin's pet name ('Little Marion'), the poet dreams:

Cha b’ fhada ’n oidhche gu madainn
Gun chadal an caidreabh Móraig.

(Short would be the night till morning/Sleepless in the arms of Morag.)

Ross's 'Òran air Aiseag an Fhearainn do na Cinn-Fheadhna' ('Song on the Return of their Land to the Chiefs') was made in 1784. He celebrates the restoration of the estates forfeited after the ’45 to their rightful proprietors, and acquiesces in King George's claim to the throne, while regretting the continued exile of Prince Charles; then he finishes with a characteristic *dubh-fhacal*, or enigma.

Feudaidh mac bodaich a-réiste
Bhith cur bréid an stòras

'S gun tig tuisleadh air na righrean
Mar a dhiobras òlach.

Fonn an cinnich fior shiol coircé,
Cinnidh fochnan òtraich.

Mar thug mi gu crìch mo luinneag
Sguiridh mi gu stòlda.

(Thus may a boor’s son/Stow sailcloth away//So that kings stumble/As yeoman forsakes them.//In land where true oat seed grows, /Dung-hill grass grows too.//Since I’ve ended my worksong/I’ll stop with decorum.)

It is profoundly symbolic. Captain Clough and King George merge into one, as do kertches and sails, the poet and Prince Charles; when he thinks of Marion in Liverpool bearing Clough's child ('dung-hill grass') he must stop, for all the anger of Culloden is clanging in his mind.

A song in waulking metre cannot always be identified from the printed page. It consists of couplets linked internally by *aicill* rhyme on any vowel, for example, *luinneag : Sguiridh*, and externally on a vowel common to the entire poem, for example, the ò of *stòras : òlach : òtraich : stòlda*. Every 'real' waulking song is not in this metre, however, nor is every song which displays this pattern necessarily in waulking metre: for example, two other criteria are that a distinct chorus (sung, in theory at least, by the waulking women) intervenes between each
couplet, and that each couplet is sung only once. Another complicating factor is that the structure of rowing songs appears to have been identical – the helmsman giving out the line, the oarsmen singing the refrain. Nevertheless it can be said with confidence that Alasdair's influence is traceable in the imagery of about half of all the songs made in what appears to be 'waulking metre' down to the early twentieth century, and that this imagery mixes women, war and weapons. Three twentieth-century examples will suffice. The first is ‘Cha b’e Guin mo Nàmhaid’ (‘It was not my Enemy’s Gun’) by Dòmhnall Ruadh Chorùna (Donald Macdonald, 1887–1967). In the trenches in Flanders he recalls the pleasure of deer-hunting at home in North Uist. His gun was a musket, he claims. King George gave her to him in marriage, and now he is paying the price for this precious gift. Her name is Morag. The second is ‘Nuair Chunna Mì’ (‘When I Saw’) by Sorley MacLean, made in 1940 when he, too, had joined the army. He sees the girl he had once loved, and:

Sann fo chòta truagh an rìgh
A leum mo chridhe gòrach.

(It’s under the king’s wretched coat/That the foolish heart was leaping.)

The third brings us forward another twenty years to the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960. In ‘Bean Dubh a’ Caoidh a Fir a Chaidh a Mharbhadh leis a’ Phoileas’ (‘A Black Woman Mourns her Husband Killed by the Police’) Duncan Livingstone from Mull (1877–1964), a long-term resident in South Africa, expresses a widow’s desire to avenge the massacre. Using the Xhosa refrain Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele (‘God Save Us, God Save Us’), he shows her imploring Rìgh nan Dùilean (‘the King of the Elements’) to give her a day

A bhith gan reubadh is gam pianadh
‘S deagh fhaobhar air mo sgian-sa.

(For tearing them and torturing them/With a good blade upon my knife.)

Livingstone abandons the precise structure of ‘waulking metre’ in favour of end-rhyming couplets, but his source of inspiration is obvious. In classical verse such as that of Cathal MacMhuirich (c.1600–c.1650) from Benbecula, land and sea are portrayed in cosmic terms as bountiful under the reign of a good leader and angry at his death. The angry picture, not so much of nature in sympathy as of nature as God’s weapon of mass destruction, returns in Buchanan’s powerful ‘Là a’ Bhreitheanais’ (‘The Day of Judgement’). In the work of Dòmhnall mac Fhionnlaigh nan Dàn (Donald MacDonald, fl. 1600) from Lochaber and An Ciaran Mabach (Archibald MacDonald, fl. 1660) from Skye the focus is upon deer and their habitat, and they are presented in human terms as models of a peaceful society. Surprisingly perhaps for a blind man, John MacKay introduces greater realism and ecological detail to his picture of Corrienessan, but he has a point to make nonetheless: nature is fine, but requires a presiding genius.

Sguiridh mise shiubhal t’ aonach
Gus an tig Mac Aoidh do dh’Alba.

(I will cease to roam your plains/Till MacKay returns to Scotland.)
What may be discerned in Alasdair’s nature poetry is a desire to rid the genre of meanings and show nature, in detail, either for its own sake or as the amphitheatre in which ordinary men and women play out their daily lives. Clearly he had seen many a pastoral painting and read James Thomson’s ‘Winter’ (1726) and ‘Summer’ (1727). So although he happily describes a stream (‘Allt an t-Siùcair’, ‘The Sugar Burn’) or a district (‘Moladh Mórair’, ‘The Praise of Morar’), his simplest innovation is this: he praises seasons.

Every student of Gaelic literature remembers the personality of the great eighteenth-century poets by the seasons which they praised. Alasdair, a man of strong views, described summer and winter. Donnchadh Bàn, a likeable fellow, picked summer only. So did William Ross, the lover. Buchanan, the evangelist, and Rob Donn, the satirist, chose winter. MacCodrum, crotchety and old-fashioned, refused to describe any at all. Only Ewen MacLachlan, thorough scholar that he was, covered all four!

In his earlier poetry Alasdair showed himself open to the minutiae of contemporary English influence: translations, loanwords, classical deities, even a pastiche of a verse from Allan Ramsay’s Tea-Table Miscellany (1723; Volumes 2–4, 1726–37). By the 1750s he appears to have decided that this was all rather superficial, and the only English influence of any kind to be discerned in his greatest poem, ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’ (‘Clanranald’s Galley’), is theoretical. In his influential Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer (1736) Thomas Blackwell had laid down a definition of epic poetry. It requires great wars, he says, the marvellous and the wonderful, but not comedy or polished language.

A Poet describes nothing so happily, as what he has seen; nor talks masterly, but in his native Language, and proper Idiom; nor mimicks truly other Manners, than those whose Originals he has practised and known [. . .] Is what we call Heroism indeed any thing else, than A disinterested Love of Mankind and our Country, unawed by Dangers, and unwearied by Toils? If it is not, the social Passions, and noblest affections must prevail in an Epic-Poem. They may vary indeed, and shew themselves very differently in different Characters: They may likewise have their own Shades, and must be sometimes drawn upon dark Grounds, to raise and give them a Relief; but still they must be the principal Figures in the Piece, if it is meant to give a real and lasting Pleasure.

The ‘Birlinn’, which Alasdair seems to have begun in Canna about 1750, is such a poem. In a little over 600 lines he describes how the galley is blessed and rowed to a sailing place, how the crew are deployed, how they sail from South Uist on St Brigid’s day (1 February), and how they survive a great storm to arrive safely at Carrickfergus in Antrim. Most of it was recited rather than sung – an innovation in terms of vernacular but not of classical Gaelic. The metre varies from section to section. The poem operates at the level of allegory as well as of factual description, and is notable for the growing list of its sources of inspiration. The more of these are revealed, the better we see how Alasdair created a coherent new vision out of fragments of the old. One traditional motif, the chief ‘as a warrior in charge of a ship rather than as a seaman himself’, is reflected in the shadowy role of Clanranald. Another, the ‘ship of state’, in which the ship is a metaphor for the kindred, steered by the chief with the help of the Trinity, is exemplified positively in ‘A’ Chnò Shamhna’ (‘The Hallowe’en Nut’) by Eachann Bacach from Mull (Hector MacLean, fl. 1650), and negatively in ‘Marbhann do dh’Ailean Dearg’ (‘An Elegy for Red Allan’) by Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein from Morar (John MacDonald, c.1665–c.1725); our galley is certainly the ship of state, but the chief’s role is taken over by the crew, and the Trinity,
though prominent, has been moved from the end (its conventional position) to the begin-
ning, with the exception of the fifth-last quatrain:

Thug sinn buidheachas don Àirdrigh
Chum nan dùilean
Deagh Chlann Raghnaill a bhith sàbhailt’
O bhàs brùideil.

(We sent thanks to the High King/Up to the elements/That good Clanranald had been
saved/From a brutish death.)

Nowhere in the poem is the chief given his traditional title Mac Mhic Ailein; the ‘brutish
death’ which he avoids sounds less like simple drowning than the hanging, drawing and
quartering suffered by his cousin Donald MacDonald of Kinlochmoidart at Carlisle on 18
October 1746.

‘Beannachadh Luinge’ (‘Ship’s Blessing’), the first section, reflects an oral ship’s bless-
ing first published by Carswell. For every blessing there is a curse, and the best-known
ship’s curse, usually called ‘Guidhe nan Leòdach’ (‘The MacLeods’ Petition’), was
invoked by the MacLeods on a MacDonald vessel, or by MacMhuirich on a Clanranald
one; the ship is overwhelmed by the sea because the crew have ‘no respect for each other’
(gun urram aon d’a chéile). Like the storm scene in the ‘Birlinn’, it is in snéadhbhairdne
‘swift metre’.

Also in snéadhbhairdne is a poem by an unknown MacLean in praise of a sixteenth-
century Earl of Argyll called ‘An Duanag Ullamh’ (‘The Prepared Ditty’). It describes
the earl’s ship, its crew and rigging. Other items which seem to have informed the
‘Birlinn’ are ‘Òran don Tighearna Thuathach, Triath Chlann Choinnich’ (A Song to
the Northern Earl, the Chief of the MacKenzie’s), made in 1719 by Murdoch Matheson
from Lochalsh (c.1670–c.1757), which singles out the qualities required of particular
members of the crew, and ‘Caismeachd Ailein nan Sop’ (‘The War-Song of Allan of the
Wisps’), made about 1537 by Hector MacLean, laird of Coll, which depicts the ship’s
tackle, the crew and their struggle with the storm. It includes a phrase ràimh gam pianadh
(‘oars being tortured’) which reappears in Alasdair’s ‘Iorram Cuain’ as well as in the
‘Birlinn’.

Moving to prose exemplars, arming ‘runs’ (stylised poetic passages) in traditional tales
describe the hero putting on his clothing, weapons and armour. They were so popular that
they are to be found detached from their stories and in burlesque. The motif surfaces in
the ‘Birlinn’ as the second section, ‘Beannachadh nan Arm’ (‘The Blessing of the Arms’).
Sea-runs describe in particular the hoisting of sails, skill and speed of sailing, rough seas,
storm damage and the appearance of monsters of the deep. The damage wrought upon
ships by the sea is described in Virgil’s Aeneid; Gavin Douglas rendered it into Scots, and
Gaelic versions may be found in Irish manuscripts, but Alasdair would have known it
better in Latin. The tale ‘Cath Fionntràgha’ (‘The Battle of Ventry’) deserves particular
mention, as Alasdair took down an oral version of it himself, perhaps from John
MacCodrum’s recitation, but this was unknown to the late Angus MacLeod when he
quoted four passages from it which are paralleled in the ‘Birlinn’ (Sar Oraín, 1933). All of
these passages may be found in Alasdair’s manuscript of the tale in the National Library
of Scotland.
In his Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: Selected Poems (1996), Derick Thomson refers us to Alasdair’s description in English prose of Prince Charles’s journey of 26/27 April 1746, ten days after Culloden:

The wind blew pretty reev (i.e. smart or strong) from south-east, that in weathering the point of Arisaig the bowsprit broke in pieces. It was a most terrible dark night, attended with a violent tempest and some flashes of lightning, and wanting a compass they could not be sure how they steered their course. But at daybreak they providentially found themselves within few leagues of their wished for harbour, and landed at Rossinish in Benbecula.

This was indeed an ‘epic’ voyage, at least in the debased sense of the word. Alasdair obtained two fragments of the boat, which have been preserved as relics to this day. April is in the spring quarter, symbolised in the ‘Birlinn’ by St Brigid’s, the spring quarter-day. On the other hand, a precipitate flight from a lost battle is no cause for celebration, and it is clear that the voyage of the ‘Birlinn’ is from Uist to Ireland and celebrates the ordinary members of the crew. Any reference to this voyage, then, lies more in contrast than in comparison.

Finally, Alasdair’s own song ‘Iorram Cuain’ (“Ocean Rowing-Song’), forty-five couplets long, is obviously a preliminary sketch for the ‘Birlinn’. It has been argued that it dates from the last week of January 1739; this would explain its first line Gur neo-aoigheil turas faoillich (“Unwelcoming is a wolftime journey’). The faoillich, or ‘wolftime’ (genitive faoillich), is the wind that may be expected to blow during the two weeks on either side of St Brigid’s – hence the dating of the ‘Birlinn’

That then is how Alasdair drew upon tradition to make his case for the unity of the Gael and the primacy of the people over their leaders. He provides enough clues to show that the ‘Birlinn’ is an allegory of the Clanranald ship of state, a microcosm of the Gael and of Scotland, being navigated by its heroic crew through the dangerous waters of the ‘45. As the storm rises to a crescendo all the most disgusting creatures of the deep rise to the surface and surround the ship; they are described in five quatrains, beginning:

An fhairge uile ’s i ’na brochan
Strioplach ruaimleach,
Le fuil ’s le gaorr nam biast lorcach
Droch dhath ruadh oirr’.

(All the sea becomes a vile/Discoloured porridge, /The blood and gore of lamed beasts turns it/A foul dull red.)

This is a precise evocation of Alasdair’s own waulking songs, the scene described here being the carnage inflicted on Cope’s army at Prestonpans. But the beasts gather around the ship, becoming more numerous, aggressive, noisy, terrifying. This is Culloden, informed by a classic little piece of Jacobite writing in English, Alexis, written in 1746 by the Rev. Robert Forbes from materials supplied by Alexander MacDonald of Kingsburgh, in which ‘Alexis’ is Prince Charles, ‘Sea-Monsters’ are defined as ‘Ships of War’, and Flora MacDonald declares:

‘Providence, I hope, will carry Us safely, and preserve Us from the Sea-Monsters which swim round this Island, and would be greedy of such a Prey as the great Alexis.’ [. . .] Upon their setting out a thick Mist descends, by which Means they get safely through the Sea-Monsters, who would have been ready to devour them.
A couple of stanzas later Alasdair begins to speak of Sinn dallte le cathadh fairge ‘Our being blinded by spindrift’, Peileirean beithrich ‘Bullets of fire’, Fàileadh is deathach na riofa/Gar glan thachadh ‘The smell and smoke of the reefing sail/Completely choking us’, cogadh ‘war’, Talamh, teine, ulsge ‘s sian-ghaoth/Ruinn air togail ‘Earth, fire, rain and elements/Raised against us’, and finally síth ‘peace’. This is no ship: the reef of a sail does not catch fire. It is what makes the ‘Birlinn’ epic poetry, for it concerns heroes surviving overwhelming odds to make history, and is consciously made from existing oral elements, transcended by one individual’s powerful imagination and personal experience of war. John MacDonald, tacksman of Ardnabbee in Glen Garry, put his finger on Alasdair’s ultimate source of inspiration when he said to him:

Gun tug thu bàrr air Hòmar
Ge b’e ceòl-fhear mòr sa Ghréigis e.

(You have surpassed even Homer/Great musician though he was in Greek.)

The ‘Birlinn’ may thus be seen as the middle link of the chain that connects Homer, Blackwell, James Macpherson and Elias Lönnrot. Macpherson certainly heard it performed in Badenoch ceilidh-houses during his teenage years; it is unlikely that he saw it in writing until it appeared in Ronald’s ‘Eigg Collection’ of 1776. Nothing as radical was attempted again in Gaelic verse until in the 1930s Sorley MacLean blended the vocabulary of Presbyterian theology with echoes of John Donne and traditional Gaelic song to pour out personal passion in ‘Dàin do Eimhir’ and political anger in ‘An Cuiltheann’.

What Alasdair taught Gaelic poets above all was to be open to outside influences while adapting the old as far as possible, to think for themselves and to experiment. In ‘Mìomholadh Móraig’ he had compared Morag’s body to a rotten tree.

Is iomadh craobh sa choill’
Tha fior lòineagach,
Blàth is cairt a croinn
Gu fior shòghradhach,
Ach geàrr i sìos gun mhoill’
’S fiach i ás a broinn
’S gheibh thu fiaclan-goibhr’
Agus còsan innt’;
Cha dèan saor gu bràch
Feum d’a bun no bàrr —
Fiodhbhadh chion gun stàth,
B’i an t-olc bòidheach i:
Leagar i gun dàil,
Spealtar i air blàr
’S loosgeart i gu’m fàs i
‘Na beòghriosach.

(Many a tree in the wood/Is truly curvaceous, /Her trunk’s blossom and bark/Truly delectable, /But cut her down without delay/And behold her from inside/And you will find goats’ teeth/And little hollows in her/No carpenter can ever/Use her bottom or her top – /Brittle useless timber, /She’d be the beautiful evil,/Have her
felled right away, /Have her split up on the ground/And burned till she becomes/Living embers.)

And in ‘Marbhhrann na h-Aigeannaich’ (‘The Elegy of the Fille de Joie’) he had blended images of sex and death to see how explosive the mixture might be; here the clapping of hands, a funeral motif, is put to good use.

Sùilean an àite nam bod
Umad a’ sileadh mu seach,
Basan an ionad nan cloch
A-nis dad phostadh, mo chreach;
An uair gh an ionad do nochd
Bhith nis da cladhach ‘s da treach —
An spaid an ionad nan stob
B’ àbhaisit ’nad shlochd dol a-steach.

(Eyes instead of penises/Stream around you in turn,/Palms instead of balls/Clap you now,
I’m afraid; May the grave instead of your nakedness/Be now excavated and dug — /The spade in place of the stakes/That used to enter your hell-hole.)

The lesson as imbibed by Alasdair’s followers and successors was ‘imitate, experiment, react’. Hector MacLeod, whose entire surviving corpus reads like a sounding-board for the great man’s ideas, rhymes on short syllables like those in ‘Marbhhrann na h-Aigeannaich’, even when praising nature. These are normally the antithesis of beauty. MacLeod’s ‘An Taisbean’ mixes an echo of classical quatrains with a piece of incantatory fifteenth-century incitement to battle and a chunk of satirical prose. It reads like a scrapbook for a ‘Birlinn’ on dry land. MacLeod does not use aicill at all, which is extraordinary for his day. Indeed, he employs less rhyme generally than any other eighteenth-century poet, and some verses in his ‘Moladh do Choileach Smeòraich’ do not even appear to scan. He is colonising the middle ground between poetic creativity and the runs, charms and invocations of what we would now call folklore. This was done more overtly in the next century by Donald MacPherson (1838–80) from Lochaber, whose ‘Glaistig Lianachain’ (‘The Goblin of Lianachan’) contains echoes of rhythm, aicill, end-rhyme and verse-structure without applying them consistently; it may be seen as an attempt to re-mould existing oral narrative into a new medium using the models so richly provided by folklore. Nor was MacPherson unique in his day. ‘Uidheamachadh Luinge Chloinn Artair’ (‘The Equipping of the MacArthurs’ Ship’) by Tiree poet John Maclean (Bàrd Bhaile Mhàrtainn, 1827–95) is structurally experimental, taking the snéadhhairedhe of the ‘Birlinn’ as a loose and whimsical starting point. Exactly the same may be said of ‘Cath Mhonadh Bhraca’ (‘The Battle of Mons Graupius’), published in 1858 by the Islay poet William Livingston (1808–70). Three other poems published by Livingston in 1858, all on historical subjects, are in free verse; and his ‘Blàr Thràigh Ghruiinear’ (‘The Battle of Tràigh Ghruiinear’), which appeared later, is in a mixture of rhyming couplets and free verse.

With hindsight, then, we may say that Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had paved the way for the Gaelic poetry of the second half of the twentieth century.
Further reading


Orality and Public Poetry

Leith Davis and Maureen N. McLane

The transposition of oral sources into print has often been viewed as a one-way exercise in power, an act of cultural domination, even as a method of violent political control – and indeed, it has been argued that writing kills orality. The antiquarian, scholar and sometime ballad-forger John Pinkerton argued the same over two centuries ago in ‘On the Oral Tradition of Poetry’ (1781): ‘In proportion as Literature advanced in the world Oral Tradition disappeared.’ Yet announcements of the death of orality, like those of the death of Scotland, have long proven to be premature. It is true, however, that writing and print technologies transform, in their re-mediations, oral materia. What we see emerging in Scottish poetry from the eighteenth century onwards is a new, multi-valent literary orality.

In eighteenth-century Scottish public poetry (here restricted to poetry written for print publication), the introduction of orality into print form often functioned as a form of cultural resistance to the dominance of English and a London-based Britain. While the majority of the Scottish literati embraced English for speaking and writing prose from 1603 onwards, the 1707 Act of Union provided a catalyst for a reconsideration of Scots as a viable and creative language for poetry. From Allan Ramsay through Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, eighteenth-century Scottish poetry underwent several striking, many-hued efflorescences, as these poets boldly claimed the authority to write equally brilliantly in vernacular Scots – with its notional proximity to oral culture – and in standard English, or in hybrids thereof. It was not of course ‘orality’ per se but rather a variety of orality-effects that Scottish poets strove to attain. By the late eighteenth century, poets had developed sophisticated techniques for exploiting the aura of orality in print; and Scottish antiquarians, scholars and critics had kept pace by developing equally refined commentaries on and theories of the oral, oral poetry and oral transmission.

‘Orality’ is of course a very broad term, evoking everything from ‘peoples without writing’ to lore and legend, to traditionary cultural practices, to bodily consumption, to popular expressive forms persisting into the age of print media (such as ballads, folk tales and songs). Orality makes sense as a term only when we clarify its implicit counters: literacy, the literary, writing, print and elite culture. Eighteenth-century Scots were especially alive to the many cultural meanings of ‘orality’: indeed, one could argue that they were the first to theorise the term. If Scotland could boast an excellent parish-school system and the most literate population in Europe, it also possessed, to its alternating pride and embarrassment, a rich oral culture among both Gaelic and Scots speakers. This repository and stimulus for antiquarians and poets, could also signify – to those committed to historical progress under the sign of the Union – a regrettable backwardness. If (as Robert Crawford has argued in The Scottish Invention of English Literature, 1998) it was Scottish intellectuals...
who ‘invented “English Literature”’, they did so in part by accepting the peripheral status of Scottish literature, language and orality.

For many ambitious Scots, ‘the oral’ connoted a residual phase of cultural development, and was thus best left behind, or confined to friendly local communities. That paragon of standard Englishness, Samuel Johnson, grounded his blasts against James Macpherson’s Ossian poems in his contempt for merely oral tradition (and indeed for Scotland: his censures tellingly equated orality and Scotland). It is striking that for many years, Macpherson and his defenders implicitly endorsed Johnson’s dismissal of the oral as a legitimate basis for poetic production: when Johnson challenged the source-bases of the Ossian poems and thundered, ‘show us the manuscripts!’, Macpherson did not, in the first instance, launch a defense of oral-traditionary poetry and transmission; he rather claimed to have displayed his manuscript sources in a bookseller’s window. Well into the 1760s and 1770s, then, ‘orality’ bore the taint of illegitimacy, and Scottish orality within the Scottish as well as British cultural imaginary remained a much-vexed domain.

Yet as the Ossian poems themselves stunningly demonstrated, the conjuring of Scottish orality and traditionary culture in print would have a great success in the later eighteenth century. If the Ossian poems’ authenticity was doubted, their great appeal for print publics – in Scotland, England, North America and across Europe – could not be. For poets, antiquarians and collectors, the complex situation of orality turned out to be in some ways a boon, particularly in post-Culloden Scotland, when the volatility of political Jacobitism gave way to a milder cultural nationalism: an illustrious Scottish national past – an oral past – could be celebrated without necessarily challenging British hegemony. Thus Walter Scott in his Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802–3) could promote medieval Border minstrels and contemporary street criers in Aberdeen like ‘Mussel-mou’d’ Charlie (as well as their passionate antipathy to England), while also supporting British military manoeuvres against Napoleonic France. Yet more rebellious and revolutionary spirits like Burns aimed to keep alive the subversive force of Scottish identity, conducted through representations of orality; and James Hogg in his collection of Jacobite songs later allied himself with popular resistance channelled through popular song.

As was true in so many zones of late eighteenth-century cultural enquiry, the antiquarians made enormous contributions to the preservation and theorisation of oral poetry; their work in turn stimulated the most original poets of the age – Robert Burns, for example, saluted the English antiquarian Joseph Ritson’s 1783 Select Collection of English Songs as his vade mecum. It was a Scottish antiquarian, John Pinkerton, who wrote one of the earliest essays on oral poetry, ‘On the Oral Tradition of Poetry’, prefixed to his Scottish Tragic Ballads; and it was a later collector and editor, William Motherwell of Paisley, who may be credited with developing the first rigorous theory of oral composition, articulated in his introduction to Minstrelsy: Ancient and Modern (1827).

Thrilled as a child by Thomas Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) (itself spurred by Ossian’s success) and by the supposedly ancient Scottish ballad ‘Hardyknute’ (a much-circulated anonymous early eighteenth-century production of Lady Wardlaw), Walter Scott moved from his own antiquarian ballad-collating and -editing to the authoring of ballad imitations to his first romance, The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805), a spectacularly successful simulation of a professional, late medieval oral poet and his ruined aristocratic milieu. A sophisticated apprenticeship and traffic in the oral thus enabled Scott to become the maestro of print genres, from ballad collection to metrical romance to the historical novel and biography. His oeuvre exemplifies the complexities of Scottish literary orality in the public sphere.
If Macpherson’s reliance on oral tradition had been scandalous, such reliance increasingly became de rigueur among collectors, who recognised that (unlike their English competitors) they could invoke oral-authentication as a trump card distinguishing their collections and their editorial practice. Ballad editors increasingly displayed their access to oral informants: the living reciter, the medium of oral tradition, saluted gingerly in Scott’s Minstrelsy, pointedly in Robert Jamieson’s Popular Ballads and Songs (1806), matter-of-factly in William Motherwell’s Minstrelsy (1827). Oral tradition, humble though it appeared to literate elites, came to acquire a new and unembarrassed status. Scott and Jamieson both emphasised that when they edited Scottish balladry, they worked as natives (unlike for example Joseph Ritson): they could even, as it were, collect ballads from themselves as living archives. Indeed, Scott observed in ‘Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry’, prefacing Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1830) that when young he could ‘recollect as many of these old songs as would have occupied several days in the recitation’.

The very titles of collections advertised their multiple source-bases, their traffic in the oral: the subtitle of Scott’s Minstrelsy announced that the poems, ‘consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads’, were ‘Collected in the Southern Counties of Scotland’; and Jamieson’s Popular Ballads and Songs: from Tradition, Manuscripts, and Scarce Editions conspicuously flagged his handling of oral and manuscript archives. Scott’s ballads were typically ‘collated editions’, as he put it, of print, manuscript and oral recitation; he had yet to arrive at Motherwell’s conviction that composite ballads were to be eschewed, that a single recitation was to be preferred.

Since the transmission of oral culture was often assumed to be the province of dairymaids and nurses (exemplified in the oral-traditionary performance of the Beldame in Beattie’s The Minstrel, 1771), it is not surprising that those interested in traffic in the oral turned to female informants. David Herd’s milkmaid, noted in manuscript in 1771, Robert Jamieson’s anonymous dairymaid, Scott’s ostentatiously saluted Mrs Brown of Falkland, and several aristocratic ladies who wished to remain anonymous (as did, in fact, poor Mrs Brown): women of all classes and social stations were recognised as significant oral-cultural transmitters. From James Hogg’s mother, the redoubtable Mrs Hogg (who conveniently came up with ‘Auld Maitland’ for Scott), to Mrs Brown (whose remarkable repertoire, rendered into manuscript by male relatives, was taken over by Ritson, Scott, Jamieson and later Francis James Child), to Lady Caroline Nairne and Anne Home Hunter, women were central to orally informed poetic production, whether as mediators of balladry and legend or as authors of original poems, or both.

If some antiquarians imagined they were conducting salvage operations – collecting oral culture before it was definitively dead – other cultural producers, namely the poets, saw themselves more robustly as reconstructing the oral in print. Robert Burns’s contributions to James Johnson’s Scottish Musical Museum (1787–1803) – over 200 songs – often retrofitted familiar airs with gloriously new words. These songs, like Burns’s poems, entered communities and became themselves part of a vital oral tradition – once again demonstrating the complexities of oral-literate interactions possible in the period. And indeed, major poets took up the project of bringing the oral over into print: those communities of gab and song in pubs, the lively exchange of speech and story, the vitality of a vernacular culture all channelled through – in Burns’s case especially – the transformative powers of a bilingual, explosively gifted poet. While it is true that the poets’ print renderings and evocations of orality necessarily required a distance from any actual oral performance or bodily presence, it is also true that the poems of Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns (for example) relied on the notional force of that somatic presence associated with oral immediacy.
Throughout the century, these poets evoked Scottish orality and deliberately challenged political and aesthetic presumptions regarding the imagined superiority of the English language and homogeneity of the British nation. In his first collection of Poems (1721), Allan Ramsay defended his decision to employ Scots as a language of poetic expression: ‘good Poetry may be in any Language’. He argues that Scots is actually more mellifluous to the ear than English: ‘the Pronunciation is liquid and sonorous, and much fuller than the English’. Perhaps anticipating the misgivings of an English readership, he celebrates a double fluency in Scots and English, observing that Scots are ‘Masters’ of English by being taught it in our Schools, and daily reading it; which being added to all our own native Words, of eminent Significancy, makes our Tongue by far the completest: For Instance, I can say, an empty House, a toom Barrel, a boss Head, and a hollow Heart.

The Scottish poet thus draws upon a linguistic amplitude unknown to his monolingual English colleague; and Ramsay makes plain that the English of his ‘reading’ and his ‘native’ Scots ‘tongue’ are complementary, not antagonistic. Ramsay further complicates any simple opposition between English ‘reading’ and Scots orality by writing a literary Scots, a long-distinguished writerly and print modality. ‘Our tongue’ may be oral, but it also has an impressive literary pedigree, as Ramsay demonstrates by employing older Scottish poetic forms like the alliterative fourteen-line stanza from Alexander Montgomerie’s ‘Cherry and the Slae’ (1597) and the jaunty six-line stanza from Robert Sempill’s ‘The Life and Death of Habbie Simpson, Piper of Kilbarchan’ (c. 1640). (The latter, dubbed ‘Standard Habbie’ by Ramsay, was taken up to great effect by Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns.)

Through this sophisticated literary medium Ramsay conjures, in such poems as his ‘Elegy on Maggy Johnston’, the vibrant, oral community of the Bruntsfield Links pub; he frames the poem proper with explanatory footnotes written in standard English. One observes here a typical gesture of linguistic and cultural mediation: if the poet is bilingual, his readership may well not be. The footnotes serve both to translate selected Scots words and also to explain local customs and geographical references to a non-local readership: Ramsay explains in his notes, for example, that Maggy sold ‘the Scots pint’ which is ‘near to two quarts English’ and outlines the rules of the ‘drunken game’ of ‘Hi-jinks’. Yet the footnotes do not so much explain Scottish oral culture as point out the limitations of explanation and translation. What lies outside the explanatory ability of the footnotes are the actual ‘food, drink, speech and song’ circulating inside the pub. ‘Elegy on Maggy Johnston’ thus draws attention to what Seamus Deane in Strange Country (1997) has called, in an Irish context, the ‘bodily economy’ of the local pub culture – an economy that consists of the consumption of liquor and the production of both bodily waste products and storytelling:

Fou closs we us’d to drink and rant,
Until we did baith glowre and gaunt,
And pish and spew, and yesk and maunt,
Right swash I true.

Such circulation of drink, song and story is celebrated by the poem that it aspires to enter this economy. And it is this ‘bodily economy’ which offers a mechanism for cultural continuity. With Maggy dead, the narrator somewhat anxiously wonders if she has left ‘to bairns o thine/The pauky knack/O brewing ale amaist like wine?’ Although the pub-goers speculate on what ingredients made the ale so strong, Ramsay implies that ‘pauky knack'
is a question of ‘skill’, of transmitted technique and trained bodily knowledge, not just of
knowing the right ingredients. The transmission of that skill will in turn be productive of
further oral activity in the form of speech or ‘crack’.

Such questions of cultural transmission preoccupied those poets most committed to
Scottish speech, music and its much-valued tradition of song and story. If in ‘Maggy
Johnston’, Ramsay presents a local form of Scottish culture, the community that revolves
around Maggy’s pub, Fergusson in such poems as ‘On the Death of Scottish Music’ works
on a broader canvas, imagining a national community heterogeneous in location and class.
Highland and Lowland, bourgeois and labouring class, urban and rural members are bound
together through the phantasmal ‘harmony’ of music. The ‘skreed’ of the pibroch and the
singing of the shepherds near the Yarrow and the Tweed are inspired by the same musical
spirit as the tunes of ‘the man in music maist expert’, William ‘Macgibbon’. Fergusson’s
salute to violinist and composer McGibbon (1690–1756) points to the strikingly mixed
cultural resources of Scottish cultural production, both musical and poetic: McGibbon,
like Fergusson, drew on both oral-traditional and more elite, print-based musics. Like
Fergusson in his own poem, McGibbon re-mediated traditionary sources, publishing music
that was itself indebted to traditional tunes. Yet for Fergusson, McGibbon signifies not a
highly modern mediation of traditionary and emergent cultural forms but rather a stalwart
exemplar of tradition per se: Fergusson hails him as the ‘blythest sangster’ and implies that
after McGibbon’s death (which actually occurred when Fergusson was six years old),
Scottish oral folk culture, too, is in danger of disappearing.

Such laments for the disappearance of Scottish traditionary culture were by the late
eighteenth century highly conventional, as well as deeply felt. Fergusson’s poem, ‘On the
Death of Scots Music’, invokes the endlessly renewable, romantic and often Jacobite theme
of the imminent death of Scottish culture and the urgent need for ‘restoration’. Not only
British threats loom: ‘Foreign sonnets’ and ‘crabbit queer variety/Of Sounds fresh sprung
frae Italy’ have helped to kill Scottish music, which may yet be ‘restor’d’, Fergusson mock-
heroically declares, if Scotland’s sons will ‘to battle speed’. Whereas in ‘Maggy Johnston’,
the symbol of cultural continuity was the skill at beer-making, in ‘On the Death of Scottish
Music’, the symbol is musical skill. The ‘pawky art’ of McGibbon might be seen as equiva-
 lent to the ‘pauky knack’ of Maggy, a skill that must be embodied rather than exclusively
learned from printed sources, and a skill that Fergusson challenges the reader to ‘restore’.

The most brilliant re-mediator of oral tradition was surely Robert Burns, poet, songster
and collector of popular song and story. A brief period of celebrity in Edinburgh and
London in 1787 was followed by descent into an ever more straitened existence back in
Ayrshire; Burns’s efforts to navigate traditionary culture and the literary public sphere were
personally demanding and met with mixed success. Like Fergusson, he explored with great
sophistication the interdependence of orality and print. In his ‘Epistle to J. Lapraik, An
Old Scotch Bard’, for example, explicitly written poems and spontaneously composed
‘sangs’ appear as equally expert inventions. The ‘Epistle’ is inspired by the recitation of ‘ae
sang’ at a community gathering, yet the ‘sang’ itself is associated with writers who worked
firmly within the realm of print culture: ‘“Can this be Pope, or Steele, /Or Beattie’s wark?”’.
The poet constantly demonstrates his fluency in simultaneously thinking along oral,
writerly and print axes, as well as in several linguistic registers.

Burns notes in his ‘Epistle to J. Lapraik’ that his original inclination to poetry was medi-
ated through literacy: he ‘fell’ to the ‘crambo-jingle’ ‘Amaist as soon as I could spell’. Yet his
creativity is fundamentally allied with orality, with somatic presence and immediacy, as
he comments: ‘Tho rude an’ rough, /Yet crouning to a body’s sel, /Does weel eneugh’.
In saluting Lapraik, Burns enlists him as a representative of Scottish orality and local, geographically specified community: “‘Tween Inverness and Teviotdale, /He had few matches’. People who know Lapraik do not think of him as a published poet, the poem suggests. Rather, they describe the products of his ‘ingine’ as oral and associate them with the ‘bodily economy’ of ‘food, drink, speech and song’ similar to that described by Ramsay. The narrator of ‘Epistle to J. Lapraik, An Old Scotch Bard’ comments ‘set him to a pint of ale, /An’ either douse or merry tale, /Or rhymes an’ sangs he’d made himsel, /Or witty catches’ will be forthcoming.

Burns stations his poem within an ongoing oral circulation: the motivation for the ‘Epistle’ is to establish a contact that will lead to further oral exchange. The speaker will offer ‘a pint an’ gill’ in order ‘To hear [Lapraik’s] crack’, and he envisions their meeting ending in ‘a swap o’rhymin-ware, /Wi’ ane anither’. Print mediation appears in Burns’s hands as only one phase of a broader communicative circuit: poets may publish, but they will also meet, drink and swap rhymes at the local pub.

For all their different local, regional, class, urban or rural affiliations, then, the work of Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns conjures up an oral ‘bodily economy’ which both penetrates and disrupts the world of print culture. Their poetry collectively suggests that the oral is not eradicated by structures of print, but rather that it persists within those structures, as well as pointing to its existence beyond them. At the same time, the presence of this ‘bodily economy’ serves to contest the idea of a homogeneous British community created by print; their work demonstrated the existence of multiple oral communities in Britain in the eighteenth century: local and regional (Scott’s Borders, Burns’s Ayrshire, Jamieson’s Morayshire, Motherwell’s Paisley), urban (Fergusson’s homosocial Edinburgh milieu, and Scott’s), notional (the Scottish nation or small community conjured in print) and actual (the poets’ fellow-carousers, kin, neighbours). The private occasion could become public, the small community broadcast: Fergusson’s Cape Club poems making their way into print; antiquarian correspondence showing up in the head- and footnotes of ballad collections; the ballad-singing and anecdotes swapped at Abbotsford appearing in Scott’s Minstrelsy and later memoirs.

Burns could jeer in the ‘Epistle to J. Lapraik’ at the ‘critic-folk’ who ‘cock their nose’ at any poet who dares ‘to mak a sang’ – ‘You wha ken hardly verse from prose’. Demonstrating his virtuosity at all modes of poetic mediation in two languages, Burns could afford such cultural confidence and brio. Yet transformations in early nineteenth-century Scotland made such triumphal orchestrations of and in Scots less likely: the impoverishment of crofters, depopulation of villages, migration to the cities and subsequent weakening of cross-generational ties and social structures eroded the basis and transmission of such traditional folk practices as singing and storytelling, as J. Derrick McClure observes in Language, Poetry and Nationhood (2000). The use of the Scots language and the depiction of oral customs in the work of nineteenth-century poets came to serve not as signs of resistance to anglicisation and English dominance, but as nostalgic representations of a past rural culture. The poems that appeared in the collection entitled Whistlebinkie, or the Piper of the Party (first published in 1832 and popular in revised form throughout the century), for example, epitomise the use of orality as a marker of a nearly obsolete rustic purity. ‘The Muirlan’ Cottars’ by John Donald Carrick portrays a conversation between a cotter and his wife who praise God for his generosity to them and prepare themselves to help others in need during a snowstorm. The ‘cosie ingle’ of their home becomes a bastion of familial and religious love. Alexander Rodger’s ‘The Peasant’s Fireside’ expands on this theme: ‘In his elbow chair reclined, he can freely speak his mind, /To his bosom-mate sae kind, by his ain
fireside’. Such poetry worked to privatise and de-politicise orality – free speech practised, it would seem, only at the fireside – as well as to marginalise it, with orality confined to rural and labouring communities; such poems did little to trouble narratives of British dominance. Furthermore, in a striking abdication of the poetic resources of Ramsay, Ferguson and Burns, the poets of Whistlebinkie make little effort to draw upon literary Scots. Whistlebinkie thus tends to reinforce rather than question the opposition of oral Scots – now almost wholly characterised as residual – and literary English.

There were some exceptions to this nostalgic neutralisation of Scots orality in the nineteenth century. In The Language of the People (1989), William Donaldson identifies a ‘renaissance’ of writing based on oral Scots in the popular press of the nineteenth century, which all deal with current events and preoccupations. But as Donaldson himself suggests, this material was inevitably written either for a specific local readership or for a working-class reading population; however effective its use for educating and mobilising these communities, Scots had been devalued for use in the wider spectrum of public poetry in Britain.

At the end of the century, Robert Louis Stevenson attempted a more conscious use of Scots vernacular as a vital literary language. Like Ferguson’s publisher, he segregated his Scots poetry; Book II of his Underwoods (1887) contains poems written exclusively ‘In Scots’. Like his eighteenth-century predecessors, Stevenson freely juxtaposes the Scottish and the English languages, employing one or the other. Stevenson understood his Scots to be a medium of invention, not documentation; he comments in Underwoods that the Scots he employed was not, precisely speaking, a transliteration from oral speech, but rather a compendium of different dialects:

I simply wrote my Scots as I was able, not caring if it hailed from Lauderdale or Angus, from the Mearns or Galloway; if I had ever heard a good word, I used it without shame; and when Scots was lacking, or the rhyme jibbed, I was glad (like my betters) to fall back on English.

He thus subsumes regional dialect into a phantasmal Scots – thereby displaying both his local knowledges but acknowledging the transmediation required for any literary production.

Whereas Ramsay, Ferguson and Burns envisioned their inclusion of Scots orality as challenging the homogeneity of English and expanding the possibilities of public poetry, Stevenson appears to reject such a future for public poetry. In the ‘Note’ introducing Underwoods, Stevenson writes:

The day draws near when this illustrious and malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten; and Burns’s Ayrshire, and Dr MacDonald’s Aberdeen awa’, and Scott’s brave metropolitan utterance will be all equally the ghosts of speech. Till then I would love to have my hour as a native Makar, and be read by my own countryfolk in our own dying language.

In ‘The Maker to Posterity’, written in Standard Habbie form, the narrator explains to an imagined reader unfamiliar with its language that he wrote the poems in ‘Lallan [sic]’:

Few spak it then, an’ noo there’s nane.
My puir auld sangs lie a’ their lane,
Their sense, that aince was braw an’ plain,
  Tint a’ thegither,
Like runes upon a standin’ stane
  Amang the heather.
Stevenson thus arrives at a literary orality almost completely sundered from vernacular practice: ‘few spak it then’, when he wrote, and in the future, ‘there’s nane’. Yet rather than indulge in bathetic lament, Stevenson allows that this may be the fate of all cultural production: he concludes by suggesting that books produced in other languages will also become ‘ghosts of speech’. In Stevenson’s poem, the fate of Scots foreshadows a global disintegration and obsolescence. Neither print nor the ‘bodily economy’ of orality will be able to provide a sure source of continuity for Scottish culture – or for any culture.

In fact, Stevenson’s dire predictions for Scots (and for public poetry) were somewhat ill-founded. Less than twenty years after his death in 1894, the beginnings of a new movement promoting both poetry written in Scots and Scottish political independence was under way. Instead of being concerned with the translation of orality into print, however, the poetry of twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance writers like Hugh MacDiarmid focused energetically on literary Scots. MacDiarmid rejected the hybridisation of Scots and English that was the marker of Ramsay’s, Ferguson’s and Burns’s political interventions, attempting instead to forcibly create a pure literary Scots – Scots that no one ever did or would speak. Raiding John Jamieson’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* to create his brilliantly pastiched idiom, MacDiarmid did indeed render the ‘bodily economy’ of the oral world into the ‘ghosts of speech’ which Stevenson described. Yet the fantasised return to the oral which has for so long galvanised Scottish poetry persists as a rich, complex resource – as the endlessly revivable ballad and the most recent poetry of Don Paterson, Robert Crawford, Liz Lochhead and Kathleen Jamie make plain.

**Further reading**


Varieties of Public Performance: Folk Songs, Ballads, Popular Drama and Sermons

Janet Sorensen

Studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performance in Europe have investigated how performance helped create and foster a sense of group affiliation, particularly on a national level. Through its staging of memory and continuity, its powers of reinvention, and its acts of substitution, performance is able to fill in the inevitable gaps and discontinuities in narratives of national origins upon which such affiliations often depend. Post-Union Scotland, negotiating a complex mix of regional, Scots and British identities, was particularly benefited by longstanding oral traditions in performance that could turn a history wrought, from a unionist standpoint, with discontinuities into a seamless story of Scottish identity. The disruptions of Union, the ongoing struggles over legitimate secular and religious leadership and the cultural divisions imposed by an increasingly anglicised power base were discontinuities specific to Scotland, gaps which performance, in a variety of arenas, might help close. At the same time, examining the wide range of public performance, broadly conceived to include not only theatre but also ballad singing, street performance and even sermons, also reveals an expansive diversity of articulations of Scottishness, often in conflict. Oral performance of ballads, for instance, could invigorate subterranean Jacobite sympathies, instil a sense of connection to a larger Scots past or define an emerging, enlightened literate Scotland in contrast to a residual oral culture. Theatre might draw polite spectators into imagined networks of national feeling or arouse depraved drives, creating a community of sinners.

Fear of performance's power to catalyse dangerous affiliations led the Presbytery of Edinburgh, in 1727, to issue an 'Admonition and Exhortation' against 'the infection of the stage and its illegal and dangerous entertainments'. The Church of Scotland had issued such interdictions against virtually all forms of performance from the beginning of the Reformation and throughout the eighteenth century – a strange stance given the early reformed Church’s use of performance elements, such as staged disputes, and the fact that sermonising was one of the most popular forms of performance throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Frequently, presbyteries petitioned local town councils to assist them in their efforts to stamp out public performance, and more often than not the magistrates heeded those requests, as when the Glasgow Magistrates forbade ‘strolling stage players from running through the streets, and from performing plays in private houses’ in 1670. Further, through the Licensing Act of 1737 the British state aided these efforts in strictly regulating and in effect prohibiting public performances, labelling any actor or
entertainer of the stage ‘a rogue and vagabond’, subject to the same draconian laws as those against newly criminalised mobile subjects. The government granted no licence for a theatre in Scotland until 1767, and this thirty-year ban dampened institutionalised drama and street performances for much of the century. The subterfuge of offering a drama gratis after a musical concert was, however, introduced. This took place, for example, in Edinburgh from 1739, while the Canongate Concert Hall (so-called) ‘opened in 1747 with a performance of Hamlet under the [. . .] cover of a concert’ and became, in Adrienne Scullion’s words in Bill Findlay’s A History of Scottish Theatre (1998), ‘the theatrical centre of Edinburgh’.

According to various religious writers, chief among the transgressions of profane performances in the street and playhouse was their sensuousness. The Kirk condemned all ‘players' in terms which grotesquely embodied them, one 1730s pamphlet calling players ‘the filth and garbage of the earth, the scum and stain of human nature, the excrement and refuse of all mankind’. Playhouses, as another pamphlet announces, ‘inflame all our disorderly passions’, and the Church equally denounced in Vengeance of God (1747) all street performances for their titillation of the body as well as the graphic embodiment of performers. The foregrounding of the body – whether in the rousing spectacle of physical performances of tumbling and rope walking, the oral and aural quality of ballad singing or the sentimental, passion-stirring emphasis of plays like John Home’s Douglas (which ran for an unprecedented six nights at its initial staging in 1756) – is an important motif in performances of the period, as performing bodies were seen as facilitating the affective bond of spectators in this wide variety of publics.

Street performance, ballads and song

Despite heavy restrictions, performances of all sorts continued, either in direct conflict with the law or at the borders of acceptability. That Scots supported these performances, either in their purchases from travelling ballad hawkers, in participation in or watching of spectacular processions or in the attendance of the musical performances which provided a front for the ‘gratis’ play productions that followed, suggests the ongoing significance of performance in the face of formidable state and religious opposition. In holiday parades, in street performances or in theatrical productions which continued to take place (despite Licensing Act restrictions) in Aberdeen, Arbroath, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Perth, a sense of cultures resistant to official norms thrived. One Aberdeen guide, for instance, records the spectacle of the New Year’s Day procession in which

servants and apprentices of artificers bore the banners of their trade. Every craft had [. . .] its champion [. . .]. The Hammermen were preceded by a grim visaged Vulcan, grasping a thunderbolt and drawn in a chariot. The shoemakers were headed by their patron, St Crispin [. . .]. Many of the young men wore fantastic dresses, amongst which the most favoured was that of a malignant Turk. An attempt to abolish this custom in the year 1785 occasioned much rioting, and several persons were incarcerated.

While the ‘malignant Turk’ costumes might have offered an alien spectacle against which a ‘white’ Britishness might identify itself, the unifying performance of collective craft communities might be better seen as an instance of complex and more informal power groupings distinct from the local state apparatus.
The role of performance and the performing body in constituting alternative communities was especially important to the variety of Jacobite sympathies surfacing throughout the period. Popular Jacobite ballad singers, like Charles Leslie, known in his day (his long life supposedly stretching from c. 1677 to 1782) as ‘Mussel-mou’d Charlie’ because of the odd deformation of his bottom lip, travelled Scotland to hawk ballad broadsheets and chapbooks. In his home base, Aberdeen, an important centre of ballad production, Leslie occupied a central street corner, where ‘he was allowed to have a virtual monopoly, singing his songs [. . .] in a deep hollow roar’ (quoted in Narrative Folksong, 1985). Both in his hollow roar and in his very name, Mussel-mou’d Charlie is forcefully and dangerously embodied, connecting performance and the spectacular physical body. The graphic embodiment of the ballad performer is especially haunting in representations of Leslie in a biographical song written upon his death that conjures the image of his rotting corpse: ‘Grim Death has clo’d his mussel mou’/. . . /He’s dead and shortly will be rotten’. But this same song also casts him as a transcendent figure, celebrated as living on in memory: ‘he must never be forgotten, / My bonnie Highland Laddie’. The performer’s doubled status, both decaying body and ongoing presence, Joseph Roach has argued in Cities of the Dead (1996), shares the symbolic logic of sovereignty, in which the king possesses two bodies, one mortal, one transcendent. Performance does crucial work, as performers stand in for a vacant original and thus enable a sense of continuity in group consciousness during periods of crisis, such as the change or loss of a sovereign. This notion of threatening absence and performance’s restorative substitution is especially interesting in the context of Scotland, with its departed and then exiled monarchs and national (parliamentary) sovereignty. In Leslie the performer substitutes for the Stuart monarch, unifying a Jacobite political community in the king’s absence, as he occupies the figurative position of the oddly doubled and missing ruler.

As a Jacobite, Leslie, like many folk song and ballad singers, helped consolidate an affiliation alternative to the officially authorised Anglo-British identity advanced in post-Culloden Scotland; for this he found himself imprisoned. Folk song, as Gramsci writes (cited in Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971)), ‘is a separate and distinct way of perceiving life and the world, as opposed to that of “official” society’. The appeal to family bloodlines above all else in border ballads or to specific locales in the Scots Gaelic ballads work too along lines of group membership distinct from official British or even Scottish national society. Opposition to the official society of church and rural property owners took one of its most interesting collective forms in the Horseman’s Word ‘cult’ in nineteenth-century north-east Scotland. Probably developed out of earlier Ploughman’s and Miller’s Word groups, this exclusively male, extensive underground organisation engaged in ‘diabolical’ rituals alongside practical discussions about horse training and, significantly, ballad singing. Hamish Henderson speculates that ballad singing remained vital in the north-east long after it had disappeared from other parts of Scotland because of the continuation of the Horseman’s Word activities up until the First World War. That the Horseman’s Word collectives met only under cover of darkness and connected their ballad singing to blatantly transgressive acts such as ‘invoke[ing] the aid of the devil’ (cited in The People’s Past, 1991) demonstrates that, like Leslie, they understood their ballad performance as resisting church and state.

Performances at secret meetings of the Horsemen, or for that matter at the closed gatherings of other all-male social groups such as Edinburgh’s Cape Club, which often featured singing, were in only a very limited sense public. In these settings group performance helped constitute very specific, renegade and male group identities. Conventional ballad singers, of necessity more public – defined in contemporary dictionaries as singers of ‘songs
commonly sung up and down the street’ – and often female, engaged in performances more wide-ranging in possible effects. They might incite Jacobite sympathies, or, as grotesquely embodied purveyors of ‘low’ culture, they might represent marginal identities. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, also saw the revaluation of ballads and their performance. If some ballad and song performances helped to unite resistant communities, others, sometimes drawing from those margins, contributed to the development of a dominant, new enlightened British community, with complicated gender dynamics. As Steve Newman has shown, Allan Ramsay adapted popular songs with choruses for all to sing, singing providing a supplement to the social interchange of conversation. In redeeming popular songs for middle-class parlours, Ramsay distanced himself from their lowly, often female sources, particularly their physicality, in his poem, ‘The Author’s Address to the Town Council of Edinburgh’, which disdains female ballad singers’ and sellers’ ‘coarse dirty fingers’. In Ramsay’s reconfiguration of them, the act of singing these preserved folk songs in polite society instead articulated Enlightenment ideals, such as sociability and shared feeling. More often than not it was women who bought and sang Ramsay’s songs (and wrote their own), pointing towards the idea of feminine sensibility important to Enlightenment notions of refinement. Polite women songwriters differentiated themselves from those street-based women ballad singers by highlighting the private nature of their productions and performance, although that line was a fine, even permeable, one.

Antiquarian discourse also bestowed authority upon female performers, seeing them as authoritative keepers of decaying folk culture. Consider the odd investment in the performing body of Anna Gordon, Mrs Brown of Falkland, who provided source material for Walter Scott, William Motherwell and Robert Jamieson. Late eighteenth-century collectors recorded her singing of variations of the ballads she was said to have learned in childhood. These transcribers perceived her performance as the last link to a newly appreciated ‘living’ culture that they saw the fixity of print as superseding. Folk songs and ballads became increasingly valued within polite and antiquarian circles, domesticating ballad performance culture for both genteel and popular audiences well into the nineteenth century. Official and popular interest in collecting folk ballads suggests the power of performance in consolidating cultural identity, but in this instance that power derives from the perceived demise of this form of performance. Once again, the fetishised performing body, in this case the salvaged oral performer, both marks and surpasses time’s inevitable decay of community cultures. This phenomenon might be nowhere as compelling as in the enduring folk-song performances of and collections for transatlantic communities of migrating Scots, such as those of Nova Scotia. Displaced yet strangely culturally rooted, the singing of Scots folk songs by these emigrants might register both the disintegration and lasting, if mobile, presence of particular Scots communities.

**Popular theatre**

If Ramsay helped institute a variety of public performance that consolidated a new vision of modern Scottishness, his case also demonstrates the ambivalence that officialdom continued to maintain towards various performance cultures, particularly the performance of a distinct Scottishness in theatre. Beginning in 1733, Ramsay managed the first resident company of stage players in Scotland and built their playhouse in Carrubbers Close in Edinburgh in 1736. Although most of the productions of the Edinburgh Players (as they were known), and of the strolling players and visiting companies that preceded them, were
familiar English standards likely to bring in high box-office sales, Ramsay’s company did produce, in 1737, Adam Thomson’s ballad opera, *The Disappointed Gallant*, in the season before the authorities shut down the Carrubbers Close theatre. Taking place in Edinburgh, *The Disappointed Gallant* also features songs set to Scots airs. The Scots setting and music, with its emphasis on local colour, anticipated by several decades performances drawing from an explicitly Scots culture, yet such stagings of Scottish spaces and celebrations of Scots music did not garner official support for Ramsay. The Town Council of Edinburgh, to whom Ramsay addressed his grievances about bootlegging ballad singers, prohibited their unauthorised publications yet failed to compensate Ramsay for the larger loss he had taken in building the playhouse. Shut down in 1737 because of the Licensing Act, this short-lived performance site represented a public space magistrates and church officials felt well rid of, despite Ramsay’s plea in the *Gentlemen’s Magazine* (1737) to Duncan Forbes, Lord President of the Session, and other judges that his company aimed to ‘only preach, frae moral fable, the best instruction they were able’.

Performance itself in this period, like Ramsay’s own position, wavered between the fostering of alternative, resistant Scots identities and the promotion of modern Scottish identity and virtue. The confluence of these positions is evident in the production history of Ramsay’s wildly popular *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725) – a play that saw over 160 productions in Scotland, England and America in the eighteenth century. Early versions of the play performed Ramsay’s published eclogues. It was a performance of these by strolling players that inspired Haddington Grammar School boys to request that Ramsay write a ballad opera which the boys then performed as their annual school play at Taylor’s Hall in 1729. Thus, Ramsay’s ‘elevated’ Scots-language pastoral dialogues made their way to the street before being taken up by the children of the elite. The schoolchildren’s performance, in turn, marked one site where authorities endorsed the re-mediated performance of ballads in Scots as a means of instilling virtue, for performance itself seems to have been an acceptable form of instruction for children. There is record, for instance, of a theatrical production at the Crail Grammar School in Fife in 1742 designed ‘to instruct rather than delight pupils. Children declaimed the drama for their parents [...] indicating how firmly entrenched theatricals had become in the education of Scots gentlemen since the Restoration’ (quoted in *Plays by Scots, 1660–1800*, 1974).

That *The Gentle Shepherd* elicited enmity from some circles is surprising. This play, like the figure of Charles Leslie, resolves gaps in a discontinuous leadership and consequently potentially divided community, in this case through motifs of substitution, but the resulting community is certainly not an explicitly Jacobite one. Its key terms of unification are the restoration of class hierarchies when Patie the worthy shepherd’s gentle status is revealed. In exile after civil war, his father, Sir William, is absent from his estate. Yet William’s rule is beyond question, transcending the terms of corrupt embodiment – his person and estate are in profound disrepair – as is evidenced by his triumphant return to rule at the play’s end. In either exile or death, the departure of the ruler threatens a crisis in both the sense of singular leadership in the body of one ruler and of the break in continuity inevitable in any community linked by its command under one such figure. As figures of surrogation, Patie and his temporary caretaker in some ways close the gap presented by the ruler’s absence. And yet they also point to the troubling and ineluctable discontinuity of rule and, consequently, the impossibility of full community coherence. That the play is distinguished by the use of Scots would seem to point towards a specifically Scots working out of these pertinent problems, and amateur rural communities staged this play for themselves into the nineteenth century – it was performed annually by Pentland villagers, for instance.
It is perhaps not coincidental that the other extremely popular Scots play of the eighteenth century, John Home's *Douglas* (1756), also addresses issues of lost leaders, surprise heirs and inversions of high and low, all disturbing discontinuities in social unity. Home, like Ramsay, was the victim of vituperative pamphlets railing against and satirising his play and was the subject himself of spirited ballads. A Presbyterian minister, Home gave up his parish for his contribution to the stage. He also, however, had staunch supporters: leading Scottish Enlightenment figures (many of whom were also members of the Moderate group who earlier the same year had protected David Hume from censure by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland) even staged an informal performance of his play. William Robertson was Lord Randolph, David Hume Glenavon, Dr Carlyle Old Norval, Home himself Douglas, Adam Ferguson Lady Randolph and Hugh Blair Anna. Their audience included Lords Elibank, Milton, Kames and Monboddo, suggesting the power of performance in cementing the social bonds of an enlightened Scottish literati. Critics of the time celebrated the high sentiment of the play, asserting that such sentiment, circulating between actors and audience, formed the civilising and unifying ties that might bind a community together.

Tracing the types of, and attitudes towards, public performance in this period, however, points less to those performances’ ability to consolidate a single national Scots affiliation and more towards their articulation of conflicting Scots identities. These might take the form of divisive party allegiances. In distinction to the moderate Enlightenment Whig sensibility developed in that unofficial performance of *Douglas*, one might consider a 1746 production of *The Gentle Shepherd*, performed by the journeymen and apprentices of a printer who had been pilloried for printing a defamatory poem about the Duke of Cumberland. The production saw such crowded houses that special seating needed to be built. Performance rallied lingering Jacobite sympathies more overtly in the riot at the Canongate Theatre in Edinburgh in 1749 when ‘certain military gentlemen’ commanded the orchestra to play ‘Culloden’ on the eve of its anniversary. When, instead, the orchestra played ‘You’re welcome, Charlie’, the officers drew their swords on the orchestra and actors. In response, the audience threw everything from torn-up benches to apples and snuff-boxes at the officers and the Highland chairmen pummelled the officers with their chair poles. Similarly, fights in the theatre broke out in the 1790s between enemies of the French Revolution and its Republican defenders, also over the performance of music – in this case ‘God Save the King’.

Performance also functioned as a site of class articulation, as in the footmen’s violent protest of David Garrick’s satire of servants in *High Life below Stairs* (1759) – a protest for which they lost their free admission to productions. In a 1767 battle that destroyed the interior of the theatre in Canongate, the ‘public’ protested the failure of the theatre owners to hire Mr Stayley, an itinerant actor, who, according to contemporary John Jackson in *History of the Scottish Stage* (1793), ‘adopted, in compliance with the taste of his audience, a pomposity in his pronunciation, and an eccentricity in tones [. . .] which by a country audience, was pronounced great acting’. Here, class position dictates aesthetic taste and performance expectations, and the stakes of these differences are high enough to instigate the throwing of ‘rails of lattices, branches of chandeliers, and broken benches’. Even among Scots unified at least in their resistance to stipulations against theatre-going, violent conflict erupted.

Towards the end of the century and into the nineteenth, productions began to appear that seemed to attempt to unify a single national Scots identity. In 1783 *The Conjurer; or, The Scotsman in London* was performed in Edinburgh after having been staged in several provincial towns, and this dialect drama featured a Scot outsmarting ‘southerners’ – a Scottish
answer to English dramas that had portrayed Scots as dupes. Increasingly, plays representing a misty Ossianic past began to appear. Several plays, the first one performed in Paisley in 1788 and another, The Highland Drover; or Domhnul Dubh M’Na-Beinn, performed in Carlisle, made use of Scots Gaelic. These anticipated the enormously popular staging of Walter Scott’s Rob Roy which filled the Theatre Royal for an unheard of forty-one-night run in 1819. Increasingly in the nineteenth century, popular theatrical performances translated once oppositional cultures on to the stage, presenting peripheral and labouring cultures to a theatre audience, in effect performing on stage the distinct cultures disappearing from the streets themselves as part of a single Scots culture. An 1816 programme for the Yeaman Shore House Theatre in Dundee, for instance, describes an evening of farce, dancing and ‘a selection of national and naval ballads’.

Reflecting fears of a new fluidity in class made possible by increased urbanisation, popular theatre in the nineteenth century both represented and helped rigidify increasingly pronounced class divisions. Such divisions, of course, were in evidence in the distinct performance traditions of earlier periods – the make-shift performances in the barns of the countryside, the theatre experience most familiar to the vast majority of Scots of the eighteenth century, were a far cry from the urban theatre attended by the well-to-do. In those urban settings, however, servants could still attend the same performance as their ‘betters’. The urban theatre of the nineteenth century was more invested in marking class spatially. Magistrates stipulated that theatres raise admission prices to exclude working people, who, consequently, were more likely to attend penny gaffs – inexpensive, unlicensed, temporary productions – and geggies – more established travelling booth theatres. These distinctions were institutionalised in the establishment of pantomimes – initially nominally non-dramatic performances by actor-acrobats, responding to licensing laws of the first half of the nineteenth century that forbade the use of the spoken word in non-patent theatres – and music halls. The latter developed in industrialising Glasgow somewhat in advance of their London cousins as Highland and Irish immigration brought the ceilidh tradition into the Saltmarket area, giving rise to ‘free and easies’, casual entertainments in the back rooms of public houses. As these became more formalised, they developed into music halls and later variety theatres, spreading throughout the rest of Scotland and initially drawing condemnation from moral crusaders and temperance movements, which set up their own rival halls, and attention from the police. Other large-scale spectacular theatre, meant to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, included huge displays of military pageantry and the very popular productions of plays on horseback, which sometimes even included canine actors. To appeal to a broad audience, some of these productions deployed symbols and language (in the case of music halls, penny gaffs and geggies) denuded of regional particularities and presenting a pageantry of tartanry.

Sermons

If the nineteenth century saw a gradual rise in the policing of class lines in theatrical performance, resulting in distinct commercial venues, it also began to see the relaxation of religious injunctions against the theatre; by 1784 the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly changed its schedule to allow delegates to attend performances by Mrs Siddons. Yet despite the Church’s hostility to theatre for much of the eighteenth century, there had also been important, if unacknowledged, performative qualities within religious practice, especially in preaching. This performative element was perhaps most evident in the huge
outdoor communions of the eighteenth century. With attendances into the thousands (two thousand at the Mauchline outdoor communion Burns describes in ‘The Holy Fair’), no other form of performance held as wide an audience at a sitting than this preaching. As Burns’s satirical poem and the pamphlets railing against these outdoor religious events make clear, the official clergy asserted the separateness of public performance, but that distinction was not always clear. Burns’s ‘The Holy Fair’ describes attending the sermons at an outdoor religious occasion: ‘Then in we go to see the show’. Close in character to the performances at rural fairs and markets, outdoor communions provided occasions for drinking, sexual liaisons and sometimes sleeping.

While the clergy might have imagined performance and religious life as quite distinct and had ‘a most illiberal and violent animosity against the stage, the players, and the eloquence that “stirs the blood and fires the brain”’, their own preaching styles often aimed at the same effect. The anonymous author of The Fashionable Preacher (1773) describes different styles of Scottish pulpit oratory, ‘one cants, and whins [sic], and sings it away [...] another bawls out with such a violent vociferation as shocks every one [...] a third makes such wry faces, such wild, unnatural gesticulations, as are enough to turn preaching into burlesque [...]’ (quoted in Ann Matheson’s Theories of Rhetoric in the 18th-Century Scottish Sermon, 1995). This text satirises the Moderate wing of the Church, with their attempts to mobilise sentiment and feeling. Aberdonian preacher David Fordyce’s 1752 Theodorus: A Dialogue Concerning the Art of Preaching models that mobilisation, advising that the ideal preacher excels at ‘the expression of the countenances [...] whenever he describes any vice [...] he has such indignation in his looks as raises your abhorrence [...] when virtue is his theme [...] his countenance seems to open and expand itself with serenity’. A professor of moral philosophy, Fordyce writes of how such preaching ‘seize[s] as with some powerful contagion’ and offers ‘the power of an irresistible sympathy’.

By the second half of the century, the Evangelicals too ‘most revered [those ministers who] by a sudden rise and fall of the voice could play on the emotions of the hearers as a musician on his fiddle, and, weeping himself, could make others weep’ (quoted in Theories of Rhetoric in the 18th-Century Scottish Sermon, 1995). Burns goes so far as to compare the effects produced by evangelical preachers to those of aphrodisiac plasters, drawing on the associations of performance and scandalous physicality. Although not characterisations with which eighteenth-century ministers would have been comfortable, these descriptions highlight the clearly performative aspect of their preaching and the use of appeal to the body to draw together an audience, a use they denigrated in other contexts.

Preachers such as Fordyce and Hugh Blair believed the Scots nation to possess its own, superior, style of preaching. Yet within Scotland distinct performance styles of preaching appealed to distinct social bodies and played a central role in the deep, continuing religious divisions in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland. With the revival of the Patronage Act in 1712, wealthy patrons appointed ministers whose preaching in a temperate, ‘cool’ style, as some pamphlets noted, performed the polite, anglicised identities that they themselves valued. This was an identity with which the lower middle class of the congregation might not identify. The preaching style of Ebenezer Erskine, who questioned the emphasis on a cultivated politesse, became increasingly popular, and a number of splits in and from the Church involved questions of styles of sermonising and the class and cultural identities that underwrote them.

In the eighteenth century the stirring oratory of the Cambuslang Revival of 1742 or the Haldane brothers’ preaching tours of the Highlands might have appealed merely to ‘vulgar’ audiences and have remained fairly fleeting. With the evangelical revival of the nineteenth
century, however, popular performative aspects became less suspect. Highly structured arguments gave way to an extravagant rhetorical style in preaching, and evaluators placed a new premium on the use of the body in effective preaching. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the powerful, unpolished performances of Thomas Chalmers no doubt contributed to the successful founding of the Free Church of Scotland in the Great Disruption of 1843 which gave the congregation, and not polite wealthy patrons, the power to appoint the minister. Especially important about Chalmers’s performance style was his frank Scottishness. In 1819, J. G. Lockhart in Peter’s Letters to his Kinsfolk describes his ‘broadly national, broadly provincial’ pronunciation, ‘distorting almost every word he utters into some barbarous novelty’ and yet insists, like many of Chalmers’s audience, that ‘I have never heard either in England or Scotland any preacher whose eloquence is capable of producing an effect so strong and irresistible’. Preaching became even more ‘popular’ in style after the revival of 1859. Later in the century, however, as standards of education rose, preaching became more intellectual, with fewer references to eternal damnation. The moment of fire and brimstone oratory had passed, with a more homely, conversational style replacing it by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chalmers and other highly demonstrative, blistering preachers of the nineteenth century, such as Edward Irving, Robert Candlish, Thomas Guthrie and William Buchanan, embraced forthrightly the performative aspects of religion. Thomas Carlyle in Reminiscences (1881) noted ‘a certain inflation or spiritual bombast’ in Irving’s preaching, ‘a trifle of unconscious playactorism’ and William Hazlitt in Spirit of the Age (1825) described him ‘puffing like a grim Vulcan [. . .] so as to excite a pleasing horror in the ladies’. But eighteenth-century writers had already come to recognise the conceptual space shared by theatrical performance and sermonising. Hume had noted in A Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40) how ‘in matters of religion men take a pleasure in being terrify’d, and [. . .] no preachers are so popular, as those who excite the most dismal and gloomy passions’. This is because, he goes on to argue, religion and drama are separate from common life, where fear and terror are actual, threatening experiences. It is only in ‘dramatic performances and in religious discourses’ that fear and terror give pleasure, allowing the imagination and passion to meditate agreeably and disinterestedly on otherwise anxiety-provoking images and thoughts. Performance, both secular and religious, would seem to provide a space for reflecting on and working out the difficult and disagreeable aspects of social and cultural coherence, from the threat of mortality and discontinuity to the violence of the state. Official cultures of state and church had a vested interest in suppressing public performances, with their invocation of the body, powers of reinvention, and the potential of those qualities to draw together oppositional collectivities. Yet official cultures were themselves dependent upon their own forms of performance in their attempts to build a unified, hegemonic group identity.

Further reading

Cameron, Alasdair and Adrienne Scullion (eds) (1996), Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment, Glasgow: Glasgow University Library.


Historiography, Biography and Identity

Karen O’Brien and Susan Manning

The period of Scottish history following the Union posed unique challenges to the historical and national self-understanding of Scottish writers. History and biography played a central role in the articulation of Scotland’s new British identity, but both genres of writing generated as many contradictions and complexities as they resolved. The period witnessed a powerful revival of interest in the antiquities and myths of the Scottish past, yet the historical and literary creation of a post-Union identity was also actuated by a liberating hostility towards inherited Scottish traditions, beliefs and prejudices. The result of these tensions between what might be called cultural nationalist and sceptical Enlightenment approaches to Scottish history was sometimes meaningful synthesis, but more often deep ambivalence – an ambivalence which infused both narratives of individual lives and accounts of collective experience. At least one critic has argued that Scottish writers, especially historians, effectively bankrupted Scottish history by the late nineteenth century, to the point where it became a mark of regional parochialism to know or care anything about the details of the Scottish past. Only two generations after Walter Scott, few educated Scottish subjects of the British Empire greatly concerned themselves with their national roots. ‘What occurred’, Marinell Ash argued in The Strange Death of Scottish History (1980), ‘was a historical failure of nerve’. Ash’s argument is greatly substantiated and refined by Colin Kidd, who traces the origins of this failure of nerve to the Enlightenment historians of the mid-eighteenth century. Their project, he argues in Subverting Scotland’s Past (1993), was to dismantle the enabling myths and invented traditions of Scottish history with the aim of accommodating it to an English model of history and progress. Even James Macpherson, the compiler of the Ossian poems, had some stake in this anglicising Whiggism: the Edinburgh Enlightenment literati who solicited them did so not to bolster nostalgia for an ancient, independent Scotland, but, rather, to bring prestige to Scotland within an Anglo-Scottish cultural partnership. Macpherson went on to become a propaganda writer for several of George III’s ministries.

A more sanguine view of Scottish historical writing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would be that it facilitated a confident, cosmopolitan sense of Scotland’s place in the world, including, but certainly over and above, its place within the Anglo-Scottish Union. Re-describing Scottish history as a journey from barbaric origins to the consolidation of modern civil society in the Union of 1707, they found a place for this event in a narrative of progress rather than of rupture. More than this, they developed a model of ‘conjectural’ or ‘philosophical’ history – as it was later named by Dugald Stewart, biographer of Adam Smith – with universal reach. According to this model (which was
also known as stadial or ‘four-stage’ history), all societies past and present pass through a uniform, necessary sequence, from the primitive hunter-gathering nomadic life of the ‘savage’ state, through pastoral then agricultural phases, culminating in the complex commercial and intellectual exchanges of modernity: civil society. This theory, first articulated by Lord Kames in the 1740s, and eloquently adumbrated by William Robertson (1721–93) in Book IV of the History of America (1777), proved to have great predictive as well as descriptive power: it enabled the historian to infer events and circumstances for which neither empirical evidence nor record was available, on the basis of probability from the general model. On this basis, Scottish historians of this period wrote not only modern, revisionist histories of Scotland but histories of England, America, India and Europe, often with great popular success. Some of these, including Tobias Smollett’s Compleat History of England (1757–8) and James Mill’s History of British India (1817), were by Scottish authors based in London. Others – notably those of William Robertson, Adam Ferguson and John Millar – emanated from Scottish universities, and by their readily intelligible anglicised prose and broad, comparative historical approach signalled the European intellectual leadership which Scotland could offer to Britain as a whole. Many of the Scottish writers who won international reputations did so from an exclusively Scottish platform (Robertson, for example, only rarely left Edinburgh), while others, like Hume and Boswell, built complex lives and reputations between Scotland, London and France. Many writers found themselves defined either as Scottish cosmopolitan provincials or metropolitan exiles; neither definition was entirely satisfactory but both had their rewards and possibilities.

Robertson established Scotland’s pre-eminence in historical writing, in the History of Scotland (1759), which scored the first major success for the ideal of provincial cosmopolitanism, and, after this, wrote histories of Europe and the Americas. Tracing the kingdom of Scotland during one of its most turbulent periods, from the Middle Ages to the Union of the Crowns in 1603, it embraced broad historical themes: the political preconditions for civil order, religious fanaticism, and economic and social progress. Robertson excited great interest among English and continental audiences by situating a peculiar and specifically national history within a larger implicit narrative of the development of civil society in Europe (a theme to which he would return, with still greater success, in his next work, the History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V, 1769). The History of Scotland also explicitly renegotiated the terms of the historical relationship between England and Scotland, in the wake of the Union and Jacobite rebellions. The closing section tells how the civil and religious strife of the sixteenth century was brought to an end by the accession of James VI and I, and how, after a period of political and economic stagnation, the Union of 1707 ‘adopted [the Scots] into a constitution, whose genius and laws were more liberal than their own’, after which they ‘extended their commerce, refined their manners, made improvements in the elegancies of life, and cultivated the arts and sciences’.

Robertson does not claim that the modernisation of Scotland in the eighteenth century was simply the result of anglicisation: rather, that the Union of 1707 enabled Scotland to find its way to the path of economic and political progress followed by England and a number of other European states. Robertson saw the Union as both desirable and inevitable, but his history struck a chord with Scottish readers across the political and religious spectrum because it also kept faith with virtues traditionally cherished by the Scottish people: love of freedom, sense of community and responsibility across different ranks, and courage of religious conscience. The History of Scotland also sensitively addressed the issue that most typified Scottish history in the eyes of the English: religious fanaticism. The Scottish Reformation was undoubtedly a violent affair, with intolerance and bigotry on both sides of
the denominational divide. Yet where Hume (the first volume of whose History of England preceded Robertson’s work by three years) characterised the Scottish Reformation as the effect of ‘some wild and enthusiastic frenzy in the human mind’, Robertson saw a painful stage on the journey to intellectual emancipation: ‘the human mind felt its own strength, and broke the fetters of authority by which it had been so long restrained’.

Neither was in any doubt that Presbyterianism – the faith into which they were born – had been, in the long run, favourable to progress and civil liberty in Scotland, and both took a diagnostic, sociological approach to this aspect of their own heritage. Yet, for Hume, the beneficial effects of Protestant zeal (‘enthusiasm’, as he called it) were largely accidental, one of those long-term ironies of which history is made. Hume’s account of English history makes occasional incursions into Scotland, often castigating his country for its bigotry and provincialism. His metropolitan sensibility and cultivated distance from cherished Scottish traditions is most clearly evidenced when he tells the story of Mary Queen of Scots. Mary touched off very strong feelings among Scottish readers, and, especially among Jacobites, she was a potent symbol of the independent Stuart Scotland which had disappeared with the Union. Hume was familiar with the large body of Scottish historical literature with a stake in the ‘Marian controversy’: was she an adulteress? Did she connive at the murder of her first husband, and plot to assassinate Elizabeth I? Or, was she an innocent victim or tragic heroine? Yet he treated the whole episode as a symptom of the wider sixteenth-century clash between Protestant and Catholic forces, with very little human interest or sympathy for the woman herself. Robertson, by contrast, narrated her story with the eighteenth-century imperative of Anglo-Scottish harmony very much in mind. His famously sympathetic, often sentimental, account of Mary’s life commands sympathy for a Catholic, Stuart monarch while nevertheless making the factual case for her adultery and indirect involvement in her husband’s murder. Robertson was praised by Scottish readers of all persuasions for his conciliatory and tolerant approach to a thorny subject (a tolerance he carried with him into later life when he publicly supported Catholic Relief in Scotland). The literary quality of his account of Mary’s suffering and downfall paved the way for a new kind of emotional or aesthetic Jacobitism in nineteenth-century literature, taken further in Walter Scott’s Waverley (1814), which depicts the Jacobite insurgents of the ‘45 as romantic, heroic yet anachronistic compared to the forward-looking, if unadventurous, world of the Hanoverian polity.

Robertson and Hume personified something of a golden age for Scottish history after the 1750s. Hume’s History of England garnered a rising reputation as successive volumes appeared (the Tudor volumes in 1759, the medieval volumes in 1762), and he continually revised and reissued the whole right up to his death in 1776. Hume’s history became ever more European in focus, as he tried to set in broader context Britain’s peculiar constitutional development. Meanwhile, Robertson turned to European history (the History of Charles V) and then to the history of the European conquest and colonisation of the Americas and India (the History of America and An Historical Disquisition concerning the knowledge which the ancients had of India, 1791). Hume’s and Robertson’s sociological treatment of both the history of the British constitution and the history of empire bore fruit in the next generation of historians. John Millar’s Historical View of the English Government (1802) took Hume’s historicised approach to constitutional history in a more liberal, Whiggish direction, as did George Brodie’s History of the British Empire from [...] Charles I to the Restoration (1822), while Thomas Somerville, with praise and encouragement from Robertson, documented the events of 1688–9 with scientific detachment in his History of Political Transactions, and of Parties, from the Restoration of King Charles the Second to the
Death of King William (1792). Other histories continued the theme given new eminence by Robertson, of Scotland as a centre for European history; these included William Russell's substantial survey, the History of Modern Europe (1779), and Archibald Alison's popular History of Europe from [ . . . ] 1789 to [ . . . ] 1815 (1833–42). Scottish prominence in the field of imperial history was assured by James Mill's History of British India (1817, expanded in 1826), a work which combined the detached, Scottish sociological approach to other cultures with a Utilitarian programme for political reform in India. Most of the historians inspired by Hume and Robertson studied the better-documented recent past, and embraced their predecessors' scepticism and hostility towards the oral history, tradition and myth which surrounded the more remote parts of Scottish history. Many also adopted Hume's and Robertson's polemical preference not only for empirically verifiable history, but also for history that could be meaningfully interpreted and narrated.

Hume and Robertson were on excellent terms with some of the leading Scottish antiquarians of the day – David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, notably – and it would be wrong to suggest that Scottish antiquarianism and Enlightenment history were simply or inherently antipathetic. The most up-to-date antiquarians made the case for their researches into the more distant regions of Scottish history in terms borrowed from the grand narrative historians, emphasising the value of their work for the analysis of social structures, culture and 'manners'. The Ossian phenomenon gave a boost to serious study of Scotland's pre-medieval past. However controversial the evidence for the Ossian poems themselves, antiquarians studying Scotland's archaeological and linguistic relics felt able to present themselves at the cutting edge of historical research. In a series of letters written in 1788 to the Gentleman's Magazine, the antiquarian John Pinkerton criticised historians like Hume who could only see the point of studying the recent past: 'One might as well think of building a house by beginning at the garretts,' he commented. Pinkerton was one of a number of learned Scottish antiquarians who pioneered new research into the culture and, above all, ethnicity, of the Picts and Celts of early Scotland. His Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths (1787) set out to prove, among other things, that the ancestors of the Lowland Scots were Germanic, and that – contrary to the claims made by James Macpherson – these people had settled Scotland earlier than, and were far superior to, the Celts. Pinkerton's work was part of an intensive, Europe-wide phase of historical enquiry into the ethnic origins and identities of modern European peoples. A central question was the racial differences between and relative merits of Europe's Celtic and Germanic ancestors, one which had the effect of placing Scotland and Ireland at the forefront of controversy. The ethnic identities of Scotland were thought to provide a clue to the racial composition of Europe as a whole, and information about cultural practices (such as oral poetry, bravery in war and the treatment of women) were important evidence for ethnic difference or kinship. In Britain, controversy about racial origins had a strong political flavour. Pinkerton wrote as a pro-Hanoverian Whig, determined to discredit the Highland Celtic savages: 'if any foreigner doubts [their inferiority], he has only to step into the Celtic part of Wales, Ireland, or Scotland, and look at them, for they are just as they were, incapable of industry or civilisation'. Organisations such as the Scottish Society of Antiquaries (founded 1780) attempted to put the study of Scottish antiquities on a broader footing, and to distance it from controversy over the historical basis of Celtic myths or the ancient Scottish constitution. Yet the controversy, fuelled by parallel debates in the Irish context, persisted well into the nineteenth century.

In the field of medieval antiquities, Walter Scott lead the way in attempting to assimilate antiquarian data regarding the regional, linguistic and folkloric aspects of Scottish history to a wider model of history compatible with Enlightenment and unionist ideas of
progress and modernity in Scotland. His *Border Antiquities* (1814–17), for example, contained engravings of many of the antiquities of the Borders region of Scotland. Scott’s antiquarianism indicated an emotional allegiance to Scotland’s independent, distinctive past which could nevertheless be incorporated into a modernising political sensibility and an ethos of historical progress, yet this point was often lost on Whig modernisers: even in the generation after Robertson, Scottish Whigs remained uneasy with the exploration of ancient and medieval Scotland. A case in point was Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, whose hostile review of *Marmion* (1808) revealed his lack of sympathy for Scott’s assimilative project.

Scott’s antiquarian and literary work implied the possibility of a middle ground, with antiquarian data providing evidence for the texture and feel of the historical period under discussion, but incorporated in a larger progressive narrative. His friend and fellow-Tory, Patrick Fraser Tytler, carried out intensive archival research for a *History of Scotland* (1828–43) which ran from the reign of Alexander II to that of James VI, and aimed to write empirically sound and analytically sophisticated history which nonetheless conveyed something of the vividness of life in past times. Reviewing his own edition of selected state papers, he wrote: ‘we long to hear the rustling of the Queen’s [Elizabeth I’s] ruff and satins as she dances her Coranto – to follow Essex to her bedside, to steal after old Burleigh, when he rises from the Council table and hies his way to his garden and his bowling green. But this is not all – what we look for in history is the truth [. . .]’ (quoted in Ash’s *The Strange Death of Scottish History*, 1980). History can offer the truth, in the sense of a carefully constructed narrative of events and facts, but it can also engage our imaginations with local colour (‘the rustling of the ruff’), antiquarian detail (the Coranto) and character.

In this regard, Thomas Carlyle who referred to himself as ‘English’ was nevertheless, to a significant degree, a historian of deep Scottish influences. He drew, for example, upon the ethnographic antiquarianism of Enlightenment Scotland with its sharp distinction between the Germanic and the Celtic, as well as upon German Romantic sources. The strongly providential strain in Carlyle’s historical writing is in many ways more in keeping with Scottish traditions of interpretation than Hume’s sceptical treatment of causality. Carlyle’s history of the French Revolution (1837) owes much to this Calvinist tradition, with its methodological and aesthetic emphasis upon collective groups, rather than on individuals, its insistence on the moral unity of society and the peculiar diagnostic weight it places on small events and details as evidence of a deeper historical purpose. Carlyle was also heir to a distinctively Scottish version of the civic tradition, which emphasised the continuing need for public-spirited elite leadership in a world of commerce and industry. Scottish Enlightenment writers’ embrace of the new commercial world in which they were living had been tempered by this ongoing commitment to notions of moral and spiritual liberty and independence; here too Carlyle’s debt to his Edinburgh University roots is evident.

In other respects, Carlyle’s famous description (and practice, in his biographical histories of Frederick the Great and Oliver Cromwell) of history as the ‘essence of innumerable biographies’ indicates a Romantic reconceptualising of history, including the ways in which personal identity may be historically understood. Eighteenth-century historians were attracted to biography as a means of conveying the events and texture of the past, but they were, in the main, wedded to classical notions of biography as the record of the exemplary deeds of great men of state. When Robertson was casting around for ideas for his second history, Hume suggested a biography of some great figure in European history along the lines of Plutarch. Robertson’s history of the reign of Charles V was a biography of sorts, but one in which the life provided the organising focus for a much wider political
narrative, with scarcely any attention to the inner, psychological or private dimensions of Charles's life. In this, Robertson resembles other historians of the mid-eighteenth century who, despite their conceptualising of the necessary interactions between personalities and circumstances, lacked the resources to integrate the disparate elements of political events, psychological portraiture and cultural history, with the result that their works tended to oscillate between different modes of writing: political narrative was usually supplemented with appendices on ‘manners’, and set-piece psychological portraiture, usually inserted at the point when the personage dies. For much of the century, historians were slow to learn from the newer form of the novel how to show the pressure of external events on the inner life of the character; conversely novelists such as Smollett often tended to represent the external events into which they inserted their characters as a static obstacle course, rather than an evolving, contingent domain.

Walter Scott was the first major writer to set the fictional stories of his protagonists within a dynamically rendered, empirically precise historical fabric. The stories of Waverley (1814), Frank Osbaldistone (Rob Roy, 1817), and Darsie Latimer (Redgauntlet, 1824) chart the emotional development of the hero’s character from puerility to maturity in a series of stages that parallel the historical evolution of their surroundings. Well before Scott, however, novelists and biographers profited from the rising popularity, in the later eighteenth century, of the historical anecdote as featured in magazines, historical compilations and memoirs. The anecdote, or vignette, crystallised a living, ephemeral moment from the past, and gave more immediate access to history than long swathes of narrative. When it concerned the lives, thoughts and actions of particular personages, the anecdote also embodied the notion of the potential plurality of historical experience. In Chapter 6, Karina Williamson describes how hostility to the anecdotal presentation of historical and life writing by influential commentators such as Hugh Blair gradually waned as writers came to value the ability of the anecdote to capture the fragmented and discontinuous nature of experience. Moreover, anecdotal fidelity to the fleeting and the ephemeral aspects of life did not necessarily imply a fragmented view of the human self. Indeed, most Enlightenment writers held to an associationist model of consciousness, with its epistemology of sense impressions, and this model placed particular emphasis upon fragments of experience as constituents of a unified self.

The literary corollary of this was that anecdotes came to be seen as the primary building blocks of historical biography: pieced together, the fragments of a life, such as Samuel Johnson’s, for instance, might cohere into a unified biography. Sporadic and piecemeal information made sense to an Enlightenment culture which believed in the basic unity of individual consciousness. James Boswell’s The Life of Samuel Johnson (1791, revised 1793, 1799) and John Gibson Lockhart’s Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott Bart. (1837–8) represent two Scottish high points in a general British resurgence of biographical writing from the late eighteenth century, in which the small, telling anecdotes functioned as the tessellated mosaic pieces of a narrative life. Biographers still paid homage to the idea of the exemplary and instructive function of their work: Robert Southey, for example, described his life of Nelson (1813) as ‘a marvel for the young sailor’. Yet they also presented their works as cross-sections or windows into a fuller moral and social history of humanity, and a means of historical cognition. Boswell’s Life of Johnson is a portrait of a unique individual, but it is also a demonstration of the highest, epic, possibilities – for human courage, genius and magnanimity, and for biography itself. Boswell cites as a template for his own work Johnson’s prescriptions for biography as an account of the ‘little circumstances’ (the anecdotes of friendships, conversations, quarrels, illnesses and so on) of the life of a person
still remembered at first hand. Boswell’s biography is heavily skewed towards the last eight years of Johnson’s life, and it is schematically episodic, being organised chronologically in a series of ‘scenes’, with accompanying documentary material. Yet, for Boswell, the anecdotal material is the gateway to the complete man. Comparison between the published version of the *Life* and Boswell’s private journals reveals the extent of his artistic selection and crafting of materials so as to portray Johnson as an inwardly consistent, morally capacious man – something Boswell, with his compulsive honesty about his own failings, never felt himself to be.

Boswell’s formula for biography was controversial, nowhere more so than among his Scottish peers, who resented the publication of Johnson’s forthright opinions – and Boswell’s commentary – on their lives, as an invasion of privacy. Nonetheless, it was recognised as a masterpiece, though more praised than directly imitated by fellow-Scottish writers: Lockhart accepted the *Life of Johnson*’s implicit invitation to publicise some of the more intimate details of the life of a great man of letters, but, in other respects, his *Life of Scott* conveys the unity of his subject differently, by means of what Francis Hart has called in *Lockhart as Romantic Biographer* (1971) ‘an epistemology of knowing by sympathetic self-projection’, rather than by carefully organised collage.

Biographers and memoir writers after Boswell tended to see their work as pieces of a larger historical puzzle. Francis Jeffrey, for example, was among those in Scotland who played an active role in promoting memoirs and biographies as a means to a broadened, culturally orientated kind of history. For the writers who came of age in the 1790s, the Scottish experience of severance from the previous generation was peculiarly acute. The Dundas regime, which systematically excluded Whigs from patronage and office, polarised many politically, while the Napoleonic Wars gave them an altered sense of what patriotism and national identity might mean in the face of Britain’s enemy. For these younger Whigs, who included Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Elizabeth Hamilton, a sense of belonging to a particular generation depended upon a selective relationship to their Enlightenment forebears. For many of them, a key point of continuity with the more progressive elements of the Enlightenment generation was provided by Dugald Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1785 to 1809. He wrote intellectual biographies of Smith and Robertson, and took forward their ideas of history and political economy into a moral and educational philosophy of his own. In addition to educating many of the leading younger Whigs, Stewart fostered and promoted women’s education and writing. Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Agrippina, Wife of Germanicus* (1804) develops some of Stewart’s ideas, using the perspective of a female participant in Roman history to explore ideas of social evolution, and the operations of the passions under different historical conditions. Historical biography functions here as a route to wider philosophical questions, consistent with those raised in her *Letters on Education* (1801–2) and, subsequently, in her *Popular Essays* (1813). With the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* by Jeffrey, Brougham and Francis Horner in 1802, the young Whigs had a major outlet for defining their own ideas of history and modernity, including their response to the French Revolution and its aftermath.

Men of Jeffrey’s generation were also much more likely than their predecessors to present the story of their own lives as fragments within a larger historical continuum. *My Own Life and Times, 1741–1814* (1861), the memoir of Thomas Somerville, a minister of the Kirk, a historian, and a man of the Enlightenment who had known Smith, Robertson and Hume, can be instructively contrasted to Hume’s autobiographical sketch ‘Of My Own Life’ (posthumously published in 1777). Hume’s is a brief, outwardly detached (and, to a modern ear, emotionally suppressed) work. It gives us a man of letters, his success and failure, his
even temperament, and his sociable disposition, with no hint of local colour in the account of his Scottish origins, and no sense that his character might reveal the historical moment which formed it. Somerville’s memoir, by contrast, is concerned with the ways in which his personal recollections can be mapped on to the history of his times, including local changes in Scotland. Somerville sees the transformation of Scotland in his own lifetime in terms of gradual improvement and progress, but, for him, this is more to be found in local detail and in oral history than in any grand narrative of change. He records, for example, as evidence for the waning of superstition in Scotland, the gradual decline of accusations of witchcraft in his own locality, offering his personal recollections as part of the evidence and impetus for such ongoing improvement.

Somerville’s memoir was not, in itself, an influential work, but indicates the possibilities explored, in the generation of Scottish writers after Hume, for the historicisation of one’s own life, as well as the lives of others. Henry Mackenzie’s biographies of his contemporaries John Home, William Tyler and William Blacklock, for example, depend for their structure and veracity on the memoirist’s personal involvement with both their subject and times. Early nineteenth-century Scottish readers approached Boswell’s Life of Johnson partly as a history of a lost eighteenth-century world. John Wilson Croker’s edition of the Life (1831), a work of massive scholarship which attempted to fill in many of the gaps left by Boswell, gave the work renewed prominence in Scotland. But the emphasis had changed. Croker presented the work as a historical record of the London of its times, one which, for Scottish writers, spoke to their own sense of being pulled between the two poles of Edinburgh and London. Lockhart’s favourable review of Croker’s edition in the Quarterly Review emphasised the value of the work as a ‘window into history’. For nineteenth-century readers, Boswell’s work also gave a window on to a particular generation of London writers, one which, to some extent, intersected intellectually and socially with the circle of Robertson and Hume. Writers and readers of this period found it particularly meaningful to think of history in terms of generations, bound together by a common locality, interests and experience. The tendency to periodise history in generational terms was intensified by the experience of living through the French Revolution, an event which had, for many, driven a wedge between the old and the young, and whose significance was interpreted not only by Carlyle’s magisterial study but through a series of biographies of Napoleon, notably that of Scott (1827). Boswell himself exemplified the idea of a younger, more radical man reinventing his own relationship to the previous generation by replacing his own intransigent father with Johnson, a different, more inspiring father figure. Elevated to the status of ‘almost the one thing needful’ in art, biography (as Carlyle wrote in a review of Croker’s edition of Boswell’s Johnson in Fraser’s Magazine, 1832) became the basis of his own new historical methodology. Disdaining the ‘mealy mouth’ of Lockhart’s Scott, Carlyle’s own subjects combined the functions of both – as his friend R. W. Emerson would put it – ‘Representative Men’ and exemplars, objects of aspiration in the old heroic mode. ‘History’, he declared in Fraser’s the following year, ‘is the Letter of Introductions, which the old generations write and posthumously transmit to the new [. . .] the message [. . .] which all Mankind delivers to every man.’

The quintessential expression of this sense of the Scottish self in strange times came from Jeffrey’s friend and biographer, Henry Cockburn. Cockburn’s Memorials of his Time were published posthumously in 1856, and cover the period from his early life (including family visits to the house of William Robertson), his studies under Dugald Stewart, his long exclusion from patronage as a Whig lawyer, to the eventual triumph of his values on the eve of the first Reform Bill. Chronologically the Memorials encompasses sweeping changes, but, to convey these, Cockburn often focuses less upon public events, than upon those little, revealing
points of overlap or disjuncture between different moments of history. These small divisions are located in the minute details of social life: the etiquette at public dances, for example, or the spectacle of the ‘singular race of excellent Scotch old ladies [. . .] indifferent about the modes and habits of the modern world: and adhering to their own ways, so as to stand out, like primitive rocks, above ordinary society’. Or the aged figure of the novelist and essayist Henry Mackenzie, who ‘though he survived the passing away of many a literary friend, and many a revolution of manners [. . .] accommodated himself to unavoidable change with the cheerfulness of a man of sense, above the weakness of supposing that the world must have been in its prime only when he was in his’.

For Cockburn, as for Mackenzie, history moves not as progress, but through successive and overlapping phases of modernity, and it is always experienced as modern by its participants. The history of one’s own time, couched as memoir, was a popular genre in Victorian Scotland. William Chambers’s memoir of his brother Robert, ‘With Autobiographical Reminiscences’ (1872) was the first of a group of biographical histories of Scottish publishing which open out on to a huge range of professional and cultural retrievals to provide a composite portrait of an era. Following the death of his wife in 1866, Carlyle embarked on a series of highly personal biographical reminiscences – of Jane Welsh Carlyle, Edward Irving, Jeffrey and his own father, which become, collectively, the material of an autobiography. Although never formulated as such, these Reminiscences (first posthumously published by Carlyle’s biographer Henry Froude in 1881) offer a distinctly non-‘mealy-mouthed’ composite portrait of the Victorian author in his personal relations.

Robert Louis Stevenson perfected the biographical memoir in a series of familiar essays, each one a virtuoso exercise in style. Accounts of his father Thomas Stevenson, and of his own youthful life in Edinburgh, combine a strong individual accent with cosmopolitan reach. As in Carlyle’s powerful memoir of his father, the complexities of personal relationship are invested with representative national significance, while remaining anecdotal and informally structured. These are history as personal meditation, not public instruction, and represent an important loosening (traceable back to Boswell) of the generic conventions of the form; Carlyle’s, in particular, is journal-like in structure, and – given its posthumous publication – might equally well be considered ‘Private Writing’ of the kind discussed by Karina Williamson.

Margaret Oliphant (1828–97), remembered on a plaque in the High Kirk of St Giles in Edinburgh as ‘novelist, biographer, essayist and historian’, moved fluidly across genres and temporalities. Biographies of contemporary religious leaders such as Thomas Chalmers and Irving sit in her œuvre alongside fictionalised historical portraits of John Knox (in Magdalen Hepburn: A Story of the Scottish Reformation, 1854) and Charles Stuart (Katie Stewart, 1852). Her first published novel, Passages in the Life of Mrs Margaret Maitland of Sunnyside (1849), experimented with fictional autobiography; her many reviews and biographies in Blackwood’s Magazine told a composite story of Scotland’s past. Reviewing Dean Ramsey’s Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character in 1860, she wrote, ‘There are few subjects of study so interesting and picturesque as that of national character [. . .] everybody dabbles in it more or less;’ in her writing, history, biography and identity – be they national or individual (and frequently these seem to merge) – are mutually inextricable. Oliphant’s Annals of a Publishing House (1897) is a dynastic biography of three generations of Blackwood’s, a chronicle of nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish publishing, a social history of literary production in the Victorian period and a personal memoir of her own professional life. Agreeing to William Blackwood’s request that she write the history of his family’s firm, she reminisced, ‘I began my married life by my first story in Maga [Blackwood’s Magazine], the
proof of which I received on my wedding day. I should like to wind up the long laborious record [. . .] with this.’ She corrected proofs of the first volume as she was dying.

‘A human life’, Oliphant wrote in Blackwood’s in 1858, ‘is generally a very illogical performance [. . .], and before it can be made to back out any foregone conclusion, or prove any formal argument, must suffer such violence as in most instances denudes it of all its individual grace.’ It is unclear whether the ‘violence’ lies with the vicissitudes of life, or the reconstructive surgery of the biographer. Her own posthumously published Autobiography and Letters (1899), written with a novelist’s eye to character and situation, famously brings ‘life’ and writing to simultaneous closure, as human relationships drop away, one by one: ‘And now here I am all alone. I cannot write any more.’ Grand historical narratives fail; but writing continues to offer a saving shape for the messiness of lives lived in time.

Further reading


Scottish empire?

Can one speak of a distinct Scottish literature of empire and emigration, and if so, what are its characteristic features? Only recently has a common disavowal of Scotland's role in the British Empire been replaced by a more sanguine admission of the extent of involvement. This chapter will propose that for Scottish writers in the period 1707–1918, the literary representation of empire often assumed a distinctly complex and reflexive form. A brief introductory discussion of R. L. Stevenson's 1889 novel The Master of Ballantrae will serve as a portal.

Stevenson's narrative of the bitter conflict between the two brothers Henry and James Durie in the aftermath of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion draws upon the dialectical structure of the historical romance associated with Sir Walter Scott. Yet cutting across Stevenson's 'national allegory' is another 'colonial' allegory, as he looks back from the zenith of the British Empire to the formative decades of the mid-eighteenth century. The exiled James's adventures as a Caribbean freebooter, his service for the French in India, as an American settler, and finally his fatal treasure-hunting expedition into the Adirondacks, recapitulate the early history of European colonialism in the East and West Indies. In contrast, his younger brother Henry is a douce, stay-at-home Whig motivated by worldly prudence rather than romantic passion. Stevenson establishes a contrast between the narrative voice of Henry's prudent steward Mackellar, and the Master James's associates Burke, and, subsequently, the Hindu Secundra Dass, who is represented as a sinister 'other'.

At the level of 'imperial allegory' the tragic plot reflects on Scottish identity within Britain and Britain's empire. Clearly there is no evidence here of a simple binary opposition between a colonial 'self' and its 'other', of the sort much beloved of early postcolonial theory. We gain a better purchase on Stevenson's narrative if we adopt John Barrell's triadic model, outlined in The Infection of Thomas De Quincey (1991), of 'this, that, and the other' in theorising the relations between Scotland, England and Britain's empire: 'what at first seems “other”' can be made over to the side of the self – to a subordinate position on that side – only so long as a new, and a newly absolute “other” is constituted to fill the discursive space that has been thus evacuated'. Like those elements which linguists call 'shifters', the relative position of all three terms is subject to variation according to the contingency of specific historical situations. The fact that 'Scotland' might assume the role of 'that' in relation to an English 'this' (or vice versa) makes the barrier dividing it from the
‘other’ more permeable. And the imagined community called ‘Scotland’ already papers over numerous social and cultural subdivisions with their own internal dynamic.

Implicit in Stevenson’s novel are two rival deployments of Barrell’s triadic model, each allegorising one element of Scotland’s historical role in Britain’s empire. On the one hand, Henry Durie might be taken to embody the British unionist conjunction of ‘this’ and ‘that’. Loyal to the Hanoverian Crown during the ’45, his marriage to the unwilling Alison Graeme, heiress to American colonial wealth, is designed to bring prosperity to the ailing fortune of Ballantrae, although the Master effectively leaches it away to finance his dissolute wandering life. Henry finally flees from his brother, who has ensconced himself in Ballantrae, to settle in America as a respectable New York merchant, before he is once again plagued by his satanic brother.

On the other hand, the Master is an imperialising Scot who has gone over to the ‘other’ side – Jacobite, Pirate, French, Hindu, Native American: in India Ballantrae dresses in white muslin and speaks only ‘the barbarous native dialect’. But Ballantrae’s colonial career is sundered from the moral or patriotic motivation underpinning British imperial ideology. Like a Satanic version of the post-Union Scot, the colonial world is the stage upon which he seeks to gather the wealth necessary to revenge himself upon his (unionist) brother for the loss of his patrimonial ‘independence’. In the end the quest for treasure (which Stevenson here, as elsewhere in his fiction, employs as a trope for the acquisitive energy of imperialism itself) destroys both brothers, although they are also consumed by a ‘tribal, intimate revenge’ originating deep in the heart of their native Scotland.

America and the Caribbean

Scotland was a colonial nation long before the 1707 Act of Union, but the failure of her colony at Darien in Panama in 1698–1700 proved a powerful stimulus in promoting union with England, enabling Scottish merchants to benefit from trade with England’s colonies. According to some historians, after 1707 England and Scotland forged a common Protestant identity whose ‘other’ was either a powerful European rival – in Linda Colley’s influential argument, Catholic Spain or France – or the colonised peoples who energetically resisted British annexation. According to another interpretation, the imperial experience served to safeguard a distinctive Scottish identity within Britain, providing a global theatre for the expansionism of a small nation within-a-nation.

The first important poetic expression of Scotland’s global outreach within Britain’s empire was James Thomson’s poem The Seasons, in particular lines 629–1102 of the 1748 text of ‘Summer’. The ‘Torrid Zone’ is up for grabs as the poet’s fancy roves unchecked among its fecund wildernesses. But Thomson insists that his Protestant, mercantilist muse is ‘no ruffian, who beneath the mask/Of social commerce com’st to rob their wealth’ or ‘spread the purple tyranny of Rome’. He attacks the rapine of Spanish colonisation, the horrors of chattel slavery, and the ‘oriental despotism’ which holds sway over the torrid zone, legitimising ‘liberal’ Protestant intervention. Thomson’s investment in Britain’s empire – he was after all co-author of ‘Rule, Britannia!’ – reminds us of the extent to which Scottish Whigs were instrumental to the eighteenth-century construction of British identity. In ‘Autumn’ Thomson lauds Scotland’s traditions of settler emigration, foreign military service and commerce which are now dedicated to the new British state. In 1744 he was rewarded with the colonial sinecure of Surveyor-General of the Leeward Islands when his patron, Lyttleton, came to power, further cementing his
links with empire. For Thomson and his compatriots, empire afforded Scotland agency within the Union. Many of Thomson's attitudes to commerce, empire and the relationship between cultures, were shared by the leading philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. The contribution of David Hume and Adam Smith to anti-mercantilist economic theory, of William Robertson to the historiography of European imperialism, and of Lord Kames, John Millar and Adam Ferguson to anthropology, provided the intellectual foundations for the British Empire in the century to come. Most shared Thomson's caveats about conquistador imperialism on the Roman or Spanish model, the latter critically scrutinised in Robertson's 1777 History of America. Employing a four-stage model of social development, Robertson, Smith, Kames and Millar enquired into the conditions of primitive societies by means of 'conjectural history' largely based on analogies between ancient Europe and contemporary native peoples as reported by eighteenth-century travellers. Rather than being simply 'other', Native Americans or Polynesians shared the same historical trajectory as Scotland or Britain, albeit located at an earlier stage on the arc of social progress.

Scottish social theorists believed that commerce, supported by law and private property, was the motor of social progress, while at the same time fearing a consequent erosion of public spirit and political liberty. Adam Ferguson, in particular, painted a positive picture of 'savage' manners, perhaps drawing on the experience of his own upbringing in Perthshire clan society. Anticipating the discourse of 'Scottish Orientalism' discussed below, he argued that primitive peoples possess 'a penetration, a force of imagination and elocution, an ardour of mind, an affection and courage' which could hardly be improved by civilisation.

In the early 1760s James Macpherson's Ossian created an imaginary paradigm of the 'rational savage', which played a profound role in the subsequent representation of indigenous peoples in Britain's colonies. (Macpherson went on to make his fortune as a colonial functionary in Florida and later London agent for the Nawab of Arcot.) This view was increasingly challenged by the emergence of a more insidious 'biological' interpretation of race, in part inspired by the polygenetic racial theories of Hume and Kames. Developed by John Pinkerton, George Combe and John Crawford, the most disturbing manifestation of Scottish 'scientific racialism' was Robert Knox's The Races of Man (1850). Although opposed to colonialism as a force for racial miscegenation, Knox's view of non-European peoples was a far cry from Ferguson or Macpherson.

One major factor influencing Scotland's rapid economic growth in the century after union was its colonial trade with the Caribbean and the American colonies. Glasgow reaped huge financial rewards as an international tobacco entrepot trading with Chesapeake Bay, outstripping Bristol and Liverpool by the 1770s. The spectacular success of Scottish merchants (many were 'sojourners' rather than permanent settlers) and their loyalty to the British Crown contributed to their unpopularity in the American colonies. Scots were in general opposed to the cause of the American colonists in 1775–6, despite the cultural links which bound them together as 'Presbyterian/provincial' societies in peripheral relationship to the English metropolis. This majority view was not always in evidence in the poetry of the next few decades, however. Robert Burns's political broadside 'When Guildford Good' and his 'Ode for General Washington's Birthday', or Thomas Campbell's narrative poem Gertrude of Wyoming (1809) showed marked sympathy for the colonist's cause.

Visiting Antigua in 1774, the Scots traveller Janet Schaw noted, 'Here was a whole company of Scotch people.' The same could be said for other West Indian islands, like Tobago, St Kitts, Granada and Jamaica, where Scots represented one-third of the white population, reaping rich rewards from African slave labour in sugar and cotton plantations.
As in Charleston, visitors often noted that 'the Negroes were dressed in the Scotch blue bonnet' and spoke a Scots patois. In 1764 the Anglo-Scots Dr James Grainger published a georgic poem entitled *The Sugar-Cane*, treating the care of African slaves as largely a problem in husbandry. Robert Burns wasn't unusual in seeking employment in 1786 as a clerk or 'negro-driver' on a Scottish-owned slave plantation in Jamaica. Nonetheless, his song 'The Slave's Lament' expresses powerful sympathy for the plight of a Senegalese slave in Virginia, revealing his ambivalence – in common with many other Scots – regarding chattel slavery. Both John Moore and Henry Mackenzie attacked slavery in their novels *Zeluco* (1786) and *Julia de Roubigné* (1777). As in England, there was no Scottish consensus on the subject. Zachary Macaulay, James Ramsay and Robert Wedderburn all wrote powerful anti-slavery tracts, but in 1791 James Boswell published a turgid 300-line poem entitled *No Abolition of Slavery*, and Thomas Carlyle, in his notorious *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (1849), called for its restitution.

Tobias Smollett's breathtaking first novel *Roderick Random* was published in 1748, the year of Thomson's death, and stands as one of the most powerful literary accounts of eighteenth-century Scottish empire. Like Thomson, Smollett was an expatriate Scot settled in London who made his literary career out of Union, among his many other projects establishing *The Briton* in 1762–3 to defend the unpopular ministry of the Earl of Bute. Nevertheless, Smollett's novels portray a completely different world from Thomson's stately georgic, in their irreverent, picaresque and deeply personal exploration of the darker side of British state- and empire-formation.

To a greater extent than Thomson the colonial sinecurist, Smollett had a personal stake in Britain's empire; as a naval surgeon he had participated in Admiral Vernon's disastrous attack on the Spanish fortress of Cartagena in 1741 and married the heiress-daughter of a Jamaican plantation owner. In *Roderick Random*’s early pages the hero’s pregnant mother dreams that she gives birth to a tennis ball which bounces around with uncanny energy before yielding up a ‘goodly tree covered with blossoms’. The dream sketches the career plan of the Scottish ‘sojourner’ who made his fortune in the East and West Indies before returning home to enjoy his wealth. It also largely anticipates the plot of the novel itself, which concludes with Roderick and his English bride Narcissa settling on the family estate near Dumbarton, reunited with his munificent ‘Argentinean’ father Don Rodrigo.

Yet the novel’s real critical thrust lies in exposing the prejudice which Roderick faces as a Scotsman at nearly every stage of his turbulent career in England and overseas; if Britain is really a ‘union’, it is deeply disaggregated, even in the face of threatening ‘others’. In London, Roderick is told that ‘you Scotchmen have overspread us of late as the locusts did Egypt’. Smollett represents Britain as Babel of tongues without any real unity: the only linguistic ‘standard’ emerges in the novel’s own narrative voice. Despite its colonial settings, the inter-ethnic ‘problem of Britishness’ assumes more importance than its scant representation of colonised peoples. A substantial passage is dedicated to the appalling conditions suffered by Roderick on HM ship *Thunder*; and if Thomson had lionised Vernon’s assault on Cartagena in *The Seasons*, Smollett paints a very different picture of the appalling sufferings of British servicemen. The finger of blame is pointed directly at Vernon and his commander General Wentworth: ‘Between two stools the backside falls to the ground.’ The coarse proverb is appropriate to Smollett’s trenchant satire on the follies of war and colonial conquest.

Smollett turns to the human ambivalence of colonial encounter in Lismahago’s captivity narrative in *Humphry Clinker* (1771). Lismahago dramatises the plight of the Scotsmen who made up one-quarter of the officers of the British army by 1752: ‘in the course of two
sanguinary wars, he had been wounded, mutilated, taken, and enslaved, without ever having attained a higher rank than that of lieutenant’. Smollett describes his torture at the hands of a band of Miami Indians after he and an Irish companion had escaped from French captivity in Canada during the Seven Years War. While his friend Murphy is castrated, broiled and eaten, Lismahago is married to a native bride named Squinkinacoosta, adopted as a Sachem and renamed ‘Occacanastaogarora, which signifies nimble as a weasel’.

Yet Lismahago can still treat the uncomprehending Tabitha Bramble to an encomium on Native American religion and manners, pausing only to denounce the misguided efforts of French missionaries (more ‘other’ than the savages) to convert them to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Smollett’s ambivalent image of Amerindians – shared by Henry Mackenzie in his 1773 novel The Man of the World – was propagated by the popular eighteenth-century genre of captivity narratives, especially the Aberdonian Peter Williamson’s lurid French and Indian Cruelty (1757). In the complex triangulation of ‘this, that, and the other’ identification discussed above, Scots affiliation reaches out more readily to Indian tormentors than to French missionaries, or even English partners in empire. In the end it is the Welsh Tabitha who takes the place of the Miami Squinkinacoosta as Lismahago’s wife.

Emigration

The Highland Clearances have assumed a role in modern Scottish literature approaching that of the notorious ‘Middle Passage’ in African-American cultural memory. Yet there are a number of problems attached to ‘the paradox of Scottish emigration,’ not least the fact that it often coincided with periods of prosperity rather than dearth. Highland emigration to North America in the eighteenth century, as Dr Johnson noted during his 1773 tour, was led by the middle-ranking tenant class. It was a largely voluntary emigration, which, according to Tom Devine’s Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society (1992), reacted ‘to the radical changes in land settlement, rentals and tenure which were destroying the old way of life’. (The attractions, and perceived dangers, of emigration to Canada are evident in William Harriston’s closet drama The Intended Emigrants (1817), discussed in Chapter 25 of this volume by Barbara Bell.)

In the eighteenth century, the flight of traditional Gaelic society from ‘Improvement’ at home often alarmed landlords, who saw their sources of labour and military recruitment dwindling away. Take Henry Erskine’s poem The Emigrant, An Eclogue, published in 1773, during the first mass exodus from the Highlands. The poem’s narrator is an aged Highland shepherd who complains that in the aftermath of the ’45 he has been forced to leave Scotland rather than pay exorbitant rent to a Lowland proprietor. Erskine voices a Scottish Whig patriotism which (somewhat unhistorically) represents agrarian improvement as tillage replacing sheep husbandry. His narrator appeals to George III and the old Highland aristocracy to intervene and forestall the emigration, which will leave Britain vulnerable to foreign invasion. This focus on British vulnerability echoes the pro-Militia campaign waged by Erskine and other Scottish ‘Poker Club’ Whigs in these same decades.

As previously mentioned, Burns’s proposal to emigrate to Jamaica, and this theme, underlies the amor patriae of songs like ‘Will Ye Go the Indies, My Mary’, ‘My Heart’s in the Highlands’, and of course ‘Auld Lang Syne’ (the latter adapted from a song of Jacobite exile). In an important sense, Burns’s poetry proved a symbolic focus for Scottish identity in the colonial diaspora, an identity that often proved more durable than ‘Britishness’. But
in the light of modern attitudes, it is ironic that Burns’s ‘Address of Beelzebub’ (1786) is strongly supportive of Highland emigration in the face of resistance from the clan chiefs. The poem is a satirical message from Satan to the President of the Highland Society, which had sought to ‘frustrate’ the emigration plans of 500 Macdonals of Glengarry to Canada. Running directly counter to Erskine’s poem, Burns suggests that the Highland landowners’ hatred of emigration is based on their fear that the clansmen will be infected by American republicanism: ‘Some daring Hancock, or a Franklin, /May set their HIGHLAND bluid a-ranklin [...]. Poor, dunghill sons of dirt an’ mire, /May to PATRICIAN RIGHTS ASPIRE’. Better to exploit these feudal serfs in the kelpworks, or as pimps and prostitutes in London’s urban sprawl. Energetic efforts on the part of the landowning class to staunch the ‘people’s clearance’ lead to Addington’s Passenger Vessels Act of 1803, rendering the cost of emigration prohibitively expensive. And Burns’s poem was deemed so seditious that it wasn’t published until 1818.

Mounting economic and demographic pressure finally exacerbated by the potato famine of 1846 lead to a volte face on the part of Scottish landowners concerning emigration. The voices of the dispossessed are poignantly recorded in Alexander MacKenzie’s classic History of the Highland Clearances (1883) and in much nineteenth-century Gaelic and English poetry. In the years after the Napoleonic War, anxieties about plebeian radicalism and mass emigration to the United States, as well as concern about native insurgency in South Africa, induced the government to adopt a short-lived assisted emigration programme. In 1820 Thomas Pringle (1789–1834), son of a Roxburgh tenant farmer and friend of Sir Walter Scott, led a party of Scots settlers to the isolated colony of ‘Albany’ on the frontier of the Cape Province. In 1834 he published a collection of poems entitled African Sketches, prefaced by a ‘Narrative of a Residence in South Africa’, based on his experiences of settler life on the frontier.

Along with fellow-Borderer John Leyden (1775–1811), discussed below, Pringle is perhaps the most important nineteenth-century Scottish poet of colonial settlement. His melancholy lyric ‘Afar in the Desert’ was pronounced by Coleridge as ‘among the two or three most perfect lyric Poems in our language’, but his finest poem is the topographical ‘Evening Rambles’, which balances nostalgia for Scotland with naturalised images of African domesticity. As in Thomson’s ‘Summer’, Pringle’s eye ‘rambles’ at large over African land, reconstituting it (in David Bunn’s words) as a ‘transitional landscape’, in which nostalgia for the Scottish homeland is transformed into a desire for colonial settlement (as in ‘Our Wattled Cot’ in Landscape and Power, 1994). The Albany settlers’ ‘wattled cot’ displaces the gothic terror of the ‘Bushman’s Cave’, and the violence of colonial dispossession is troped by images of the natural sublime.

Better known for his provincial classic Annals of the Parish, John Galt’s ‘colonial’ novels Lawrie Todd; or the Settlers in the West (1830) and Bogle Corbet; or, the Emigrants (1831) fictionalised his own experience in facilitating ‘assisted emigration’ to North America. In 1823 Galt was appointed secretary to the Canadian Company and despatched to Upper Canada as part of a government commission to investigate the condition of emigrants. In 1826 he founded Guelph, Ontario, fictionalised as ‘Judiville’ in Lawrie Todd, but a brush with the colonial authorities forced his return to Britain.

The eponymous narrator of Bogle Corbet is born on a Jamaican plantation and trained as a Glasgow weaver, before setting up in London as a West India merchant. After his business fails, Bogle immigrates with his second wife to Ontario, the future hope for Britain’s overseas empire. But Galt is critical of the British government for failing to support emigrants, who are easily seduced by the rival attractions of the USA. Canadian forests are
depicted as rain-soaked and melancholy, and the settlers’ labours unremitting. Galt shows his regional chauvinism in contrasting the enterprise of Lowland settlers with feckless Highlanders who ‘sit all day in the sun, groaning to each other, “Thank Got we are true clansmen, though we pe in Canada, och hon, umph!”’. Although Bogle’s personal fortunes are eventually restored by emigration, he admits, Calvinistically, that ‘the step was taken too late for my own happiness [. . .] A sacrifice is required, and, having made it, he should not repine at the consequences’.

Although more properly considered in relation to the literary history of their respective nations, Scottish emigrants to Australia and New Zealand played an important role in inaugurating a distinct anglophone literature in the southern hemisphere. The largely Scottish colony of Otago (Dunedin was co-founded by the Free Kirk minister Thomas Burns, the poet’s nephew) was the setting of much of the poetry of John Barr, who emigrated from Paisley in 1852, publishing a volume of vernacular verse evoking the struggles of pioneering life in New Zealand. In contrast to Galt’s melancholy, Barr the radical, in his Poems and Songs, Descriptive and Lyrical (1861; cited in Radical Renfrew, 1990), is upbeat about his experience;

There's nae place like Otago yet,
There's nae wee beggar weans,
Or auld men shivering at our doors
To beg for scraps or banes

[. . .]

Nae purse proud, upstart, mushroom lord
To scowl at honest toil.

The overwhelming majority of Scots emigrants in this period, however, headed for Canada and the United States. Stevenson’s travelogue The Amateur Emigrant (1895) recounts the author’s first-hand experience of ‘slumming’ on the emigrant trail from Glasgow to California in 1879. Stevenson breaks with the nostalgia endemic to the poetry of Burns, Pringle and others: ‘we [Scots] are a race of gypsies, and love change and travel for themselves’.

‘Scottish Orientalism’ from India to the Pacific

‘Send [your muse] to India [. . .] That is the true place for a Scot to thrive in; and if you carry your story fifty years back [. . .] you will find as much shooting and stabbing there as ever was in the wild Highlands.’ Such is the advice of Scott’s ‘Mr Fairscribe’ to the ‘author’ in the preface to his ‘Indian’ novella The Surgeon’s Daughter (1826). Scott here seeks to exploit India as a ‘romantic’ setting, on a par with the Highlands so thoroughly exploited in his earlier fiction. The huge Scottish presence in British India (often attributed to the energetic patronage network of Henry Dundas) helps explain the frequency of the Indian topos in Scottish poetry and fiction of this period. India was – to quote Scott again – ‘the Corn Chest for Scotland, where we poor gentry must send our younger sons as we send out black cattle to the south’. By the end of the eighteenth century bright, university-educated Scots like Colin Mackenzie, Thomas Munro, John Malcolm and Mountstuart Elphinstone dominated the East India Company’s service. Scots in India (as elsewhere) were clannish and helped their countrymen climb the greasy ladder of wealth and patronage. But India could be a dangerous place: 57 per cent of all white civilian employees of the Company in
Bengal between 1707 and 1775 died during their service. One-third of Company army officers were Scots, and half the royal troops serving in India between 1754 and 1784 were recruited in Scotland. Despite the legend of loyalty to death, Scottish troops seem to have been particularly prone to mutiny when faced with the prospect of an Indian tour of duty: it is not difficult to imagine why.

Henry Mackenzie’s account of the Indian experiences of the press-ganged soldier Edwards in *The Man of Feeling* (1771) dwells on the horrors of colonial life in India. The novel’s protagonist Harley demands, ‘When shall I see a commander return from India in the pride of honourable poverty?’ (His moral critique is, however, undermined by Mackenzie’s chapter heading: ‘The Man of Feeling talks of What he does not Understand.’) Yet Harley’s sentimental sympathy for Britain’s Indian subjects is a recurrent feature of the distinct body of thought which Jane Rendall has dubbed ‘Scottish Orientalism’. William Robertson’s 1791 *Historical Disquisition into the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* is perhaps the exemplary text in this genre, with its praise of Hindu manners and literature. Two generations of Scottish scholars, students of Sanskrit, Persian or Hindustani, social theorists or historians converted this wish into a reality: the Hindu ‘other’ seemed more familiar when viewed through ‘Ossianic’ lenses. Ironically, one of the major challenges to Scottish Orientalism, which did much to bring about the waning of the Orientalist era of colonial government, was dealt by another Scot, James Mill, in his iconoclastic *History of British India* (1817). Mill subverted the whole project of imaginative sympathy for the Hindu ‘other’, proposing instead to reform India along utilitarian lines.

‘Scottish Orientalist’ attitudes characterise Elizabeth Hamilton’s novel *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796). Hamilton writes as an act of homage to her late brother Charles, an Oriental scholar patronised by Warren Hastings, model for her character Captain Percy. Employing the epistolary format and ‘reverse travelogue’ style of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, Hamilton sends Percy’s Hindu friend Zaarmilla on a tour of British India and Britain itself. His letters home reveal increasing disenchantment with nominally ‘Christian’ Britain. Hamilton writes mainly as a female moralist with a view to reforming corruptions at home, as seen through the eyes of the gentle Hindoo Zaarmilla.

Before his departure for India in 1803, John Leyden (like Pringle and Hogg, the son of humble Border farmers) had shared his friend Walter Scott’s antiquarian interests and published a loco-meditative poem entitled *Scenes of Infancy: Descriptive of Teviotdale* (1802). Successful in his application for patronage, Leyden travelled widely in southern India; his facility with Oriental languages quickly earned him the prestigious Chair of Hindustani at Calcutta’s Fort William College in 1807, and he set about translating the New Testament for the Bible Society. Leyden’s poetic perceptions of India are marked by constant cultural comparisons with Scotland. Conventional tropes of sensibility are re-inflected by exotic location, as in his reworking of Burns’s ‘Ae fond kiss’ in ‘To Aurealia’, or the melancholy ‘Ode on Leaving Velore’, in which the tropical landscape, with its picturesque traces of Hindu antiquity, is suffused with memories of departed youth in Teviotdale. Notably absent here are the tropes of domesticity and settlement featured in Pringle’s ‘An Evening Ramble’. In ‘Ode to an Indian Gold Coin’, Leyden developed the complaint of Burns’s ‘Lines Written on a Bank-Note’: ‘For thee, vile yellow slave, /I left a heart that lov’d me true/I crossed the tedious ocean-wave, /To roam in climes unkind and new’. Colonial service is a sacrifice of health, youth and love to filthy lucre. In ‘Song of the Telinga Dancing Girl’, Leyden identifies with ‘Rah’da’s’ frustrated desire for her European lover, now screened from her ‘ardent glances’ by the presence of his female compatriots. His career was cut short in 1811 when he died of a ‘poisonous fever’ after ransacking a colonial
library in Batavia for Oriental manuscripts during Lord Minto’s expedition against the Dutch colony. His fellow-Borderer James Hogg wrote his elegy: ‘Leyden! A shepherd wails thy fate, /And Scotland knows her loss too late’.

Despite the risks, numerous ‘nabobs’, many of them Scots, returned to Britain with substantial fortunes, which they used to purchase estates and parliamentary interest. In 1785 Henry Mackenzie satirised nabobs in The Lounger, and a similar stereotype survives in John Galt’s comic novel of 1826 The Last of the Lairds. Galt’s returning nabob ‘Mr Rupees’ is originally an Ayrshire cow-herd who incongruously seeks to re-create an Indian lifestyle in the cold Scottish climate in his Oriental villa ‘Nawaubpore’. Nevertheless his scheme to ‘buy out’ Malachi Mailings is thwarted by the pawky old laird.

Scott’s Guy Mannering (1818) represents a significant revision of this Nabob stereotype. The novel tells how the decayed fortunes of an ancient Dumfriesshire family, the Bertrams of Ellangowan, are restored by (the English) Colonel Mannering and the kidnapped family heir ‘Van Beest Brown’, both of whom have served as soldiers in India. Although at one point the lawyer Mac-Morlan explicitly refers to Mannering as ‘an Indian nabob’, the *nouveau riche* butt of Scott’s social satire is now the upstart lawyer Gilbert Glossin, who has purchased Ellangowan from the bankrupt laird. Instead of positing a threat, Indian wealth now props up the shaky neo-feudal order of Scotland-within-Britain against the destabilising forces of ‘democratic’ social aspiration. Although India plays an important role in the plot, it remains distinctly in the background, unlike The Surgeon’s Daughter. But the novel also features an intriguing instance of ‘internal Orientalism’ in the person of Meg Merrilies, a beturbaled gypsy ‘sybil’. Meg’s concealed knowledge of the fate of the kidnapped heir is of more importance in articulating the diffuse plot than the feeble device of Mannering’s astrological predictions. Scotland’s traditional social hierarchy is restored rather than subverted by an unlikely alliance of Mannering’s Indian rupees and Meg’s gypsy wisdom.

Scotland’s nineteenth-century involvement with the Pacific was largely based on the ‘unromantic’ activities of missionaries like James Elder, William Scott, David Cargill and Archibald Murray. But it was R. L. Stevenson who cemented the links between Oceania and the Scottish imagination, uncovering the real impact of European colonialism on Polynesian society, with which he discovered a profound sympathy. Stevenson lived in Samoa from 1889 until his death in 1894, championing the cause of the islanders against European and American colonial policies, as described in his book *A Footnote to History*. His Pacific fiction ranks with the best colonial writing of Kipling or Conrad and represents a late nineteenth-century flowering of ‘Scottish Orientalism’.

It is easy to think that in his Pacific years Stevenson had put Scotland behind him. But in his travel book *In the South Seas* (1890) he confessed that his empathy with the Marquesan islanders was largely due to ‘some knowledge of our Scots folk of the Highlands and Islands’. Their contemporary predicament seemed identical to that of the Highlanders a century before: in both cases modern capitalism had shattered a traditional warrior society based on ‘patriarchal communism’. Avid to study native traditions, he offered fragments of Scottish antiquarian lore as exchange items: ‘the black bull’s head of Stirling procured me the legend of Rahero’. Perhaps unusually, Stevenson preferred exchanging stories rather than bullets with native peoples on the colonial frontier.

Driving all this ethnographic research was Stevenson’s modernist desire to create a new kind of colonial fiction to challenge the romance genre which he had inherited from Scott, Marryat and Melville. In *The Wreckers* and *The Ebb-tide*, co-authored with his stepson Lloyd Osborne, he anticipated Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in examining the pathological effects of colonial encounter on the European psyche, the breakdown of the beachcomber
ideal. Stevenson’s finest achievement, however, is the *Beach of Falesá*, which unusually (for him) focuses on a transracial romance between the semi-literate trader John Wiltshire and his native bride Uma. The novella’s depiction of Polynesian culture and its resourceful adaptation to colonial conditions marks a real advance for nineteenth-century European (let alone Scottish) fiction. In 1891 Stevenson claimed that his novella was the first ‘real-istic’ South Sea story: ‘everybody else who has tried [. . .] got carried away by the romance and ended in a kind of sugar candy sham epic, and the whole effect was lost’.

On the strength of ‘The Bottle Imp’ and other tales translated into Samoan, Stevenson was dubbed ‘Tusitala’ – the teller of tales – by the islanders, among whom he made his home. Upon his death in 1894, he was afforded full Samoan funeral rites and buried on the summit of Mount Vaea with the Pacific stretching beneath him. Stevenson as ‘Scottish Orientalist’ provides an appropriate conclusion to this brief survey. His Pacific fiction – far removed from the sound of the guns which were soon to deafen Europe – represents a watershed between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish ‘literature of empire’ and an emergent modernist and postcolonial imagination.

**Further reading**


Novelist, historian, poet, playwright, satirist, editor, critic, translator, compiler, political journalist, travel-writer, naval surgeon, physician: the sheer range of his literary and professional activities has perhaps done more than any other single factor to cause the modern reader to lose purchase on the full achievement of Tobias George Smollett. In his own short lifetime, Smollett was most esteemed as a historian. He would have wished it so, for the prestige of historical writing (contemporary practitioners included David Hume, William Robertson and, in England, Edward Gibbon) was high, certainly in relation to the uncertain status accorded the ‘new species of writing’ – the novel – on which his modern reputation principally rests. What Smollett brought to prose fiction, however, was a respect for older forms of literature, learning, imagination and a wide-ranging interest in the changing world around him, observed with the fiercely critical intelligence that informs all of his writing.

Tobias Smollett was born in Dalquhurn in 1721 and baptised in March of that year in Cardross, Dunbartonshire. His landowning grandfather, James Smollett (1648–1731), was a Whig supporter of the 1688 revolution who later assisted in drawing up the 1707 Act of Union. Smollett’s father, Archibald, died young, leaving Tobias, his third child and second son, with scant resources to support the inherited social position of which he remained acutely conscious and not unreasonably proud throughout his life.

Schooled in Dumbarton, Smollett acquired a sound classical education but lack of funds forced him to leave for Glasgow, where, at the age of fourteen, he began an apprenticeship under two celebrated surgeons, William Stirling and John Gordon. In the 1730s, however, the surgeon remained decidedly a poor relation of the physician and uncertainties as to the exact nature of Smollett’s connection with Glasgow University – like many students of surgery of the time he did not take a degree – probably may relate to financial embarrassment.

Four years later – and without completing his apprenticeship – Smollett took the high road to London. His aims are uncertain but most likely mixed. The imminence of war with Spain perhaps suggested possibilities for an adventurous young apprentice surgeon. Conversely, Smollett’s literary ambitions may have been paramount in his decision to move south. Certainly, he took with him a copy of The Regicide, a neo-Shakespearean tragedy, based on an episode from George Buchanan’s Rerum Scoticarum Historia. The play’s failure caused him prolonged vexation: unperformed, it eventually achieved publication in 1749. The experience was the prologue to further theatrical setbacks, including a (now lost) version of Alcestê that Handel was to have set to music for Covent Garden in 1750. Only with the slight patriotic comedy The Reprisal; or, the Tars of Old England (1757) did Smollett achieve some popular dramatic success.

This, however, lay almost two decades in the future and faced with the failure of his first literary work, Smollett joined the navy at the outbreak of the War of Jenkins’s Ear. Serving
as a surgeon’s mate in the Caribbean, he witnessed the catastrophic military reversal inflicted on the British forces at the siege of Cartagena. The experience marked the young man for life, leading the older writer to pen multiple and ever-harder accounts of the defeat and those he held responsible for it.

Before long, however, Smollett’s early reversals – exile from Scotland, the inability to follow a learned profession or to complete his apprenticeship as a surgeon, the brutal realities of active service on a man-of-war, even the rejection of his tragedy – provided the writer with materials for *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748). The novel is much more than unembroidered autobiography, yet the hero’s national and social background, his medical training and literary aspirations and his naval service and presence at the debacle at Cartagena all have counterparts in the twenty-seven-year-old author’s life. So, too, does the prejudice encountered in post-1707 Britain by the ambitious young Scotsman.

It would be wrong, though, to overdramatise Smollett’s situation. He began to make a reputation while still in his early twenties. Two impassioned verse satires, *Advice* (1746) and *Reproof* (1747), suggest an overoptimistic attempt to lay claim to the Scriblerian mantle laid aside following the deaths of Pope and Swift in 1744 and 1745. Lines like ‘Too coy to flatter, and too proud to serve/Thine be the joyless dignity to starve’ have a familiar Scriblerian (though authentically Smollettian) ring of neglected merit. Yet if this poetic vein was all but exhausted, Smollett had still earlier penned a much finer poem that additionally demonstrated considerable personal courage in one seeking to make his way in English literary circles. In April 1746, the Duke of Cumberland’s crushing victory over Charles Edward Stuart at Culloden led to an outpouring of English self-congratulation. Though a staunch Hanoverian and strong critic of the arbitrary tendencies he associated with Roman Catholicism and Jacobitism, Smollett nevertheless powerfully lamented Cumberland’s brutality to his enemies and the savage retribution exacted on the civilian population, in ‘The Tears of Scotland’ (1746). Written against the prevailing political climate, Smollett’s was a poem of which a contemporary wrote that it ‘made every tender-hearted Whig feel himself for moments a Jacobite’ – and, in its privileging of fierce moral indignation over political expediency, it remains an exemplary Smollettian work.

In 1748, Smollett forsook the more respectable forms of historical tragedy or verse satire, publishing *Roderick Random*, which received positive critical notice and sold well, and a translation of Alain-René Le Sage’s *Gil Blas* (1715–47). The success of Le Sage’s episodic novel undoubtedly influenced Smollett’s work. Both writers describe a world in moral and social disorder characteristic of earlier Spanish picaresque fiction. Le Sage also introduced a leaven of modern sensibility that Smollett too would employ. Such sentiment undeniably made his fiction more popular in his own day – though few modern readers are likely to consider Smollett’s attempt at, for instance, female characterisation to be very successful. By contrast, the powerful rendering of life below deck long provided materials for naval historians and later novelists alike and Smollett’s paternalistic affection for ordinary seamen made Tom Bowling a byword for the honest British sailor.

Smollett followed the success of *Roderick Random* with *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751). Here, though, he abandons the Scottish frame of the earlier novel, along with first-person narrative and the element of overt autobiography that lent strength to *Random*. In their place, he offers an increasingly jaundiced view of an England whose endemic moral corruption threatens to contaminate even the hero. Smollett’s darkening satire is directed particularly against the English nobility, whose alliance with the new moneyed classes seems set to leave no place for the independent country gentry whose interests Smollett
defended throughout his life. To offset the novel's bleakness – including spiteful satirical portraits of some of those, like David Garrick, who had fallen foul of the author – Smollett offers a more open and genuine comedy. The account of the land-garrison of the former retired naval officer Commodore Trunnion is richly humorous, while that of Trunnion’s frustrated attempts to ride across country to his own wedding is a magnificent comic set-piece. What gained *Pickle* immediate notoriety, however, was the lengthy interpolation of the scandalous amatory adventures of Lady V— (Lady Frances Anne Vane), allegedly written by herself. This was both innovative and daring for much contemporary criticism of the ‘new species of writing’ lamented its alleged licentiousness. In fact, the ‘Memoirs of a Lady of Quality’ survived into the second edition of 1758, but much of the coarser, scatological comedy, involving leaking chamber pots and the like, was excised in deference to the increasingly refined demands of contemporary novel readers.

A restless interest in the possibilities of the new prose fiction distinguishes Smollett’s third and fourth novels, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) and *Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760–1). The former boasts a preface that remains a major piece of early novel criticism and an unsympathetic, even demonic, central character. Despite the acknowledged power of individual episodes, though, *Fathom* failed to repeat Smollett's earlier successes. Nor did *Sir Launcelot Greaves* fare better. Smollett’s admiration for Cervantes – already evident in *Roderick Random* – had resulted in a translation of *Don Quixote* in 1755. In *Greaves*, however, Smollett himself seems barely convinced by his Yorkshire knight-errant. When even Sir Launcelot is made to insist that ‘I am [no] affected imitator of Don Quixote’, it is unsurprising that the whole enterprise appears a little half-hearted. Yet if Smollett’s work lacks the freshness of Charlotte Lennox’s reworking of Cervantes in *The Female Quixote* (1752), the quixotry is not unmotivated. Greaves may protest his sanity but he is forcibly incarcerated in a private madhouse. Such madhouses here become England’s equivalent of the Bastille: embodiments of the threat to individual liberty by the arbitrary powers of government or misapplied law.

If Smollett’s third and fourth novels are uneven, possible causes are not hard to find. Early in the 1750s, Smollett had attempted to break free from dependence on booksellers by building up a medical practice. To qualify as a physician, he purchased an MD degree for £28 Scots from Marischal College, Aberdeen. Setting up house in Downing Street, he combined regular practice with revising for publication the important obstetrical writings of his friend and fellow-Scot, Dr William Smellie. In 1752, Smollett published a medical paper of his own, the *Essay on the External Use of Water*; the subject was a lasting interest of the author’s and would find its lurid comic apotheosis in the description of Bath in *Humphry Clinker*.

Professional success as a physician, however, eluded Smollett. Accordingly, the 1750s saw him increasingly engaged in self-confessed hackwork. For instance, his translation of the *Journal Oeconomique* was driven by a need to maintain not only himself but also his wife, Anne Lassells, and their daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1747 or 1748. Yet ambition remained: in the space of four years Smollett founded not one but two literary journals – the long-lived *Critical Review* (edited by him 1756–63) and the *British Magazine* (1760–7). More determinedly than any other journal of its day, the *Critical* set out to give extended serious attention to new works of imaginative literature. Though proud of being a ‘gentleman by birth, education, and profession’, the failed physician insisted that the *Critical* reviewers too were ‘gentlemen’, helping make the profession of paid critic a respectable one.

Smollett was simultaneously involved in a much more ambitious venture. In April 1757, he began to publish his *Complete History of England* (1757–8), an account of national
history from the Roman conquests to the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, that would
do much to shape his reputation during his lifetime. Pugnaciously, the future author of the
‘Ode to Independence’ (c. 1766), in a letter of 2 July 1758, claimed independence as his
defining virtue as a historian:

I have flattered no individual; I have cultivated no Party [. . .] I pique myself upon being the
only Historian of this Country, who has Honesty, Temper and Courage enough to be wholly
impartial and disinterested.

Unsurprisingly, not all readers agreed, accusing Smollett of Tory, even of Jacobite, sympa-
thies. The work’s public success was more certain. A revision of the quarto edition appeared
in eleven octavo volumes. Still more accessible to a growing public – and characteristic of
the writer’s attachment to the ideal of popular enlightenment – was the publication of the
work in weekly parts, at 6d each. A Continuation (1760–5) took the history from 1748 to
1765. Remarkably, Smollett was simultaneously involved in the compilation and part-
authorship of the modern section of the Universal History (1759–66) in forty-four volumes.

Smollett’s alleged impartiality as a historian did not extend to his accounts of the siege
of Cartagena. In an unsigned Critical Review article, Smollett savaged Admiral Knowles.
Acknowledging authorship – to save the printer from punishment – Smollett found himself
subject to a libel action taken by Knowles; on 24 November 1760 he was found guilty, fined
and sentenced to three months’ imprisonment. During his incarceration, he continued
Sir Launcelot Greaves, published in the British Magazine from January 1760 to December 1761.
Subsequently, the British would publish a number of pleasing lyric poems whose sentiment –
well gauged to appeal to the tastes of middle-class readers – suggests a very different aspect
of the touchy, at times choleric, writer.

As writer and editor, Smollett had a sharp sense of the literary market. As a politician,
he was less acute. An admirer of the youthful George III, who had acceded to the throne
in 1760, Smollett was asked by the king’s principal adviser and prime minister, the Earl of
Bute, to produce a weekly paper in defence of the ministry. The result was The Briton, first
published in November 1761. Smollett insisted on the new paper’s impartiality but to small
avail. A Scot himself, Bute was alleged to have surrounded himself with his own country-
men and Smollett’s attempts to defend him tended rather to exacerbate than alleviate the
situation. When John Wilkes founded an opposition paper, he pointedly entitled it the North
Briton. Enthusiasm waning, Smollett struggled on until February 1763, but it was
John Wilkes who would achieve popular success and, eventually, more lasting fame as a
defender of English liberties with No. 45 of the North Briton.

Smollett’s political disillusionment was soon eclipsed by personal sorrow. Less than two
months after he abandoned the Briton, his fifteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, died. Grief –
to which his letters bear poignant testimony – coupled with the persistent ill health from
which he had suffered for many years led him and his wife to leave England for the conti-
nent. The lasting literary monument to this journey is one of the finest travel books in
English: Travels through France and Italy (1766). Memorably caricatured as Smelfungus by
Laurence Sterne in A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy (1768), Smollett was in
truth much more than the splenetic traveller of Sterne’s (or popular) imagination.
Conventional in form, the Travels offers both an engaging personal account of the vicissi-
tudes of continental travel and a serious attempt at an objective relation of the past and
present conditions of the states and cities that Smollett visited. Sharply intelligent, well-
informed, and endlessly curious, Smollett sought out much that other travellers passed by
without comment or interest, while showing a fearless (occasionally eccentric) disregard for received opinion.

Returning to Britain in 1765, Smollett continued to add to his prodigious literary output. There were old scores to settle. He had never forgiven Bute and under the guise of an account of Japanese politics, his scatological History and Adventures of an Atom (1768) excoriates the former prime minister, along with politicians and military leaders of all persuasions, in a savage rendering of the Seven Years War. More constructively, Smollett worked on yet another encyclopedic compilation, the Present State of All Nations (1768–9).

Comparison of The Present State with his last and most successful novel, The Expedition of Humphry Clinker (1771), reveals both Smollett’s intense interest in questions of contemporary political, social and economic change and his still-increasing mastery of novelistic form. To the varied fictions he had published previously he now added an epistolary novel. Neither the form itself nor its use in a travel narrative was at all original: in Clinker, the letter-writers inform distant friends of their family party’s travels in the mid-1760s from their rural Welsh home through the cities and fashionable spas of England to Scotland and (almost) home. Smollett’s handling of the epistolary form, however, had no real precedents in fiction. Strikingly for a writer so often fiercely dogmatic in his pronouncements, the letter-writers are distinguished one from another by social class, gender and age, as well as temperament. The result is a complex spatialised account of the emerging polity of Great Britain that is ultimately resistant to any univocal reading of it. Here, the brusque certainties (right or wrong) that dominate so much of Smollett’s writing are subordinated to a nuanced account of a society in the process of a profound transformation that the novel’s principal characters, variously, fear and welcome. That Humphry Clinker reluctantly promotes tolerance as an active good is no indication that Smollett – dying after years of illness – had gone soft. In the irascible valetudinarian Mathew Bramble, constantly in danger of being outwitted by his elderly sister, his niece and nephew, and even the apparently simple-minded servant Humphry Clinker he picks up on the road, he offers a wry fictional self-portrait of the moralist at bay. Indeed, it is striking how many of the qualities of the youthful writer survive into a more expansive maturity. There is a belief in social hierarchy tempered by an insistence on reciprocal rights and responsibilities and a passionate hatred of oppression. There is contempt for a society increasingly dominated by money and not morals. Not least, as admirers and detractors alike have noted, there is a nostalgic affection for his native country – where occasional visits had provided rare moments of calm for the frequently beleaguered author – enlivened by a prescient recognition of the role Scotland, its growing trade and industry and, above all, his fellow-countrymen and women, would play in the emerging British Empire. Most remarkably perhaps – given almost two decades of unremitting literary labour carried on in continuous ill-health, punctuated by political and personal quarrels, professional disappointments and the death of his only child – Smollett retained his love of, and gift for, comedy. That he did so with no strong or even hopeful belief in divine providence places him in a small minority among the writers of his age. By conviction, Smollett remained to the end on terms of ‘dissent civility’ – to appropriate one of his own imaginative linguistic usages – with religion.

Attempting to mend his failing health, the author spent the last two years of his life in Italy. A quarter of a century previously, he had written in ‘Reproof’, ‘Jews, Turks or Pagans, hallow’d be the mouth/That teems with moral zeal and dauntless truth’. Now, he finally settled in Leghorn (Livorno), whose 1593 constitution made the small state a celebrated bastion of religious and civil toleration in eighteenth-century Europe. Smollett died there, aged just 50, on 17 September 1771.
Further reading


Burns is notoriously elusive. Don Paterson opens his selected edition, *Robert Burns* (2001), with the disclaimer that the poet's character was 'so complicated as not to exist at all'. Yet in what Paterson terms Burns's 'furious shapeshifting', the poet invites comparisons to Scotland itself, that cultural site under perpetual construction with which Burns's poems and songs are so closely identified. Indeed, in his career path from acclaimed author of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786) to largely anonymous saviour of Scottish song, Burns does somehow mysteriously vanish into 'Scotland'. His status as a national icon has tended to obscure not only elements in his character, but also the nature of his literary achievement.

In 1926, in the foreword of his own Burns edition, Hugh MacDiarmid – still writing as C. M. Grieve – was sure that the real Burns was the dialect poet: 'Much of the best, and least-known, of Burns depends for appreciation on a thorough knowledge of Scots'. English songs and poems were just so much sentimental 'rubbish' to be cleared away. Yet his own editorial selection disregarded this prescription: he chose three poems largely in dialect ('Tam o’ Shanter', 'Address to the Deil', and 'To a Mouse'), one English poem ('A Bard's Epitaph'), but no fewer than sixteen songs, most of which – including 'Mary Morison', 'Highland Mary', 'Ae Fond Kiss', and 'The Banks o’ Doon' – are predominantly English.

The fact is that, though the ratio shifts from text to text, Burns always blends English with Scots, sentiment with satire, literary with local references. His 'magnificent mixedness', as Robert Crawford calls it in *Devolving English Literature* (1992), suggests not capitulation to English cultural pressure, but what Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), has termed 'hybridity', a form of resistance to cultural authority that works by infusing the colonisers' language and speech with local or 'native' references. In Burns's writings, forms of 'native' knowledge (local Scottish references) are typically positioned against more widely disseminated 'knowledges of cultural authority', particularly the idea of English as the 'standard' or prescribed language for poetry. Bhabha’s idea of hybridity offers a way past the simplistic dyad – 'good' dialect versus 'bad' English – which has characterised so much Burns criticism in modern times.

With his mixed range of allusions and languages, Burns in fact seeks to elude capture by any cultural authority, whether Scottish or English. In the kirk satires and 'Holy Willie's Prayer', tyrannies of the local, provincial smallnesses are satirised just as energetically as the notion that English is the only language proper for British poetry. Even Burns's famous title *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* is more elliptical than may at first appear, standing at once as a provocative statement of local allegiance and (in its hedge of 'chiefly') a hint of other interests, too. In Burns's addresses to and for Scotland, in Bhabha's words, 'no political ideologies [. . .] claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves'. Burns himself, in short, saw no poetic use for cultural purity. It is no accident that the final
lines of ‘Address to the Unco Guid’ define ‘what’s resisted’ (emphasis in original) as the measure of personal integrity.

Between the poet's birth (25 January 1759) and the sensational success of Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect lay twenty-seven years of family aspiration and family struggle which form one context for the mixed realms of reference in his writings. Burns was the first child of thirty-eight-year-old William Burnes, a gardener soon to become a tenant farmer, and twenty-seven-year-old Agnes Broun. Three sisters and three brothers were born between 1760 and 1771. All the children lived and thrived, and John Murdoch, Burns's schoolmaster from 1764 to 1766 (the poet's only years of classroom instruction), recalled that in the Burns cottage at Alloway, where he often lodged, 'I really believe there dwelt a larger portion of content, than in any palace in Europe.' Burns moved his family in 1766 to Mount Oliphant, a rented farm: the leasehold property at Alloway, where the poet was born, was at seven and a half acres too small to support the growing family. The new farm was located off the main roads and the children could no longer safely walk to school. Attempting to fill the gap, William Burnes home-schooled them in geography, astronomy and natural history. A charter member of the Ayr Library (founded in 1761), Burnes often walked to town for books. David Sillar, a friend of the poet in the early 1780s, remembered that it was Burns's 'custom to read at table'; this habit of reading or writing during mealtimes, or in any spare moment, persisted throughout the poet's life.

The close-knit family worked, studied and nearly starved at Mount Oliphant, where they stayed until 1777. The soggy soil was 'almost the very poorest [. . .] I know of in a state of cultivation', remembered the poet’s brother Gilbert, who stayed in farming. The rent at Burnes's next farm was more than triple what he had paid at Mount Oliphant – a pound per acre or £130 annually – even though Lochlie, like Mount Oliphant, was poorly drained and unimproved. Burnes became involved in litigation with this last landlord; just weeks after averting bankruptcy by winning a favourable verdict in a second lawsuit, he died in February 1784, probably of tuberculosis. The poet's account of these years (in a letter typical in its dramatic, hyper-charged English diction – Burns wrote only one letter wholly in Scots vernacular) is tinged with anger:

We lived very poorly; I was a dextrous Ploughman for my years; and the next eldest to me [Gilbert] was a brother, who could drive the plough very well and help me to thrash. – A Novel-Writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I [. . .]. This kind of life [. . . combined] the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing toil of a galley-slave.

His family's own favourite among his poems was ‘The Cotter's Saturday Night’, which in part recalls their early life at Alloway. James Kinsley's note in his Poems and Songs of Robert Burns (1968; all quotations are from this edition) identifies echoes from numerous poets, English and Scots; but the most important precursor is Robert Fergusson's 'The Farmer's Ingle' (1773), which likewise describes the evening meal of a farming family. Burns, however, employs a more heightened language, suggesting his deeper emotion in considering 'peasant' subjects. His epigraph is taken from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' ('Let not Ambition mock their useful toil', etc.), but unlike Gray's peasants, Burns’s are heroic. Gray’s view of a peasant family is retrospective:

For them no more the blazing Hearth shall burn,  
Or busy Houswife ply her Evening Care:
No Children run to lisp their Sire's Return,
Or climb his Knees the envied Kiss to share.

Burns uses the present tense, moving from long-shot to close-up:

Th' expectant wee-things, toddlan, stacher thro'
To meet their Dad, wi' flitcherin noise and glee.
His wee-bit ingle, blinkan bonilie, = fire
His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty Wifie's smile,
The lisping infant, prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary kiaugh and care beguile. = anxiety

Bright glints of vernacular contribute to the vitality, but Burns has also made poetic capital out of a vigorous excision of all Gray's negatives: 'For them no more'; 'No Children run'.

In early lines in which numerous family members greet each other with joy, the plentiful rhymes of the Spenserian stanza are fraternal sounds bringing together strongly marked vernacular words – 'sugh'/'pleugh', 'drapping in'/'tentie rin', ‘SCOTIA's food'/'chows her cood'– and a remoter elevated English: 'sacredotal stole'/'language of the soul'; 'grandeur springs'/breath of kings'.

In later stanzas the diction becomes uniformly lofty:

And O may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From Luxury's contagion, weak and vile!
Then howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous Populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire, around their much-lov'd ISLE.

Burns here echoes stanza five of ‘The Farmer's Ingle' but also Oliver Goldsmith's ‘The Deserted Village': ‘O luxury! Thou curst by Heaven's decree, /How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!' The poem may also borrow from Goldsmith its evident enthusiasm for patriarchal order. Indeed, ‘The Cotter's Saturday Night’ is in part a tribute to a patriarch: William Burnes inspired the character of the Bible-reader in the poem, just as Oliver Goldsmith's boyhood memories are retrieved in 'The Deserted Village' as characters of his own first schoolmaster (Tom Byrne of Lissoy village) and his own father, a kindly and open-handed minister whose ‘ready smile' expressed to all in the village a generous ‘parent's warmth'.

Yet Burns's cotters are unlike Goldsmith's rustics in being larger, not smaller, than the social institutions of church and school that have been set above them. The 'priest-like' father in particular is conceived on a monumental scale:

The Sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big ha'Bible, ance his Father's pride: = hall-Bible
[. . .] Those strains that once did sweet in ZION glide,

He wales a portion with judicious care; = chooses
‘And let us worship GOD!’ he says with solemn air.
Though clearly respecting the family’s prayer, the poet-speaker does not join it, concluding the poem with a prayer of his own making that takes not scripture but Scottish history as its text:

O THOU! who pour’d the patriotic tide,
That stream’d thro’ great, unhappy WALLACE’ heart;
[. . .] (The Patriot’s GOD, peculiarly thou art,
His friend, inspirer, guardian and reward!)
O never, never SCOTIA’s realm desert,
But still the Patriot, and the Patriot-bard,
In bright succession raise, her Ornament and Guard!

Burns’s patriot-bard is called to guard a nation, not just a family. Admiring the virtues of the ‘Sire’, Burns’s speaker nonetheless evinces no interest in one day assuming his role as pious custodian of the status quo. Like William Wallace, named Guardian of Scotland in 1297, he instead pledges himself to defend the endangered and embattled idea of a free Scotland, addressing God not as an ‘ETERNAL KING’ but instead as a hater of tyranny who counts poets among his chosen ones.

Burns’s heroic cotters sustain their faith by study of the Bible. The patriot-bard differs from them chiefly in having gone beyond reading to become a powerful writer. Nonetheless, by foregrounding their self-respecting endurance as the foundation of what he knows, Burns’s speaker carries the peasant family along with him – as no Gray, Goldsmith or even Ferguson had ever done before – to his visionary conclusion. In this poem, as elsewhere, Burns evokes Scotland less as a geopolitical entity than as a sympathetic space in which the significance of ‘poor bodies’ can be addressed, defended, and redefined. In ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, non-owning farmers stand as a Bible-fortified ‘wall of fire’ encircling a ‘Scotland’ envisioned as just one long chain of virtuous country households led by people like the poet’s father.

As seen in the divergent prayers dramatised in ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, religion was for Burns – like all modes of authority and tradition – a cultural force that inspired mixed emotions. Burns sees faith as upholding ‘poor bodies’ in their daily struggle for survival with dignity. His emphasis shifts, however, when those who pray or in other ways speak for religion reveal their motives – as in ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’ – to be vindictive or self-interested. ‘Your children of Sanctity’, he wrote in September 1792, ‘move among their fellow-creatures with a nostril snuffing putrescence, & a foot spurning filth’; the ‘conceited dignity’ of self-proclaimed saints irritated him just as much as the airs assumed by aristocratic ‘great Folk’. Still, as Susan Manning has observed in ‘Burns and God’ in Burns and Cultural Authority (1997), even the poet’s kirk satires defy any unitary interpretation, as they suggest not a wholesale rejection of faith but a critique of false teachings: ‘we can say that Burns was a better Calvinist than the Kirk whose once-revolutionary spiritualism had ossified into a new theological orthodoxy’.

‘Address of Beelzebub’, written about three months after Burns completed ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, shows that the poet can envision a chain of oppressive brutality as well as a chain of virtue. Burns’s satiric target is a group of absentee landowners meeting in a London tavern to find ways of preventing Highland tenants from emigrating; or rather, as Burns sarcastically puts it in his introduction, attempting ‘an escape from’ their ‘lawful lords and masters whose property they are’ (quoted in Kinsley).
Beelzebub, addressing as peers-in-evil these leisured men of property, advises a continued course of persecution:

But smash them! crush them a’ to spails!
And rot the DYVORS i’ the JAILS!
The young dogs, swing to the labour,
Let WARK an’ HUNGER mak them sober!
[. .] An’ if the wives, an’ dirty brats,
Come thiggan at your doors an’ yets,
Flaffan wi’ duds, an’ grey wi’ beese,
Frightan awa your deucks an’ geese;
Get out a HORSE-WHIP, or a JOWLER,
The langest thong, the fiercest growler,
An’ gar the tatter’d gypseys pack
Wi’ a’ their bastard on their back!

Suppressed by Burns’s early editors and first printed in The Scots Magazine in 1818, this poem views hereditary privilege as itself enforcing the cycle of hereditary poverty against which Burns’s own family had struggled and would struggle. Although the Devil is a dialect speaker here, the poem’s ‘Scottishness’ (as is characteristic for Burns) really inheres in its hatred of tyrannical insolence, its angry rejoinder to those in power. Burns’s list of the Devil’s compatriots in Hell is drawn from different cultures and eras, but all – Herod, Polycrates, Almagro and Pizarro – were tyrants, friends of empire, colonisers. The meaning of the poem is to be found in the gap between Beelzebub's expressed contempt for the dispossessed tenants and the indignant feelings among readers the poet is intent on stirring up. A more famous dramatic monologue, ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’, offers the same implied but decisive critique of a dialect speaker who with every word only further discredits the self-serving system of ‘values’ that his prayer addresses.

The songs Burns wrote and revised during the last eight years of his life (he died 21 July 1796) are often more oblique than early writings such as ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’ and ‘Address of Beelzebub’. During his stay in Edinburgh (late November 1786–June 1788), he widened his repertoire of Jacobite songs and studied collections of ballads. After 1787, references to historical Scottish experience often replace, or more deeply encrypt, references to family and personal experience. Many of his late speakers are historical personages: Mary Queen of Scots, for instance. In other songs – ‘The Luvely Lass o’ Inverness’ and ‘My heart’s in the Highlands’ are examples – unnamed speakers are set in landscapes which he knew mainly through his study of ballads and songs. (Between spring and autumn of 1787, Burns made brief tours of the Highlands and the Border country, crossing into England as far as Carlisle. These were visits to admirers of his poems but also pilgrimages to the regions most renowned in Scottish song and story.)

Settings for Burns’s writing before 1788 were usually both local and specific: the cantata ‘Love and Liberty’, for instance (written in November 1785), is set in Mauchline at the disreputable tavern of Agnes Gibson. In songs written after 1788, by contrast, Burns typically suggests a more generalised Scottish backdrop – a Scottish Arcadia that often blends elements of Highland and Border landscapes. The courtship and erotic songs Burns set in this virtual Scotland of his later work gave him yet another way of speaking to and for the ‘poor body’. It is no accident that references to economic
struggle so frequently enter lyrics celebrating the joys of ‘mutual love’ as in ‘Braw Lads o’ Gala Water’:

It ne’er was wealth, it ne’er was wealth,
That soft contentment, peace, or pleasure;
The bands and bliss o’ mutual love,
O that’s the chiepest world’s treasure!

Conventional pastoral imagery (leafy groves, etc.) is frequently used in these later songs not because Burns was attracted to literary clichés but because nature, seen as fallen and marred by sin in Calvinist tradition, is idealised in pastoral:

How lofty, sweet Afton, thy neighboring hills,
Far mark’d with the courses of clear, winding rills;
There daily I wander as noon rises high,
My flocks and my Mary’s sweet Cot in my eye.

‘Flow Gently, Sweet Afton’ was written at Ellisland very soon after Burns had moved his family there. The backdrop is a ‘lofty’ landscape well irrigated by the windings of a gentle-flowing river: as so often in Burns's later works, the speaker’s emotions (in this case, expressive of a tranquil, prosperous love) find their mirror in the natural setting.

In the clean Scottish space of Burns’s later songs, ‘winding rills’ are traced by many a ‘roving’ lover and meandering speaker; this freedom of motion suggests a free play of emotion between lovers in the landscape, or shows a correspondence between the unstudied beauty of nature and the wandering thoughts of a solitary speaker. In ‘My heart’s in the Highlands’ (Burns’s notes to the song credit the first two lines of the chorus to tradition), the poet’s added lines evoke the Highlands as a place of bounding energy: ‘Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe’. ‘Auld Lang Syne’ uses similarly kinetic imagery: ‘We twa hae run about the braes, / And pou’d the gowans fine’.

‘Tam o’ Shanter’ (1790), Burns’s favourite among his writings, is characteristic of his later work in its emphasis on ‘straying’. As drunken Tam rides home through a violent storm, the passing landmarks offer their silent record of other night-riders who have perished or fallen. But Tam is destined to survive all perils, indeed to experience an intense if fleeting pleasure in seeing (among the community of night-dancing witches he encounters) the young witch Nannie, whose body is revealed when her ‘cutty sark’ (‘short-shift’) lifts up in the course of her dancing. The apprentice-witch Nannie and the middle-aged, habitually drunken Tam are actually kindred spirits. Both are votaries of pleasure who ignore or defy the Kirk’s and the state’s prescription of self-denying, prudent ‘virtue’ as the peculiar duty of the rural poor.

In this one way like ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ is in part addressed to William Burnes, the poet’s late father, who in February 1784 had been buried at Alloway kirk, scene of the witches’ dance. Their worst conflict occurred when the poet left home one night to participate in a ‘country dancing school’ as he wrote in a letter:

My father had an unaccountable antipathy [. . .] against these meetings; and my going was, what to this hour I repent, in absolute defiance of his commands [. . .] [F]rom that instance of rebellion he took a kind of dislike to me, which, I believe was one cause of that dissipation which marked my future years – I only say, Dissipation, comparative with the strictness and sobriety of Presbyterian country life.
Even in the ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, the speaker to some degree distances himself from the ‘Sire’ in pledging himself to a more politically active life; but in ‘Tam o’ Shanter’, written some six years later, the gesture of distance has broadened into an insistence on utter difference, as the witches dance with joyous abandon on whatever is left of patriarchal order while Tam stands by and ‘roars out’ his approval.

Freedom to dance, drink, play, chase, kiss, ‘stray’ and court is increasingly emphasised in Burns’s writings during years in which civil liberties throughout Britain were being abridged. During the same years when Burns was submitting hundreds of Scottish songs to the editors George Thomson and James Johnson, William Pitt was enacting anti-sedition policies, paying especially close attention to Scotland, with its comparatively recent history of violent insurrection. Economic times were hard: in 1796 food riots broke out in Burns’s own town of Dumfries. Burns’s support for the French Revolution was sometimes openly expressed, as in a letter of 1795 to Frances Wallace Dunlop in which he called the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette a deserved fate and concluded, ‘I imagine that time is not far distant when a man may freely blame Billy Pit, without being called an enemy to his Country.’ The letter infuriated Mrs Dunlop, who broke off their friendship.

In ‘Ye Jacobites By Name’, a song of 1792 printed anonymously (like most of Burns’s Jacobite songs) in Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum*, Burns implicitly considers the evils of his own day while (as in ‘Address of Beelzebub’) replicating an argument that he expects his audience to see through:

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[. . .] What makes heroic strife, fam’d afar, fam’d afar?
What makes heroic strife, fam’d afar?
What makes heroic strife?
To whet th’ Assassin’s knife,
Or hunt a Parent’s life
Wi’ bludie war.—

Then let your schemes alone, in the State, in the State,
Then let your schemes alone in the State,
Then let your schemes alone,
Adore the rising sun,
And leave a Man undone
To his fate.—
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The stanzas, revised from a traditional fragment, are characteristic of Burns in the gap between what is said and what is meant, as the Jacobite speaker sarcastically parrots Whig arguments about political expediency. Apparently set in 1689, the song commends Mary and Anne for hunting ‘a parent’s life’ with ‘bloody war’. The ‘man undone’ who speaks might even be their father, James VII and II. In the final stanza, which Burns added, this speaker advises his followers to idolise the ‘rising sun’ of political pragmatism and abandon him ‘to his fate’.

As Andrew Noble, Patrick Scott Hogg and Liam McIlvanney have recently re-established, Burns was no friend to monarchy. The explanation for the speaker’s viewpoint in ‘Ye Jacobites By Name’ cannot be that Burns was himself a Jacobite, Tory, or neo-Burkeian conservator of existing institutions. It is precisely because the poet is obliquely considering his own and Scotland’s options in the dark years of the 1790s that he so often goes back to other moments of national crisis: 1688, 1715, 1745. In ‘Ye Jacobites By Name’, Burns is reading James VII and II’s experience of history – loss of sovereign power, political
betrayal, what Jacobites saw as Parliament’s ad hoc revision of the terms of governance – as a recapitulation (the Stuarts being a Scottish dynasty) of Scotland’s historic mistreatment by England. It is in this sense that he can present James, a king who reigned in London and was revered by Tories, as a speaker for ‘Scottish’ values.

One thing that may be firmly asserted of Burns’s work, early and late, is that in it Scotland is not a place so much as an imagination of freedom, projected out of an unspoken milieu of oppression. In ‘Love and Liberty’, the defiant songs of the homeless beggars are staged inside the temporary shelter of the tavern, but the opening stanzas remind readers that a cold November awaits them when their night of pleasure is over. In ‘Tam o’ Shanter’, Burns’s mock-hero rides clear of town, wife and the burden of adult responsibilities, finding a magically energetic space in which lightning flashes as witches cast off their clothing. Yet the moment passes quickly - ‘in an instant all was dark’ – and Tam rides back to renewed labour and domestic routine.

Poor bodies, no longer mute or humble, speak out in Burns; yet a fleeting quality in their dramatised experience suggests some pressure on Burns’s poetic imagination from real-time, dystopian Scotland. Burns knew well that a better life for the poor could not really be built on a foundation of stolen moments of bliss. Yet for speakers to address social inequities directly was less and less possible; by 1795, the Treasonable Practices Act had been extended to include informal conversation and written documents. In any event, though his songs became shorter, they also became more concentrated; and Burns never abandoned his central topic, defined in a famous lyric of 1795 as ‘honest Poverty’ – that state in which people, however hard-pressed their struggle to survive, utterly refuse to hang their heads. To be sure, in Burns’s later work almost anyone might turn up poor: if James VII and II’s situation in 1689 places him in the category of indignant suffering soul, he will be awarded honorary status as a ‘poor body’ and commiserated with. Indeed, Burns’s imagination of Scotland as potential free space is itself a kind of national tradition, as may be seen also in the Declaration of Arbroath (1320): ‘It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom – for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.’

Burns’s writings, whether early or late, do not conduct the nostalgic tour of a colourful but safely inert Scottish past seen in Sir Walter Scott’s Waverley a generation later. For Burns, Scotland is not over yet. In ‘Is There for Honest Poverty’, the poet moves from his defence of men in homespun (‘hoddin grey’) to a vision of future global brotherhood: ‘Man to Man the warld o’er, /Shall brothers be’. As Thomas Crawford has observed (in Burns (1960)) ‘[H]e appears as a regionalist only up to a point. In his finest writings he belongs not to Scotland only, but to the world.’ The potentially utopian space that Burns defines as ‘Scotland’ is a place of free motion and strongly conveyed emotion. He critiques tyranny through a richly equivocal double vision of a glorious if embattled Scottish past and a free-moving, free-speaking Scottish – and world – future. As a poet, Burns himself rides on through the stormy setting of his later years, joyously traversing and negotiating the distance between Scottish and English, pagan and Calvinist, satiric and visionary points of reference, as he makes his case for the authority of ‘poor bodies’. It is no wonder that Scotland has been so ready to see itself in the idealised and liberated vision he projects.

Further reading


George Gordon Byron was born on 22 January 1788 in London. However, as Byron put it in *Don Juan* (1819–24), he was ‘half a Scot by birth, and bred/A whole one’. His mother was Catherine Gordon, daughter of the twelfth laird of Gight, who proudly claimed descent from James I of Scotland. In 1789, Byron and his mother moved from London to Aberdeen, where they stayed until 1798. They lived first in Queen Street, then Broad Street. Byron attended John Bowers’ school in Long Acre and Aberdeen Grammar School, and took holidays near Braemar in the Dee Valley in sight of Lochnagar and Morven.

These early experiences of Scottish culture, education and landscape have encouraged commentators to argue that their influence dominates Byron’s poetry. Matthew Arnold claimed that Byron exemplified ‘the Titanism of the Celt, his passionate, turbulent, indomitable reaction against the despotism of fact’. T. S. Eliot, referring particularly to Byron’s exposure to Scottish Calvinism, argued that Byron’s Scottish experiences and inheritance ‘provided the material’ for Byron’s ‘peculiar diabolism, his delight in posing as a damned creature’ as well as the ‘evidence for his damnation’. Eliot was also the first to see in Byron’s satirical style the essential qualities of ‘flying’, and to suggest that the Dedicatory Verses to *Don Juan*, for example, are ‘closer in feeling and intention to the satire of Dunbar’ than anything English. More recently, Tom Scott has added that the ‘sentimentality’ and ‘sheer vitality and energy of Byron’s mind, its hard-headed extroversion, its jocularity and satiric edge, and certain sense of the colloquial’, as well as its ‘occasional religiosity’, among other things, are all fundamentally ‘Scottish traits’. Other critics have seen in Byron the fascination with personae and conflicted personalities that is a common feature of post-Union Scottish culture, while, for some, he shows a kind of Caledonian antiszyzygy *avant le mot*.

For these readers, Byron is a Scottish poet. Yet, in 1798, at the age of ten, Byron became the sixth Baron Byron of Rochdale and moved to the Byron family seat, Newstead Abbey, in Nottinghamshire. By the time he was writing *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), having attended Harrow and Cambridge, he had aligned himself with a very English literary tradition and cast himself very much as an English bard. George Bayron Gordon, as his name was entered in the Aberdeen Grammar School register, transformed himself into Lord Byron, English public schoolboy and aristocratic Cambridge undergraduate of Norman lineage.

Byron was still writing as an English poet in *Beppo* (1818), and it is as an English poet that Europe knew and idolised him. It is not enough, then, to call him a Scottish poet. But it is not enough to call him an English one either. As he adopted an English rather than a Scottish identity on moving to England, so he adopted a European identity rather than his English one when he went abroad. *Manfred* (1817) knowingly evokes Goethe’s *Faust*, for instance, while canto IV of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1818) self-consciously rewrites...
Madame de Staël’s influential novel of European national identities, *Corinne* (1807), as it visits sites linked to various Italian writers including Petrarch, Dante, Boccaccio and Alfieri, implicitly affiliating Byron and his work to the Italian literary tradition (whereas, in *Corinne*, it is a Scottish hero who encounters these sites).

Byron moved from being Scottish to being English to being European. But his adoption of each new identity did not overwhelm previous ones so much as overlay them, and very late in Byron’s poetic career both his English and Scottish selves were still repeatedly reasserting themselves, even as his poetry achieved an ever more cosmopolitan scope. The final cantos of *Don Juan* – sometimes called the ‘English cantos’ – demonstrate Byron’s continuing, comfortable familiarity with one particular English world. In the tenth canto of the poem, however, Byron also states (alluding to Macbeth and The Lay of the Last Minstrel) ‘I “scotched, not killed,” the Scotchman in my blood, /And love the land of “mountain and of flood”’. The ‘Scotchman’ and his love of Scotland surface again and again in Byron’s poetry. There is the well-known ‘Lachin y Gair’ from *Hours of Idleness* (1807), which draws on Byron’s childhood holidays in the Dee Valley, as well as the claim in *Don Juan* that “‘Auld Lang Syne’ brings Scotland, one and all, /Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills, and clear streams/The Dee, the Don, Balgounie’s Brig’s black wall” immediately to mind. There is also the famous lyric, ‘So we’ll go no more a-roving’ (1817), which is, in substantial part at least, a translation of a Scots song sometimes said to have been written by James V, as well as Byron’s knowledge of and admiration for Thomson, Beattie, Burns and, most importantly, Scott. And there are passing references such as those in canto III of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1816) to the clan song, ‘Cameron’s gathering’, and to the ‘stirring memory’ of the parts played by Sir Evan Cameron and his descendant, Donald, in the battles of Killiecrankie and Culloden – references that suggest a Scottish bias in Byron’s view of his contemporary world, in this case because he is emphasising the presence of Highlanders on the battlefield of Waterloo. The tenacious hold Scotland had on both Byron’s imagination and sense of himself is still obvious in *The Island* (1823), when the narrator states that, for him, the sight of Mount Ida brought up the memory of ‘Loch-na-gar’ and ‘Celtic memories’ ‘mixed’ ‘with the Phrygian mount/And Highland linns with Castalie’s clear fount’. If Byron is a European poet, he is also an English poet; if he is an English poet, he is also a Scottish one.

His contemporary James Hogg seems to have known this very early on. In a letter to Byron of 30 July 1814, Hogg wrote that he was pleased ‘to find that you are half a Scotsman’ but that he had already ‘weened as much from the nerve and freedom of your verse’. In August of the same year, Hogg encouraged Byron to revisit his ‘native mountains’ and their ‘dark woody glens’. Byron never did.

Byron’s publishing career got properly under way in 1807 with *Hours of Idleness*. This sold reasonably well, and was, on the whole, favourably reviewed. Henry Brougham’s sneering review of the collection in the *Edinburgh Review*, however, produced Byron’s first major work, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. This satire’s attacks on leading literary figures generated resentments that Byron was still dealing with years later – not to mention a challenge to a duel. But it put him on the map.

Byron left for his first European journey later the same year. He returned with cantos I and II of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812), which track his travels and introduce the irredeemably alienated, but highly seductive, ‘Byronic hero’ to the world. Byron famously said of the day that *Childe Harold* I and II were published, ‘I awoke [. . .] and found myself famous’, and with the publication of these two cantos the astonishing pan-European phenomenon of ‘Byronism’ began. In Britain, the first edition sold out in three days and 4,500 copies were sold in six months. In Europe, the cantos were translated into every major language.
Byron consolidated his sudden popularity with the series of ‘Tales’ he published over the next few years – each set in an exotic location and centred on the adventures and emotional suffering of a Byronic hero. The success of these tales was unprecedented: most famously, 10,000 copies of *The Corsair* (1814) were sold in a single day; 25,000 copies within a month. Popular, and populist, as these narratives were, the distinctive hero at their centre was to have a massive impact on European intellectual and political life. In 1816, though, Byron separated from his wife and went into what turned out to be permanent exile, chased by rumours of sodomy and incest and by one of the great moral outrages of the nineteenth century. This permanently fractured his relationship with those readers in Britain who had made *The Corsair* such a success. But it also added to his allure for some readers and Byron knew this. *Manfred*, for instance, shows him playing with the separation scandal, incorporating it into the Titanic suffering of his latest Byronic hero. And, while the scandal damaged Byron’s popularity in Britain, reviewers also noticed a new maturity and sophistication in the work that followed it. Cantos III and IV of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, for example, were enthusiastically received by reviewers – most famously by Walter Scott in the *Quarterly Review*.

After 1816, one of Byron’s primary literary activities was writing plays: historical tragedies – *Marino Faliero* (1821), *The Two Foscari* (1821) and *Sardanapalus* (1821); controversial ‘Satanic’ biblical dramas – *Cain* (1821) and *Heaven and Earth* (1823); the ‘Romantic’ *Manfred* and *Werner* (1822). Since George Steiner’s re-assessment of Byron’s drama in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), Byron has come to be seen as the most important Romantic-period dramatist in Britain and one of the most important in Europe. Byron also continued to write narratives featuring new variants on the Byronic hero – *Mazeppa* (1819) and *The Island*, for example – as well as satires such as *The Vision of Judgement* (1822) and *The Age of Bronze* (1823). But modern critics generally agree that he began to find his most original voice in his first comic work, *Beppo*, while his masterpiece is the comic epic, *Don Juan*.

With the publication of cantos I and II of *Don Juan*, however, Byron lost one sector of his British readership for good. Reviews of the two cantos were extremely hostile to what they saw as Byron’s immoral and impious retelling of the legendary libertine’s early sexual adventures, and the official editions of these cantos sold badly. But Byron’s British readership did not dwindle; it changed. Up to this point, his publisher, John Murray, had pitched the poet’s work at the aristocracy and gentry, producing editions of an appropriate quality and price. But the form in which Byron’s poetry was consumed was shifting; cheap pirated editions of *Don Juan* did well from the outset. When Byron changed publisher in 1822, and instalments of the poem began to appear in a cheaper format, he discovered that he had a new public among the lower middle classes, including shopkeepers and tradesmen. Four volumes of new cantos of *Don Juan* were published after 1822, with 17,000 of the cheapest version produced each time. Taking into consideration the likely circulation of books among Byron’s new readers, it is likely that *Don Juan* found more than half a million readers. Byron outgrew one enormous readership only to discover a much larger one.

Indeed, after his death, his writing found a larger readership again, on the continent. The impact of Byron’s life and work on European culture had already been considerable in his lifetime. His death transformed him into an icon of European Romanticism. Byron died in Missolonghi, Greece, in 1824, poised to enter the struggle for Greek independence from the Turks. From this moment on, he represented a convergence of literature and political action that transformed European ideas of both. ‘Byromania’ swept across Europe. In Germany, Shakespeare is the only British writer to have exerted a comparable hold over the German imagination. In Russia, the leaders of the Decembrist rebellion were all avid
readers – followers almost – of Byron. In Poland, Byron had a very substantial influence indeed on the general tone, mood and, particularly, the patriotism of a generation of Romantic poets. In Spain, Byron’s seemingly unshakeable influence was powerful for the whole of the nineteenth century and beyond.

Many of Byron’s European readers were particularly drawn to his concern with the liberation of oppressed nations and peoples – indeed, with freedom of all kinds, national, political and individual – and to the challenge he posed to accepted religious, philosophical, moral and political orthodoxies, his attempts to undermine the tyrannical hold these so often have on human life. But Byron’s poetry also powerfully depicts some absolute limits to freedom. His speakers, narrators and characters live under the sway of oppressive forces they cannot shake off as well as those they can: guilt, memory, prescriptive gender roles, and predestination, as well as political tyranny, ideology and conventional morality. While Byron famously encouraged both the Spanish and the Greeks to rise up and win their freedom from oppressors, his poetry is littered with figures who seek freedom only to discover implacable counterforces that deny it.

Take some early examples from two of Byron’s ‘Tales’, The Giaour (1813) and The Corsair. The hero of The Giaour is blasted by the loss of his lover so that his existence is a ‘dreary void’. He seeks relief from this void in the memory of his loss, but the memory traps him in intense suffering, which eventually destroys him. The heroine of The Corsair, in love with the hero, frees him from prison and certain death by murdering his enemy. But by doing so, she locks herself into permanent alienation from him by transgressing his rigid sense of gender: her act compromises his own heroic masculinity, while putting her, in his eyes, ‘beneath her sex’. In Byron’s early work, escape from one prison only leads into another.

Later works also display a sense of life as inescapably ‘cabin’d, cribb’d, confined’ (Childe Harold iv). In the later cantos of Childe Harold, the prison is twofold. First, it is history, with its ‘one page’ on which is written the inevitably repeated fate of all civilisations: ‘First Freedom, and then Glory – when that fails, /Wealth, vice, corruption, – barbarism at last’. Second, the prison is our earthly existence itself: though we might occasionally glimpse something beyond mortality, and despite what our imaginations can create and achieve, ‘the weight/Of earth recoils upon us’ and any sense of having transcended our mortality is unavoidably followed by a return to our quotidian, earthly existence. In Marino Faliero, the prison is ideological: Faliero cannot become the revolutionary he aspires to be because he is trapped in the mindset of the aristocratic world he would bring down. In Sardanapalus, the prison is a world order in which nations must be ruled by might, not love: attempts to rule by the latter make the need for the former all the more urgent while threatening to render it ineffectual.

Byron’s response to all this is not stoic resignation. Childe Harold IV responds to the inescapability of history and mortality by insisting on ‘thought – our last and only place/Of refuge’. Beppo responds to the prescriptions and prohibitions of conventional gender roles by highlighting the kind of power women can have, even within those roles, to subvert and take control of male energies. But it is in Manfred that two definitively Byronic responses to the ‘cabin’d, cribb’d, confined’ nature of human existence come into focus: on the one hand, a Promethean defiance of all external authority, and, on the other hand, a complete submission of the self to the immediate life of one’s own being.

Manfred’s Promethean defiance insists, in the face of supernatural spirits, Classical gods, even the ‘Evil principle’ himself, that the ‘mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark, /The lightning’ of his own ‘being, is as bright, /Pervading, and far darting’ as theirs, and ‘shall not yield’ to them, ‘though coop’d in clay’. The claim to equality with all authority and the
refusal to yield to any authority together win a major victory for Manfred, thwarting a supernatural attempt to trick him into a Faustian surrender of his soul.

Submission to one's own being is exemplified in Manfred's death: as he dies, Manfred states that 'tis not so difficult to die', submitting himself to whatever his being throws at him even in this extremity. In Manfred, this attitude is new, surprising and comes too late for Manfred, but Byron makes this kind of passivity in the face of one's being both essential to the very survival of Don Juan as a comic poem and redemptive for Juan himself. Juan's movement forward from previous lovers – and from the pain of separation and loss – to new lovers is made possible not just by his healthy libido but also by his ability to let himself be entirely taken over by the immediate vitality of his own being. Don Juan relies on, and revels in, this ability, offering a comic vision that repeatedly celebrates the abandonment of self to impulse.

Yet the poem is also constantly challenging and problematising its own idealisations. Don Juan is an ongoing dialogue with itself, thematically and generically: it throws profound challenges at its own comic vision in order to test that vision's validity and sustainability, revising and refining its understanding of itself and its concerns as it progresses. Indeed, Byron's texts, including Don Juan, are also in dialogue with each other: key concerns are repeatedly returned to from different angles. At the heart of this dialogue is a work that problematises both Promethean defiance and the notion of abandoning self to impulse. This work is Cain, which insists on the pointlessness of any kind of resistance to at least one authority by focusing on a character who is predestined to commit murder by acting on the angry, violent impulse of a moment. And, while this play is central to Byron's poetic career and thinking, Calvinism is central to the play – the Calvinism that Byron learnt in Scotland.

Further reading

Saturday, 10 December 1825: 39 Castle Street, Edinburgh. The as-yet undeclared 'Author of Waverley' and long-time Clerk to the Court of Session describes in his Journal a cold walk home in the rain which makes him think of 'Tam o’ Shanter'; he reports on two mildly comical letters and one irritating one he hadn’t had patience to answer; then he meditates on the inevitable approach of death, the surety of the Christian afterlife, Muslim ideas of the same, the nature of experience after death and 'the universe with all its endless extent of worlds', before recording his company for dinner and commenting on upwardly mobile surnames. The juxtaposition of ideas in the whole entry is revealing, but especially intriguing is the way in which the self-conscious passage about the afterlife follows on from the vivid description of the irritating correspondent, a stranger who had felt impelled (seven years after the novel's publication) to let Scott know how inferior he thought the fourth volume of The Heart of Midlothian (1818) was to the previous three. To cap his literary admonishment,

The Knave demands of me in a postscript to get back the sword of Sir W. Wallace from England where it was carried from Dunbarton Castle. I am not Mr Genl [General] of the Ordnance that I know. It was wrong however to take away that and Mons Meg. If I go to town this spring I will renew my negotiation with the Great Duke [Wellington] for recovery of Mons Megs [sic].

Even in his years of official anonymity, Walter Scott was a new kind of 'public' writer in the history of Scottish literature. His readers had (and often still have) demanding expectations of him not just as an interpreter of Scotland to an international public but also as a preserver of Scotland's traditions and its historic artefacts. The snapshot of the Journal entry for this one day reveals a writer bound to the cultural history of his country in ways which could be both energising and depleting. The writer had become a spokesman for his country, culturally accountable in a new way. Scott shaped that role, and his reputation ever since has in turn been shaped by it.

Four years after the irritating letter, Scott did ensure the return of Mons Meg from the Tower of London to Edinburgh Castle. He had already recovered the Scots Regalia, found in a chest in the sealed Crown Room of the Castle in 1818. Countless Scottish traditions and tales survive in and by means of his writings, in all genres. The spire of the Scott Monument (George Kemp, 1840–4, with statue by John Steell), which remains the focal point of Princes Street in Edinburgh, mingles characters from Scottish history with characters invented by Scott, as if they had equivalent national significance (which, in Victorian Britain, seems often to have been the case); while, in George Square, Glasgow, John Greenshields's statue of Scott (1837) occupies the place originally designed for George III. Does Scott replace the
Hanoverian monarch or represent him, and what is the relationship between those roles? Scott continued and redirected the preservation of older Scottish culture – ballads, songs, legends, folklore – begun by Ramsay, Ferguson, Macpherson and Burns, as well as the traditions of Enlightenment historiography and social analysis (he was a pupil of Dugald Stewart). He habitually incorporated the past into the present. According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘every old ruin, hill, river or tree called up in his mind a host of historical or biographical associations’; and when, in 1822–5, the main part of Abbotsford, his domestic-baronial house on the Tweed near Galashiels in the Scottish Borders, was built, its porch was copied from Linlithgow Palace and its library ceiling incorporated designs from Roslin Chapel. Scott’s imaginings saturate Scotland and his fame is imprinted on Scottish topography, from ‘Scott’s View’ across the Eildon Hills and Edinburgh’s Waverley station, to the ‘Fair Maid’s House’ (the Grovers’ Hall) in North Port, Perth and Jarlshof in the Shetland Isles (Scott invented this Norse name for settlements of at least Bronze Age origin in his novel The Pirate, 1822).

For readers of his own time, however, ‘Walter Scott’ did not exist in quite the form we now see. Partly because of the high visibility of his successful poems, he published his novels anonymously, maintaining a complex series of narratorial feints and disavowals until, in 1827, financial disaster forced him to acknowledge his identity as the fabled ‘Author of Waverley’. His career is part of the complex negotiation between the private and public worlds of the writer going on throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century. He enjoyed representing himself as a mysterious, faceless figure, the ‘Eidolon’ of the Author, just as his readers enjoyed investing him with quasi-mystical power as the Wizard of the North or the Great Unknown. And in his fictions, too, young men and women learn the impact of public events and ideas on individual personality. They move from private imaginative worlds on to the stage of great public crisis, and then back again, into marriage or death at the end of the fiction. Central characters can be, like the Great Unknown himself, strangely faceless, as if defined only by the ‘true’ relics of Scottish character and story around them. Hence Hazlitt’s limiting praise for Scott as ‘only the amanuensis of truth and history’: only the scribe, never the creative source. The most influential works of the nineteenth century, worldwide, therefore, were always partially concealed, deriving their power from the ‘real’ to which they gave shape. For subsequent and present-day readers in Scotland, likewise, these works can never break free from the culture they created.

Scott combined an impassioned interest in the relics of the Scottish past (aristocratic, religious and popular) with broad reading in a range of European literary and historical forms, from French and Italian romance, Norse sagas and old chronicles and tracts to the German tales and ballads of the 1790s and the delaying, circumlocutory narrative styles of contemporary ‘Gothic’ fiction. In his works, Scotland is part of ancient and interconnecting European narrative and folk traditions, and in turn his versions of the Scottish past inspired libertarian and nationalist movements across Europe. A declared unionist, and politically conservative, Scott consistently resisted moves to narrow and reduce Scottish identity. In 1819 his Malachi Malagrowther pamphlets successfully campaigned for the retention of the Scottish currency; while, in March 1826, he reflected in his Journal:

They are gradually destroying what remains of nationality and making the country tabula rasa for doctrines of bold innovation. Their lowering and grinding down all those peculiarities which distinguished us as Scotsmen will throw the country into a state in which it will be universally turned to democracy and instead of canny Saunders they will have a very dangerous North British neighbourhood.
His association of ‘innovation’ with the erosion of Scottishness is an important key to his works, which have sometimes been too easily accused of neutralising the Scottish past, making it palatable and marketable. He was in fact acutely conscious of his own role in interpreting Scotland; and one of his most enduring figures, in benevolent, comic and sinister guises, is the figure of the storyspinning mage, the keeper or would-be keeper of ancient and sacred documents and books. In an age of revolution, he described the rebellions and revolts of the past, restoring order only by self-consciously fictitious sleights of hand. Conceptually sophisticated even, or especially, when presenting his works as workaday performances, he developed a form of historical fiction in which individual storylines, whether comic or tragic in resolution, are always emptied of final significance by the passage of time.

Scott’s own roots were in Edinburgh and the Borders. Born in Edinburgh and throughout his professional life a successful lawyer there as well as Sheriff of Selkirkshire, he spent much of his childhood at the home of his paternal grandfather, Sandy-Knowe Farm near Smailholm Tower in Roxburghshire, the area associated with the legendary medieval poet Thomas of Ercildoune, ‘the Rhymer’. Upon his marriage in 1797 he bought 39 Castle Street, at that time on the western edge of Edinburgh’s developing New Town: the years of his greatest success also saw the construction of some of the New Town’s great public buildings, such as the Edinburgh Academy (opened in 1824) and the Royal Institution (1826). While his four children were growing up he leased Ashestiel House near Galashiels before buying in 1811 the farm which later formed the basis of the Abbotsford estate. He was made a baronet in 1820, the first creation of George IV’s reign. For many years he was a partner in the printing firm of James Ballantyne and Company, the collapse of which in 1826 left him personally liable for debts of about £120,000. His burial in the ruins of Dryburgh Abbey lastingly incorporated him to the remains of Scotland’s ancient institutions: for visitors from 1832 on, he has been an integral part of that romantic past.

Even in Thomas Carlyle’s ambivalent evaluation (in his 1838 review of the first six volumes of Lockhart’s biography) Scott opened up ‘a new-discovered continent in Literature’; his works include poems, novels, collections of ballads, plays, reviews of contemporary European writers, political commentaries, editions, histories. Hazlitt thought them ‘almost like a new edition of human nature’. Because of his renown as a poet and novelist, many works which would be another writer’s claim to fame are now rarely read, but the four series of his Tales of a Grandfather (1828–31) constitute an important contribution to children’s literature; his Life of Napoleon (1827) is one of the most ambitious political biographies of the early nineteenth century; his editions of Dryden and Swift are significant; his edition of the medieval romance Sir Tristrem (which he claimed for Scotland and for Thomas of Ercildoune) set new standards for editing and interpreting older texts and was only a small part of his major contribution to the antiquarian and bibliographic explosion of the beginning of the nineteenth century; and among a mass of critical writing he wrote authoritative essays on chivalry, romance and drama for the Encyclopaedia Britannica and key early reviews of Mary Shelley, Jane Austen and E. T. A. Hoffmann. He was a prolific and captivating letter-writer: the Millgate Union Catalogue, available online through the website of the National Library of Scotland (www.nls.uk/scott), is the most up-to-date listing of extant correspondence. His five plays reflect a life-long interest in the stage: a keen theatre-goer, he encouraged Scottish drama in particular, was a shareholder in and an acting trustee of the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, and worked devotedly on the Edinburgh productions of Joanna Baillie’s plays. Each of his plays comes from a distinct literary or historical tradition: The House of Aspen (1799, published 1829), a tale of the Germanic Secret Tribunal, is an adaptation of
one of Veit Weber’s prose Sagen der Vorzeit, Der heilige Vehme; The Doom of Devorgoil (1817–18, published 1830) is a melodrama with extravagant stage effects, in the mode of popular Gothic drama; Haldon Hill (1822) and MacDuff’s Cross (1823) are patriotic historical sketches; Auchindrane: or, the Ayrshire Tragedy (1830) is a psychological drama inspired by a manuscript account of a seventeenth-century trial. Stage adaptations of Scott’s poems and novels, many the work of his friend Daniel Terry, were, as Barbara Bell discusses in Chapter 25, numerous, hugely popular, and an important factor in the revival of the Scottish theatre in the 1820s.

In fact, Scott nearly made his first major appearance on the literary scene as a dramatist: The House of Aspen was rejected by John Philip Kemble at Drury Lane only after some tentative rehearsals in 1800. Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (3 volumes, 1802–3), which builds on ballads collected with the help of William Laidlaw and James Hogg, seems only in retrospect a ‘natural’ start to his career, and emerged from a lively entanglement of diverse literary enthusiasms in the 1790s. His earliest published poems were imitations and adaptations of German ballads by Gottfried Bürger (‘William and Helen’ and ‘The Wild Huntsman’, 1796); and he continued to work in the Germanic tradition with ‘The Fire-King’, ‘Frederick and Alice’ (1801) and with later works such as ‘The Battle of Sempach’ (1818) and ‘The Noble Moringer’ (1819). Scott’s shorter poems covered the entire spectrum of contemporary taste, from the unfinished fragment-ballad ‘The Gray Brother’ to battle-hymns, love poems, contributions to anthologies such as Albyn’s Anthology (1816), sentimental Gaelic, mock-Orientalism (as in the extended skit ‘The Search after Happiness; or, The Quest of Sultaun Solimaun’, 1817) and the patriotic military subscription-poems The Vision of Don Roderick (1811) and The Field of Waterloo (1815).

Scott’s longer narrative poems – the first three, especially, praised for their originality by contemporary reviewers – sought to re-create for modern readers the experience of older extempore oral verse while maintaining, as Hazlitt commented in 1818, ‘a modern air in the midst of the antiquarian research . . . [offering] history or tradition in masquerade’. The appropriation of the minstrel style accompanied two other significant aspects of the poetry: dialogic form and the quest for authenticity, both of artistic manner and of society’s true heirs. Eighteenth-century Scots works, James Beattie’s Minstrel in particular, had prepared for this style and this preoccupation. The ‘Preface’ to The Lay of the Last Minstrel initiates Scott’s career-long disavowals of ‘combined and regular narrative’ and ‘the dignity of a regular Poem’. He liked literary forms that offered ‘latitude’, and claimed ‘Ancient Metrical Romance’ as his model (though in fact parts of the poem imitated Coleridge’s as-yet-unpublished ‘Christabel’). Right from the start of his literary career, Scott focused on the relationship between the artist and his audience, tracing all the insecurities and bravado of the old minstrel’s performance; and emphasised the artist’s complex role as partly original, partly dependent on old stories and old formulations. In the Lay, also, the minstrel’s flexible imitation of folk memory is contrasted with the dangerous finality of the book of the magician Michael Scott, recovered from his tomb in Melrose Abbey. Poetic form is further fractured in Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field (1808), in which wintry, meditative, verse epistles to friends preface the six cantos. The epistles mix personal address and reminiscence with enthusiasms for romance and tales of chivalry, reflections on the position of the artist, the importance of imaginative freedom: they speak of an art out of joint with its own times even as it asserts its nationalistic loyalties; of art as refuge and escape; and of the ‘idleness’ of modern minstrelsy. The burden of loss in the epistles breaks up the narrative. Again the plot of Marmion – based on a forgery – has literary implications, and again delving into the past involves confronting the tomb. The claustrophobic images of the live burial of Constance
in Canto Two mark this as a much darker romance; while at the court of James IV at Holyrood the delusive enchantments of art are suggested by the treacherous Lady Heron’s song of ‘Lochmowr’ (often read out of context: it concocts a tempting blend of erotic and military daring to draw James recklessly to war). A heightened self-consciousness about the forms and functions of art also informs the representation of the ‘wilder minstrelsy’ of the Highlands in *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), of North Yorkshire, with its emasculated poet Wilfrid, in *Rokeby* (1813), and of the struggles of Robert Bruce in *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), and governs Scott’s only tale of King Arthur’s court, the anonymously published *Bridal of Triermain* (1813) and the meditative frame of *Harold the Dauntless* (1817), with its reflections on how ‘the Romancer’s tale becomes the reader’s dream’: a tale of early Christian north-east England ‘to cheat the time, a powerful spell’.

The move (never absolute) from poetry to novels in 1814 is one of the patterns which have been imposed retrospectively to shape Scott’s career into ‘preparation’ and ‘achievement’. In line with the elaborate opening-plays and ‘huddled’ endings of individual works, Scott’s writing life has seemed laborious in anticipation, brief in true worth, and lame in conclusion. In the novels, however, poetry continues to play an important part, whether in the invented mottoes to chapters, or in exchanges in verse or song (as in *The Pirate*, which features dialogue in verse between Norna and Claud Halcro, Norna and Minna), or in songs given to individual characters, the best of which are those sung by peasant, outcast or psychologically damaged characters such as Davie Gellatley in *Waverley*, Elspeth Mucklebackit in *The Antiquary* and Madge Wildfire in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. Scott’s lyric gifts are sometimes clearer here, and in imitated forms put in the mouths of morally or sociably dubious characters – such as the Glee Maiden’s ‘Lay of Poor Louise’ in *The Fair Maid of Perth* – than in his independently published poems. The extensive use of verse in *The Monastery*, in which the White Lady converses in song with the Glendinning brothers and Mary Avenel, is particularly revealing of the interconnections in form between some of his most experimental writing and the dialogic form of his narrative poems. The frame narratives of his novels, meanwhile, enter into dialogue with the fictions they enclose, especially in ironically antiquarian conclusions. The plot of *Redgauntlet* (1824) concludes with an optimistic sharing of the values of romance and common sense between the two heroes, Darsie and Alan, but the final words of the novel come in a postscript, in which an imaginary antiquarian writes to the novel’s imaginary narrator to inform him that he has been unable to discover much about the future fortunes of either man. The two heroes are lost in the narrative present, and instead the novel concludes with an image of the defeated enthusiast, Hugh Redgauntlet, drawing out his life in a French monastery. The benevolent restoration is contextualised; the defeat, not the victory, remains. In all Scott’s fictions, an ostensibly, often officiously moderating narratorial voice makes fanatical discourse of all kinds seem alien, but this moderating voice is always undermined by patterns of imagery, intricate alliances between unexpected parts of the plot, and by disconcertingly casual, distancing conclusions. The tale always says more than the teller.

Like the *Journal* entry with which this chapter began, Scott’s novels are marked by instabilities and idiosyncratic associations of ideas, by tonal and ideological difference. They are not the triumphal familial entity the Scott Monument makes them seem, although Scott began the trend towards synchronicity by reissuing them in collections, first, in the 1820s, as *Novels and Tales, Tales and Romances*, and then in the collected edition known as the ‘Magnum Opus’ (1829–32). Although they became the dominant language of fiction for the rest of the nineteenth century – the language which Scottish writers, in particular, struggled against and within – they were never a natural language,
but one which readers learned. Readers accumulated ways of thinking, metaphors, mannerisms, familiar places and characters who emerged in later fictions (by Scott and others), in music, theatre, paintings and luxurious collections of illustrations (the most sumptuous being those of different ‘sets’ of Scott heroines). The novels were always controversial, especially in Scotland: Thomas McCrie’s indictment of the representation of the Covenanters in *The Tale of Old Mortality* (1816) precisely anticipated twentieth- and twenty-first-century unease about the extent to which Scott made Scotland’s past conform to his Episcopalian conservative unionist convictions. They were not universally or equally popular, and their critical fortunes have remained unstable. Victorian Britain was shaped by Scott the medievalist, while the ante-Bellum American South, according to Mark Twain, fell fatally in love with ideals of chivalry. European writers rewrote Scott’s fictions of national identity and the decline of the aristocracy, championing not only the Scottish novels but also works such as *Quentin Durward*, *The Talisman* and *Anne of Geierstein*, all set outside Scotland. In the twentieth century, preference swung back to the Scottish novels, especially the earlier ones. In point of style or force of scene and imagery, however, it is as difficult now as it ever was to contain and commodify Scott’s ‘true’ subject.

Key ideas carry over from the poetry: an interest in narrative art as performance and in tales as written, disputed, texts and relics; an anxious polarisation of passive and active male figures, often (respectively) sons and fathers; a steady awareness that land outlives human endeavour; and, amid all the precisely evoked contexts of family, social group and historical moment, a fundamentally interior conception of human nature. Scott’s central characters stand always slightly apart from the group, defined by it in ways which the endings of the novels invariably show to be misjudged, partial, or sentimental. These ideas developed, and changed, over the course of his career as a novelist, and they interacted along the way with the controversial ideas he encountered and the new literary works he read. For example, the strange undercurrents in the medical world of 1820s Edinburgh – which culminated in the trial of the murderers Burke and Hare late in 1828 – contributed to the sinister portrait of the mediciner Henbane Dwining in *The Fair Maid of Perth* (published early in 1828). Scott attended Burke’s execution, and the cry ‘Burke [smother] Sir Walter!’, shouted at him by an angry crowd during the 1831 Jedburgh election, reportedly haunted his thoughts during his last illness.

Like his Romantic-period contemporaries Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth and De Quincey, Scott envisaged systematic and encyclopedic modes of writing, which, in practice, fragmented. In the ‘Advertisement’ to *The Antiquary* (1816), he claimed that his three novels had been conceived as a sequence exploring Scotland geographically, historically and socially. Similarly, the four volumes of *Tales of My Landlord*, first series, were intended to comprise four tales of different regions: Borders, Highlands, Fife and the west. The frame narratives, prefaces and explanatory notes of his fictions further the fantasy of system, but in practice he was a restless rather than a systematic or formulaic writer, never focused unless he had several projects on the go at once.

In the novels of the 1820s, he can be seen obsessively re-examining moral and historical problems raised in and by his earlier acclaimed works. Forms of artifice are highlighted as characters step forward from paintings and tapestries or are mistaken for statues; they take part in plays, masquerades, symbolic dances and pageants. As a result, fictional protagonists and readers alike are confronted by a partially reanimated past which is always at least half aesthetic or picturesque. Both are spectators, who find their safe one-way relationship with the spectacle before them increasingly challenged as they are made aware of their own complicity in the interpretation and representation of the past. And they are
equally given the opportunity to forget this insight in the comfortable restorations of the story's end. As his career developed, Scott's writing shows more anxiety about the role of the popular artist, the motivation of his audience and the complicity of art in the extinction or relegation of aspects of the past it seemed to preserve. These anxieties are woven into the topics and structures of his fiction, most insistently from Kenilworth (1821) on. In St Ronan's Well (1823), for example, the absence of a stable standard of judgement, more than usually noticeable in Scott's narratorial commentary, makes the presentation of modern manners unsettling and sinister. The plot is always about to be absorbed into something else – a play by Thomas Otway, or A Midsummer Night's Dream, or an episode in Matthew Lewis's Gothic novel The Monk. As if to highlight this potential for absorption, a masquerade at Shaws-Castle is thematically and structurally central (Chapter 7, of thirteen, in the second of three volumes) – and a particularly passive form of masquerade, a series of tableaux vivants which Scott calls 'playing a picture'. Unlike the play-acting scenes in Austen's Mansfield Park, these episodes show people performing parts emptied of meaning, and provide a devastatingly undermining analogy both for the form of the writing and the nature of modern social interaction. St Ronan's Well questions the reassuring conventions of the novel of manners (a form which, with characteristic self-deprecation, Scott's 'Magnum Opus' introduction to this novel says he had 'failed' to master). Even darker are The Fair Maid of Perth (1828), the greatest of his later novels, and its immediate successor Anne of Geierstein (1829), in which Scott valorises the burgher class in a context of weak kingship and degenerate chivalric codes. His reflections on the grounds of civil liberty and political representation, in these fraught years preceding the 1832 Reform Act, refute polemically simplified notions of his attachment to aristocratic privilege.

Events in Scott's life, most of all his financial ruin in 1825–6, have been used to explain the change in his fiction – the decline, as it has been made to seem, of a populariser obsessively writing for money. But Scott had always written for money, had always been obsessive and had always been uneven. He changed the nature (not just the subject) of his fiction not in 1826, but with his first novel set outside Scotland, Ivanhoe, in 1819. What really changed over the course of his career was the redefinition of fiction provided by the Waverley novels themselves. The fictions became darker as the nature of a new reading public's reaction to fiction became clearer to Scott, and as he sensed the new order of fiction and of society in which his private world of 'castle-building' was caught up. Just as his contemporaries did, modern readers must learn the fictional language in which Scott expressed these ideas, for there is no decisive corroborating evidence about them – no Lawrentian essay on 'Why the Novel Matters' or on the role of the artist in the modern world, no extended self-exploration even in the Journal. The evidence for Scott's complex views lies in the novels' increasingly sinister images of the adept-artist-mage; his exposure, his violent death. Carlyle, as so often, crystallised the Victorian understanding of Scott when he represented him as a 'healthy' imagination in a time of cultural sickness – though healthy to no moral effect since he was 'unconscious of an aim in speaking'. Scott was an icon and a problem for all the Scottish writers who followed him, but it would be Robert Louis Stevenson who developed most keenly the ideas and images of his novels, in exile.

Further reading


Law Books, 1707–1918

John W. Cairns

Law books constitute an uneasy, complex genre. Usually commentaries explaining or criticising the law, they can have distinct authority as representing the law, rather in the way the Bible is authority for theologians. They can be the professional literature of lawyers, including student works, not readily understood by outsiders, or even technical works aimed at a lay profession that operates within a highly regulated framework. They can even be aimed at the general public, such as James Lorimer’s *A Hand-book of the Law of Scotland* (1859), a popular Victorian work. Also, those building blocks of the law, statutes and decisions in lawsuits (precedent) need to be considered.

Between 1707 and 1918, the Scottish law library grew from a rather small to a relatively large size, reflecting the expansion of the legal profession. The intellectual history of Scots law and the history of legal practice also qualitatively changed the nature of the Scottish law library over the same period. In 1707, legal practice in Scotland (conforming to general European fashion) gave a significant place to Roman law (in the authoritative collection made on the authority of the Emperor Justinian (ad 527–65), known as the *Corpus iuris civilis*, or body of the Civil law) in constructing arguments about what the law was or how a court should decide specific litigation. This was because, in the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance, the lawyers (then developing as a secular legal profession) had automatically accepted the authority of the Roman law and Canon law (collectively known as the *utrumque ius*) in litigation. In the later sixteenth century, Scots came to view law as deriving its authority from a sovereign; but Roman law continued to be viewed as universal superior law. This is important, because otherwise Scotland might seem to have been very deficient in legal literature. Instead, Scots regarded the literature of this universal law (sometimes referred to as the *ius commune*) as having immediate practical relevance. Thus, Sir George Mackenzie (1638?–1691), a major author on Scots law, was of the view that, in deciding points of difficulty, it was best to rely on the opinions of writers of the *ius commune*, interpreting the texts of the Roman and (to a lesser extent) Canon laws. This reliance on the Roman and Canon laws and their commentators explains the extensive collection of such literature made by individual Scots lawyers (often acquired during foreign study) and the Faculty of Advocates in the early modern period. Lack of this learning is what Bartoline Saddletree regrets when he wishes his father had sent him to study in Leiden or Utrecht, in Walter Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818).

Development in the early seventeenth century of justification of the use of Roman law by reference to the authority of natural law prompted re-evaluation of its role; concern with sovereignty and political authority prompted greater concern with Scottish legal materials. Prior to the Union, this promoted publication of works in which ‘native’ material and Roman material were blended, rationalised and validated by the law of nature. The most
important was the intricate and complex *Institutions of the Law of Scotland Deduced from its Originals, and collated with the Civil, Canon and Feudal Laws, and with the Customs of Neighbouring Nations* (1681) written by James Dalrymple, Viscount Stair (1619–95) in splendid seventeenth-century English. One may also point to the numerous publications of Sir George Mackenzie that traditionally emphasised Civil law as *ius commune*. Such works, manifestations of the ‘Roman-Scots’ law, set the tone for publications during the first decades of the Union so that law books, such as those written for the developing university discipline of Scots law by Alexander Bayne (1685?–1737) and William Forbes (1668?–1745), reflected a continuing attitude in which the *ius commune* was the normal source of rules except where Scots law had provided otherwise. Likewise, the excellent (1732) edition of the *Jus feudale* of Thomas Craig (1538–1608) by James Baillie (1672–1744) had an elaborate apparatus placing the original text in the framework of the Civil and Canon laws. This said, from 1707, the laws of nature and nations were starting to dominate Scottish legal thinking, appearing in the written and printed court pleadings, with a Chair of Public Law and the Law of Nature and Nations in Edinburgh inaugurating modern legal education. As universal higher law, natural law validated Scots law.

Stair accepted the widespread view that the custom of the Court of Session (the highest Scottish Civil Court) was the best source of new rules of law. In the first half of the eighteenth century, however, publication of the Court’s decisions remained erratic. The relative inactivity of the Westminster Parliament in reforming Scots law, however, together with the development of moral-sense theory (expounded in works such as the *Principles of Equity*, of Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782), first published in 1760) reinforced focus on the decisions of the courts as making law and, by the middle of the century, both private enterprise and the efforts of the Faculty of Advocates brought results. Kames, advocate and then judge, prominent among the Edinburgh *literati*, produced various collections including *Decisions of the Court of Session, [... ] in Form of a Dictionary* (1741); from 1752 onwards, the set generally known as the *Faculty Collection* appeared with reasonable regularity. Notable in the development of better reports of decisions was the work of Robert Bell (?–1816), who tried systematically in the 1790s to preserve the opinions of the judges, now viewed as important in determining the point of law.

Though a new edition of Stair’s *Institutions* was published in 1759 by John Gordon (1715–75) and William Johnstone (1729–1805), the ageing nature of this synthesis stimulated three major publications in the middle years of the century. The first was *An Institute of the Laws of Scotland in Civil Rights: With Observations upon the Agreement or Diversity Between them and the Laws of England*. In Four Books. *After the General Method of the Viscount of Stair’s Institutions* (1751–3) by Andrew McDouall, Lord Bankton (1685–1760). John Erskine (1695–1768), Professor of Scots Law in the University of Edinburgh, published *Principles of the Law of Scotland: In the Order of Sir George Mackenzie’s Institutions of that Law* (1754). A student textbook, this supplanted the work of Mackenzie that had been several times reprinted during the previous fifty years; it achieved many editions (the last in 1911) developing beyond a mere teaching work. Erskine and Bankton expounded Scots law in a rationalist natural-law framework; with the former’s posthumously published *Institute of the Law of Scotland. In Four Books. In the Order of Sir George Mackenzie’s Institutions of that Law* (1773), these works were the last attempts to give a comprehensive statement of Scots law in this way. Erskine’s *Institute* was another very successful work, with new editions until 1871: it entertained the minister Blattergowl in Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816).

Increasingly valued as syntheses of case law, such comprehensive works did not yet spawn many specialised treatises. Collections of styles, that is guides to drafting legal documents,
such as those of George Dallas (1635–1701), were always important, as were practical guides for notaries and justices of the peace; but treatises such as that of John Millar, Jr (1760–96), *Elements of the Law Relating to Insurances* (Edinburgh, 1787) remained rare. Two notable works, founded on a profound study of the decisions of the High Court of Justiciary, were the *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland Respecting the Description and Punishment of Crimes* (1797) and *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland Respecting the Trial of Crimes* (1800) by David Hume (1757–1838), Professor of Scots Law in the University of Edinburgh. Combined, these went through a number of editions under the title, *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland, Respecting the Description and Punishment of Crimes*. While treatises on criminal law were also written by John Burnett (1764?–1810) and Sir Archibald Alison (1792–1867), it was Hume’s work that gained lasting authority. The importance of Scottish electoral law led to several works (notably by Alexander Wight (?–1793) in 1773 and 1774). Its complexity allowed the creation of the faggot votes by Gilbert Glossin and the older Bertram in Scott’s *Guy Mannering* (1815).

Post-Union, Scottish law books demonstrated increasing interest in English law. William Forbes took English law into account in preparing the 1718 edition of *Methodical Treatise Concerning Bills of Exchange* [. . .] According to the Analogy of the Scots Law (1703). Bankton did likewise in his *Institute*. If this primarily reflected intellectual interest, some viewed assimilation of Scots and English law as a means of perfecting the Union. Further, imperial Britain operated by English law; merchants trading to the West Indies, North America or England needed documents acceptable in English courts, a need met by James McKay’s publication (in Glasgow) of *System of English Conveyancing Adapted to Scotland* in 1789.

Between 1800 and 1830 the Scottish courts were dramatically reformed. The old unitary Court of Session was split into two divisions in 1808. Investigation of the forms of process led to the introduction of civil jury trial and an Outer House, which became a permanent court of first instance, with the two divisions of the Inner House becoming appellate courts. Streamlining of process also led to an emphasis on oral rather than written pleading. There were also major reforms in other courts, rationalising structures and expanding the jurisdiction of that of the Sheriff, the most important lower regional court. This was dramatic change in a short period and Walter Scott was not alone in his view that ‘little by little, whatever your wishes may be you will destroy and undermine, until nothing of what makes Scotland Scotland shall remain’. These changes coincided with a tremendous expansion in the number of lawyers in Scotland. Between the mid-1790s and 1832, membership of the Faculty of Advocates more than doubled, while that of the Society of Writers to the Signet nearly tripled. Similar patterns can be shown for other societies of lawyers. This put tremendous strain on the Scottish legal system.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Scots lawyers no longer understood Scots law within the framework of the law of nature and nations, but rather as a system complete in itself, generating its own rules through analysis of precedent and, where necessary, statute. (Desire for clearer precedent had been a factor in remodelling the Scottish courts and forms of process.) Throughout Europe, especially after the era of Napoleon, law became more national, as states adopted civil codes, the older *ius commune* being forgotten.

This had a significant impact on Scottish legal literature. Thus there was, from the 1790s, regular publication of the Acts of Sederunt of the Court, while treatises and practical guides (such as those of James Ivory (1792–1866)) aided practitioners with the new court structures and procedures. In particular, the innovation of juries in civil cases created demand for guidance in the fast-developing law of evidence, with treatises by James Glassford (1771–1845) and George Tait (1784?–1865) in the early 1820s.
Powerful and rapid development of the Scottish economy led to works on commercial law, of which the two-volume *Commentaries on the Municipal and Mercantile Law of Scotland considered in relation to the Subject of Bankruptcy*, published in 1804 by G. J. Bell (1770–1843) is only the most notable. By 1810, Bell (who later succeeded to Hume’s chair in Edinburgh) had elaborated his work into a more general treatise that went through many editions. In the early nineteenth century, the economy being still primarily agricultural, treatise writers necessarily catered for the needs of lawyers dealing with the landed classes, who still dominated social and political life.

The squandering of the nation’s inherited wealth through the luxurious pursuits of the landed classes was a theme of Enlightenment writing and the Scottish landed classes often entailed their land, as Scott did Abbotsford, to protect it from the borrowing of improvident heirs. Entails, viewed as deterring progress by tying up capital and discouraging investment in improving land, were controversial: the idea of an ancestor controlling the descent of his property for generations was seen as contradicting the ideal of ownership. John Galt’s most powerful novel, a generational saga entitled *The Entail or the Lairds of Grippy* (1822), dramatised the problems of familial degeneration and paralysis under entail, making it a symbol of the plight of Scotland in the grip of a powerful legal system. Through the century, a series of statutes destroyed the power of entails, with legal writing duly reflecting on the changes.

In 1829, G. J. Bell published *Principles of the Law of Scotland for the Use of Students in the University of Edinburgh*; to accompany it, he published *Illustrations from Adjudged Cases, of the Principles of the Law of Scotland* (1836–8) for the assistance of his students. This teaching text, which continued to be republished until the end of the century, updated, developed into a work of authority, expanded far beyond its original scope, reflecting the developing focus on case-law and interest in English authority, with a modern emphasis on obligations and property over the traditional institutional scheme copied from Justinian. Bell’s brother Robert was a prolific author, many of his works reflecting his experience in forms of deeds and as Lecturer in Conveyancing to the Society of Writers to the Signet, including the first treatise in Scotland (which went through many editions) on the law of lease. His *Dictionary of the Law of Scotland* (1807–8), with subsequent editions, became a standard reference work.

Particular controversies often spawned a relatively extensive literature, not always ephemeral in nature. One such, in the early nineteenth century, was provoked by the incompatibility of the Scottish and English laws on marriage, divorce and legitimation of children (the very stuff of novels such as *Saint Ronan’s Well*). Thus, James Fergusson (1769–1842), Commissary of Edinburgh, wrote a number of relevant works, while the importance of the topic led Patrick (Lord) Fraser (1817–89) to publish his two-volume *A Treatise on the Law of Scotland as Applicable to the Personal and Domestic Relationships: Comprising Husband and Wife, Parent and Child, Guardian and Ward, Master and Servant, and Master and Apprentice* in 1846. Reflecting the traditional, Roman institutional scheme, this monumental work was developed into three separate treatises. Likewise, the wealth of publishing on parish matters, church courts, teinds and the legal structures of the Church not only reflected their continuing importance, especially for members of the established Church and landowners, but also the revived evangelicalism of the Victorian age and its controversies as the Church moved towards the Disruption of 1843. Later in the century, hotly contested agricultural reform led to various Agricultural Holdings Acts and Crofting legislation. Literature duly followed.

Huge effort now went into ensuring regular and frequent publication of law reports. From the 1820s, there was regular annual reporting of the decisions of the Court of Session,
High Court of Justiciary and Scottish appeals to the House of Lords. Older cases were collected together from manuscripts and older reports by W. M. Morison (1715–1821) in his multi-volume *Decisions of the Court of Session from its Institution until the Separation of the Court into Two Divisions in the Year 1808, Digested under Proper Heads in the Form of a Dictionary* (1811). This soon attracted indexes, synopses and continuations as well as other supplementary volumes and material, making access to the older jurisprudence of the Court of Session much easier.

Along with statutes and precedents, the developing category of ‘institutional writings’ was now considered to be the third main formal source of Scots law. These were works held to have particular value in providing a foundational statement of law, thus having authority in court. The institutional work *par excellence* was Stair’s *Institutions*, but it was soon joined by Erskine’s works and eventually by those of G. J. Bell and David Hume’s treatise on criminal law. Institutional works helped give some anchorage to a legal system that had left its moorings in the *ius commune* and had rejected its location in a framework of the law of nature and nations, and in which law tended to be viewed in increasingly formal terms, divorced from ethical considerations. The institutional writers’ articulation of basic principles became especially important, as Scots lawyers often used English cases in presenting their account of Scots law.

These developments set the tone for the rest of the nineteenth century. Further reform led to the simple and clearly defined structure of Sheriff Court, Court of Session and High Court of Justiciary. In 1850, statute forbade written pleading in the Court of Session, already discouraged. Major reform in 1887 created modern criminal procedure. The general nineteenth-century view was that law was essentially positivist and national, which, for Scots law, meant that it was to be found in Scottish cases and statutes and Westminster statutes applicable to Scotland. Further, the imperial parliament and the House of Lords had an impact on Scots law, moving it in the direction of English law.

The most obvious feature of law publishing in the hundred years or so running up to the First World War is its sheer volume, reflecting the wealth and complexity of Scottish industrial society. As well as regular publishing of the general run of case reports of the major courts, along with digests, indexes and handbooks to assist finding the law in them, few important statutes failed to acquire a manual or handbook or to provoke a commentary. Specialised series and publications – outwith traditional disciplinary categories – were produced to service the differing and growing demands on the legal profession. Notable examples are Francis Deas’ (1839–74) *Law of Railways Applicable to Scotland* (1873) and James Ferguson’s (1857–1917) collections of railway cases and statutes. Industrial development is also reflected in treatises on workmen’s compensation and reparation for injury.

Scots lawyers also had to cope with the reform and tremendous expansion of the responsibilities of local government within the Victorian state. Representative county councils were created in 1889, while the Burgh Police Acts allowed the creation of more effective municipalities. This engendered a considerable amount of very specialised publications on local government, sanitary laws and public health.

Rapid change demanded efficient communication. The nineteenth century was the age of the development of the legal periodical. Most intellectually important were the *Journal of Jurisprudence* (1857–91) and the *Juridical Review*, started in 1889; many others, from the *Scottish Jurist* (1829–73), the *Edinburgh Law Journal* (1831–32), to the *Law Chronicle: Or, Journal of Jurisprudence and Legislation* (1829–33) attempted to provide Scots lawyers with accurate, current information on the law in what was obviously a tough market.
Germany dominated nineteenth-century legal scholarship. Many Scots were impressed by the German Historical School of Law, which emphasised a historical approach to Roman law and the German legal sources that chimed with historical interests inherited from the Scottish Enlightenment, in works such as Kames's *Historical Law Tracts* (1758). This reinforced the historical and antiquarian interests that produced the Record edition of the *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland* (1814–75), James Reddie's (1775–1852) *Historical View of the Law of Maritime Commerce* (1841) and *Inquiries, Elementary and Historical in the Science of Law* (1840), Cosmo Innes's (1798–1874) *Lectures on Scotch Legal Antiquities* (1872), and George Neilson's (1858–1923) *Trial by Battle* (1890). Notable are the works edited by the various historical clubs. The same historical impulse led Scott, a practising lawyer, to create plots that turn on legal and historical dilemmas (*The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), *Redgauntlet* (1824) and *The Heart of Midlothian* are all examples). This last in particular generated interest in its legal and historical content, leading Scott's friend, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (1781–1851), to publish *Criminal Trials Illustrative of the Heart of Midlothian, with a Notice of the Life of Captain John Porteous* (1818). The same concern with the legal past and the gossip retailed by Henry, Lord Cockburn in *Memorials of his Time* (1856) allowed R. L. Stevenson, an advocate who had studied law at Edinburgh, to derive the material that went into *Weir of Hermiston*.

The quite extraordinary development of the study of Roman law in Germany also influenced Scots. An Edinburgh professor, James Muirhead (1830–89), educated in Edinburgh and Heidelberg, drew on his profound knowledge of the continental literature in writing his *Historical Introduction to the Private Law of Rome* (1886) and producing his edition with translations of *The Institutes of Gaius and Rules of Ulpian* (1880).

German legal philosophy, in particular the *Naturrecht* of K. C. F. Krause (1781–1832), influenced the important publications on legal theory and international law of James Lorimer (1818–90), Professor at the University of Edinburgh, educated in Edinburgh, Geneva, Bonn and Berlin. In Germany, the logical exposition of the Roman texts that created the *Pandektenrecht*, a Roman law systematised for modern practice, as well as debates over codification also impressed the Scots. Thus, concerns with codification led to a number of Scottish pamphlets influenced by the German experience. Scots, like the Germans, operated in a legally plural state where conflicts of law were always an issue and they translated the leading German works on private international law.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which such intellectual trends influenced more general writing on Scots law. The work of J. G. Smith (1831–95), however, who had studied in Germany, shows interest in both *Pandektenrecht* and *Naturrecht*. Such influence is also evident in the work of Sir John Rankine (1846–1922), an Edinburgh professor partly educated in Germany. His *Law of Land-ownership in Scotland* (1879) reflects German *Pandektenrecht*, relying on Roman law and modern European scholarship with references to the famous treatise of Savigny, in its initial discussion of the concept of possession, while citing the work of his teacher at Heidelberg, K. A. von Vangerow (1808–70).

There was no new work attempting the comprehensive scope of the works of Stair, Erskine and Bell, though these continued in new editions. The foundational status and authority now given to these ‘institutional writers’ probably precluded an attempt to emulate them. Further, the fast-moving development of the law must have prevented such a work from being viable. Instead, authors, such as Lord Fraser and John (Lord) McLaren (1831–1910), produced heroically proportioned treatises on specific areas of the law, synthesising and directing, not always elegantly, the rapidly developing case-law. Furthermore, the greatly increased size of the legal profession, enlarging the market for law books,
supported by the rapid development of the Scottish publishing industry, permitted authors to provide treatises on trusts, joint stock corporations, commercial law and reparations, as well as older staples of conveyancing, land law, rights in security, and procedure.

The century to 1914 produced an especially rich legal literature, the like of which would not really be matched again in Scotland until towards the end of the twentieth century. Many of the works were classics, still occasionally consulted, such as W. M. Gloag (1865–1934), *Law of Contract: A Treatise on the Principles of Contract in the Law of Scotland* (1914). The wealth of writing reflects the prosperity of a confident legal culture, participating in imperial Britain, conscious of its past, but reflecting the attempts of the contemporary society to grapple with its social problems. It was a legal culture to be dramatically disrupted by the Great War.

**Further reading**


Periodicals, Encyclopaedias and Nineteenth-Century Literary Production

David Finkelstein

‘No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money’, commented Samuel Johnson sardonically in 1776 to his shadowing biographer James Boswell according to the latter’s Life of Johnson. Johnson’s comment came at the end of an era marked by the scrabbling of textual scribblers in London’s Grub Street, a world where authors without wealthy patrons churned out words for one-off payments, and copyright was the printer-publishers’ to dispose of and use as they pleased. The landmark trial of Donaldson v. Becket in 1774, when a Scottish bookseller successfully challenged the London book trade’s monopoly on reprint and copyright matters, created the legal basis for the development in the nineteenth century of a new literary economy and a new profession: that of the professional author. There had been cases in the eighteenth century, it is true, of the self-made literary star, Alexander Pope being the most spectacularly successful example. But one has to look hard during this period for authors who did not depend mainly on patronage or a separate, private income of their own, but who made a living by writing.

Of equal significance to the development of authorship as a profession were the opportunities created by Scottish businessmen, intellectuals and print culture specialists in the wake of late eighteenth-century activities that marked the Scottish Enlightenment period. From 1745 until the early 1800s, Edinburgh, with a population of a mere 40,000 inhabitants, became an unlikely cultural capital, experiencing an unprecedented period of intellectual, cultural, scientific and technological development that would resonate throughout the anglophone and European world, and included the achievements of individuals such as David Hume, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson.

But Edinburgh’s intellectual strengths required material support and circulation, and this was provided by such eighteenth-century printing and publishing pioneers as Allan Ramsay (initiator of the circulating library concept), Gavin Hamilton, William Creech (publisher of Robert Burns, Henry Mackenzie, Adam Ferguson and the philosopher Dugald Stewart) and William Smellie. These individuals in their time established Edinburgh as a potential rival to London as a source of important, well-printed books, and the general international diffusion of ideas in the late eighteenth century was in great part due to the access Scottish authors had to this efficient and localised print network that could generate and disseminate their texts on a wide scale.

While Ramsay, Creech and Smellie played their part in encouraging free exchange of ideas in the capital city and disseminating the results to the wider world during the first
quarter of the nineteenth century, new figures emerged whose publishing innovations transformed Edinburgh into the second literary city in Britain, a role diminished only by the fallout and subsequent reorganisation and consolidation which followed the English stock-market crash of 1826. Scots whose lists were to dominate the nineteenth-century literary marketplace founded firms in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Cambridge. Figures such as Archibald Constable, Walter Scott’s publisher, Daniel Macmillan, Robert and William Chambers and Thomas Nelson followed similar career paths and were motivated by similar desires (if one is to believe later house histories) rising from modest circumstances to become major players in the British publishing field.

**William Smellie and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica***

One of the great publishing endeavours to emerge from Edinburgh during the latter half of the eighteenth century was the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The first edition, begun in 1768 by two enterprising Scots, Andrew Bell and Colin Macfarquhar, was modelled on an earlier European exemplar of collected, didactic scholarship, the French *Encyclopédie* launched by Diderot and D’Alembert in 1750, as well as on Ephraim Chambers’s 1728, alphabetically arranged English compendium, the *Cyclopaedia*. Bell and Macfarquhar secured as editor William Smellie, a well-known intellectual whose career encompassed writing, bookselling and publishing. Over the next three years Smellie would prove responsible for producing most of the articles in the first edition, afterwards boasting that he had created it by means of pastepot, scissors and material culled from his personal library collection.

The edition was published in slim, sixpenny instalments between 1768 and 1771, then collected and issued as a three-volume set of 2,659 pages and 160 engravings. Alphabetically arranged, the first edition emphasised practical topics at the expense of more literary subjects. Thus while it featured a detailed, thirty-nine-page discussion of equine diseases and their treatment, as well as fifty pages on bookkeeping, poetry was limited to a five hundred word entry, drama merited seven lines, and there were no biographies or historical articles. As the initial editorial preface made clear, the primary intention was to produce a practical and commercially attractive reference work:

> Utility ought to be the principal intention of every publication. Wherever this intention does not plainly appear, neither the books nor their authors have the smallest claim to the approbation of mankind. (Quoted in *The Myth of the Britannica*, 1964)

Although modest and conservative in its initial approach, the *Encyclopaedia* sold well enough to encourage Smellie to compile further editions, expanding the range of topics, shifting the emphasis to encourage and accommodate extensive survey essays, and attracting high-profile contributors to flex their prose styles in public. Its size grew exponentially: the second edition of 1784 took up ten volumes and 8,595 pages; the third edition of 1794 covered eighteen volumes; and the renowned fourth edition, completed in 1810, stretched to twenty volumes and over 16,000 pages.

The *Encyclopaedia*’s uniqueness, embodied particularly in the 1810 edition and subsequent supplements, was its encapsulation of the spirit and intellectual curiosity implicit in Edinburgh’s cultural development during the Scottish Enlightenment. Contributions from celebrated Scottish thinkers and intellectuals engaged the reader in rational, scientific, literary and philosophical questioning and explication. The *Encyclopaedia* favoured detailed
analysis over short, clipped, factual entries. Walter Scott contributed essays on drama, romance and chivalry; Robert Malthus and David Ricardo expanded on their social and economic theories in entries on population, commerce and political economy; Thomas De Quincey contributed entries on ‘Pope’, ‘Schiller’ and ‘Shakespeare’. Later supplements would feature, among others, significant contributions by James Mill on the English Utilitarians, Thomas Young on his deciphering of the Rosetta Stone, and Macaulay on Pitt, Bunyan, Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith.

The ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia* was begun in 1875 under the editorship of Thomas Spencer Baynes, former Professor of Logic at St Andrews University. Ill-health forced him to withdraw from the editorial chair, and William Robertson Smith replaced him. Smith brought energy and enthusiasm to the project, expanding the range of topics and drawing in an elite range of contributors from literary circles (Swinburne, Matthew Arnold and Andrew Lang), the scientific community (T. H. Huxley, Lord Kelvin, Alfred Russel Wallace, James Clerk Maxwell) and from the social sciences (Prince Kropotkin, James Frazer). The edition was finally completed in 1889. Published in twenty-five volumes, its 20,000 pages contained 9,000 illustrations and 17,000 articles totalling 30,000,000 words. The edition was hailed as a landmark in scholarship and learning, the ultimate ‘scholar’s edition’, within whose pages could be found all that was worth knowing.

This version of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would continue to be published in Edinburgh until 1898, when a group of US entrepreneurs would secure copyright from its then owners, the publishers A. & C. Black, and expand its international scope. Following a minor, revised tenth edition issued in 1902, the new owners embarked on an ambitious, radical new edition in partnership with Cambridge University. The editors of the eleventh edition abandoned the long, comprehensive-essay approach of previous versions in favour of shorter, general survey articles. Also, unlike previous versions, this edition was planned for publication not in parts but simultaneously. Articles were kept on file until all contributions were completed and submitted for final editorial approval and revision. The results were published in early 1911 in an edition containing 40,000 articles and over 40,000,000 words. Its 1,500 contributors were drawn as before from learned members of the professions and the academy, and included 168 Fellows of the Royal Society and forty-seven staff members from the British Museum. The eleventh edition would prove influential in establishing a popular template of short, comprehensive survey pieces on human activity that was subsequently imitated in other twentieth-century productions.

The enterprise begun by Bell, Macfarquhar and Smellie in 1768 was one that acted throughout the 1800s as a touchstone in British cultural life, spawning inexpensive imitations such as William Chambers’s enterprising *Chambers’s Encyclopaedia*, issued in successive parts between 1859 and 1866. Both he and his brother, Robert Chambers, would credit their intellectual development and subsequent turn to publishing and writing specifically to the world opened up to them by Smellie’s venture. Coming across a set of the fourth edition of the *Encyclopaedia* that his father had purchased and left in the attic, Robert described, in his *Memoir of Robert Chambers with Autobiographic Reminiscences of William Chambers* (1872), opening the volumes with a delight that would remain with him the rest of his life:

I felt a profound thankfulness that such a convenient collection of human knowledge existed, and that here it was spread out like a well-plenished table before me. What the gift of a whole toy-shop would have been to most children, this book was to me. I plunged through it like a bee. I hardly could be patient enough to read any one article, while so many others remained to be looked into.
The concept of gathering, categorising and re-presenting humanity and human activity in a central, accessible and organised form would also directly influence later publishing projects such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Likewise, the *Encyclopaedia*, with its use of magisterial essays to expound on cultural topics, would provide a major supporting link to the literary revolution signalled by the development of the heavyweight literary journal in the early 1800s.

**The Edinburgh Review and the rise of the literary journal**

Between 1800 and 1850, as Lee Erickson has eruditely demonstrated in *The Economy of Literary Form* (1996), the literary periodical became the dominant publishing format in British culture, and with its rise, the essay was for about twenty years the dominant literary form in the reviews and magazines and was the most readily marketable literary commodity.

The quarterly *Edinburgh Review* established the template for subsequent periodicals of this type. Founded in Edinburgh in 1802 by four disaffected Whig lawyers with literary ambitions, it rose in eminence to set the standards and parameters by which most nineteenth-century periodical publications were measured and judged. Contributors were well paid (initially up to ten sterling pounds per sheet), an innovation the publisher Archibald Constable insisted on in face of the view of the *Review’s* first editor (Francis Jeffrey) that contributors should be ‘all gentlemen and no pay’. The format – paper cover, article lengths and style – were much copied, particularly by rivals such as the *Quarterly Review* (founded in 1809). Articles went unsigned, a practice that remained almost universal in British literary periodicals until the 1860s.

The sweep of history represented by the development of literary periodicals from the *Edinburgh Review* onwards is one ripe for exploration and analysis. Prior to the founding of the *Edinburgh Review*, there existed few substantial literary journals in Britain. Two London literary reviews of note that dominated the market from the mid-eighteenth century were the *Monthly Review*, begun by Ralph Griffiths in 1749, and the *Critical Review*, founded in 1756 by Archibald Hamilton and Tobias Smollett. They had been preceded by Addison and Steele’s *The Spectator* (in existence from 1711 to 1712) and *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (founded in 1732). All of these titles, like their subsequent imitators, were written as literary miscellanies, their pages a mixture of literary gossip and short selections of prose and verse. Sales were low, and in most cases journals had to depend on solicited private subscriptions to stay afloat. Not many survived for long. The *English Review*, for example, founded by the publisher John Murray in 1783, was considered a moderately successful journal for having achieved average sales of over 750 copies per month. Yet by 1793 it too had disappeared, absorbed into the *Analytical Review*.

Trying to provide an encyclopedic breadth of coverage was a dominant editorial perspective among those who had charge of literary journals prior to the emergence of the *Edinburgh Review*. (And some were directly linked: Macvey Napier, for example, cut his teeth revising the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the early part of the century before assuming editorship of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829.) The conspicuous demise of such literary miscellanies was a direct result of their eagerness to be viewed as sections of an ongoing encyclopedic enterprise, a record of knowledge in all areas of human endeavour. As Joanne Shattock notes in her study *Politics and Reviewers: The Edinburgh and the Quarterly in the Early Victorian Age* (1989), these review journals failed due to overly ambitious commitments to include as many works as possible, ‘even to the extent of cramming what could
not be reviewed into a series of short notices’. Such a commitment could not hope to cope with the ever-increasing number of publications in all fields by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Small-scale critical journals were soon overwhelmed with the entrance of the magisterial review essay pioneered by the Scottish-based *Edinburgh Review*. Bagehot commented in 1855 that review-writing was by then the dominant feature of the British literary landscape, owing its existence to the firmness with which it had been expounded in the hefty pages of the *Edinburgh Review*:

> The modern man must be told what to think – shortly, no doubt – but he must be told it. The essay-like criticism of modern times is about the length which he likes. The *Edinburgh Review*, which began the system, may be said to be, in this country, the commencement on large topics of suitable views for sensible persons. (Quoted in *Politics and Reviewers*, 1989)

The *Edinburgh Review* dedicated itself to breaking with past literary traditions: it was a quarterly journal (the first to develop such pattern of publication) with the avowed intention of offering a passionate yet informed approach to periodical criticism. From the start it declared its unabashed partisanship as a Whiggish publication (the rival *Quarterly Review*, countered by styling itself a Tory alternative to the *Edinburgh*’s ‘deleterious doctrine’).

Francis Jeffrey, its lead editor, dominated the *Review* for over twenty-five years (from 1803 to 1829). It was he who steered the *Edinburgh Review* to unashamedly selective and elitist practices. When he and his like-minded collaborators Henry Brougham, Francis Horner and Sydney Smith met in Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh, in 1802 to discuss their new venture, they declared that their prospective journal should offer commentary only on (select) books of the moment. More importantly, quality was to steer the course of this literary ship. As the advertisement for the opening number made clear in the *Edinburgh Review* (1 October 1802), plucking the best out of the torrent of work emanating from the publishing capitals of London and Edinburgh was the driving force behind this new venture:

> Of the books that are daily presented to the world, a very large proportion is evidently destined to obscurity, by the insignificance of the subjects, or the defects of their execution [. . .]. The very lowest order of publications are rejected, accordingly, by most of the literary publications of which the Public are already in possession. But the contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* propose to carry this principle of selection a good deal further; to decline any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature; and to confine their notice, in a very great degree, to works that have either attained, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity.

Englishman Sydney Smith wryly suggested that his Scottish collaborators’ fondness for plain fare should lead them to adopt for the *Review* the motto ‘*Tenui musam meditamur avena*’ (We cultivate literature upon a little oatmeal). True to their powerful Edinburgh legal backgrounds, they adopted instead a more sober quotation to greet the reader as they turned to the title page of each volume – *‘judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur’* (the judge stands condemned when the guilty is acquitted).

Smith’s jesting alternative motto is revealing of the Scottish base from which the magazine sprang, as much as it is a comment on the *Edinburgh Review*’s mixture of sober critical appraisal and occasional lightness of touch. The *Review* drew for initial inspiration on long-standing eighteenth-century traditions of Scottish debate on philosophy, politics, economics, evolution and revolution, while consistently upholding the superiority of the Scottish
educational and legal systems. Its critical attacks on English poets have been noted for their inconsistency – thus the wavering over Wordsworth from negative to positive commentary over the first thirty years of its existence. But Jeffrey’s famous opening salvo in the November 1814 issue against Wordsworth’s Excursion (‘This will never do’), in which he attacks Wordsworth’s ‘low-bred’ heroes (and in particular the character of the rustic Scottish Pedlar), can be read not only as an explosion against the linguistic rusticity of the Lake School poets, but also as a nationalist reaction to an anglicised representation of the rural Scots. The same issue concluded with a review by Jeffrey of recent work by the Scots James Hogg and William Tennant, in which their naturalist verses are praised wholeheartedly. A reader perusing the Edinburgh Review that month would have emerged feeling that Scotland was at last producing writers set to challenge the dominance of English poets of the contemporary British literary cultural landscape. The Edinburgh Review, however, was careful to contain its Scottishness within the safe framing of a ‘North Briton’ identity, thus balancing between the political realities of Scotland’s position within the Union and the desire to emphasise Scotland’s cultural uniqueness.

Coleridge and other contemporaries were quick to note the Scottish flavour of the Edinburgh Review. As Coleridge commented to Crabb Robinson, the journal was ‘a concentration of all the smartness of all Scotland’. Byron’s famed poetic attack on the Review in 1809, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, played up the negative aspects of such Scottish ‘smartness’, suggesting unkindly that such talents were symptomatic of a lack of literary talent north of the border – the Scots could critique, but they could not write poetry. ‘I could not say Caledonia’s Genius’, Byron added in a sarcastic footnote to the English Bards, ‘it being well known there is no Genius to be found from Clackmannan to Caithness’ (quoted in Stafford, ‘The Edinburgh Review and the Representation of Scotland’, in British Romanticism and the ‘Edinburgh Review’, 2002).

The Edinburgh Review dominated critical circles and established the template by which literary periodicals were judged for decades to come. Competition would soon be forthcoming from both London- and Scottish-based quarters. The London publisher John Murray, for example, began issuing the rival Quarterly Review in 1809, while the monthly journal Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine would come out of the Edinburgh stables of William Blackwood in 1817. The market soon grew crowded with the founding of journals such as the London Magazine in 1820 and the Westminster Review in 1824, and the influence of the quarterly journals would decline even more perilously in the 1850s and 1860s with the influx of monthlies such as the Cornhill Magazine (1860), the Fortnightly Review (1865) and the Contemporary Review (1866). Although the Edinburgh Review lasted until 1929, its later years were marked by an overwhelming seriousness and lack of resilience that grew more antiquated in face of the exuberant dynamism of its competitors. As Mark Pattison would remark acidly in 1877, ‘those venerable old wooden three-deckers, the Edinburgh Review and the Quarterly Review still put out to sea under the command, I believe, of the Ancient Mariner’.

The rise of the monthly periodical

Indigenous literary talents and works featured in the Scottish-led or -run monthly periodicals that followed in the Review’s wake (Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, London Magazine, Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal) were to prove Byron wrong, but it is worthwhile pausing to reflect on the prevalence of talented Scots whose drive and energy established the journals
that dominated the literary marketplace for much of the nineteenth century: Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Francis Horner (Edinburgh Review, 1802); Walter Scott, who turned against the Edinburgh Review to successfully lobby John Murray for the London-based alternative Tory Quarterly Review (1809), and for which Scott’s son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart, served as editor from 1825; William Blackwood, John Gibson Lockhart (again), John Wilson and James Hogg, whose literary hi-jinks marked the early days of the Tory monthly Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (started in 1817); and the Aberdonian John Scott, editor of the monthly London Magazine (1820), for a period chief rival to Blackwood’s.

Chief among the Scottish-led monthly productions that followed in the wake of the Edinburgh Review was Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, established in Edinburgh by William Blackwood I (1776–1834). Blackwood was an enterprising young man whose move into publishing at the turn of the nineteenth century had come as a result of opportunities created by his predecessors. William Blackwood I was to play a key role in both the periodical and book-publishing field, revitalising the older Edinburgh tradition of the publishing house as a literary gathering place. From the beginning he encouraged emerging writers to make his place of business a centre of literary society, a sort of literary club where men of letters might find a meeting place. One outcome was the building of the ‘Old Saloon’ when the firm moved to new premises in 45 George Street in 1829 – an oval room where literary portraits stared down upon an oval table, and confirmed ‘Blackwoodians’ gathered to continue the tradition begun in the early days.

More significant was the launch in April 1817 of what was to become the flagship publication of the firm, a monthly literary journal that initially was edited with lacklustre effort by James Cleghorn and Thomas Pringle. Consensus has it that The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine, as it was first known, was planned by Blackwood to be a ‘more nimble, more frequent, more familiar’ Tory alternative to his rival Archibald Constable’s Whig-orientated quarterly the Edinburgh Review. Recent scholarship suggests that the magazine was originally directed to challenge the ailing monthly Scots Magazine, which Blackwood had identified as a weak spot in Constable’s stable of literary periodical productions.

The first few issues of Blackwood’s new venture, however, were anything but exciting. Terminating Pringle’s and Cleghorn’s contracts after six months, Blackwood re-launched the journal in October 1817 as Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, with editorial input and contributions from members of his literary coterie, including John Gibson Lockhart, John Wilson (‘Christopher North’) and James Hogg. The first few issues, with their attacks on local and national literary figures, their brand of personalised satire, and their blend of anonymously authored literature, politics, fiction and poetry, established the reputation of the Blackwood firm. Lawsuits brought against the firm by those attacked added welcome publicity, but frightened off some of Blackwood’s trade connections: both Baldwin, Cradock & Co. (Blackwood’s London agents) and Oliver & Boyd (Blackwood’s printers) severed their connections with the firm based upon the furore caused by the new journal.

Bringing home the first number of his re-launched journal, William is said to have presented it to his wife with the words, ‘There’s ma Maga-zine’. In affectionate parody, the journal became known to future generations of contributors and readers as ‘Maga’. Maga’s rising reputation and sales swiftly put paid to the Scots Magazine while at the same time attracting competition from London in the shape of the London Magazine, published from 1820 to 1829. Its editor, John Scott (ironically, a native of Aberdeen), specifically proclaimed it a rival to journals emanating from ‘secondary towns of the Kingdom’, that is, Blackwood’s Magazine in Edinburgh. The hostility with which both sides attacked each other culminated in 1821, when John Gibson Lockhart challenged John Scott to a duel.
In what may be considered the most extreme conclusion to a literary quarrel the nineteenth century has ever noted, Lockhart’s second, G. H. Christie, faced Scott instead, and mortally wounded him with his second shot. Future ‘Blackwoodian’ contributors confined themselves to verbal attacks on such luminaries as Wordsworth, Keats, Hazlitt and Coleridge.

Blackwood consolidated his initial success by using the journal to attract a core of well-placed writers to the firm. These included the Irishmen William Maginn and Samuel Ferguson, and the Scots John Galt, Douglas M. Moir (‘Delta’) and Thomas De Quincey. The magazine also featured occasional reviews by Walter Scott, fiction by Samuel Warren and Susan Ferrier and work by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Maga was used both as a showcase for new talent and as a method of attracting potential contributors to the firm’s book lists. A technique pioneered by Blackwood was the publication in book form of works first serialised in the magazine, pre-dating Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley’s use of such marketing strategies by several years. Works featured in this way included Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818), and *Inheritance* (1824), John Galt’s *The Ayrshire Legatees* (1820–1) and Douglas M. Moir’s *The Autobiography of Mansie Wauch* (1824–8). At other times Maga was used to drum up interest in texts not yet realised, as in the sly case of John Gibson Lockhart’s *Peter’s Letters to his Kinfolk* (1819). In February 1819 there appeared in Maga a positive notice of this book, a collection of letters supposedly written by a Welsh doctor and published in Aberystwyth. The following month a Maga review heaped further praise upon it, going on to attack booksellers who had not yet stocked up on this virtuoso text.

Needless to say, the work did not exist; not, that is, until it was brought out shortly afterwards by Blackwood as a ‘second’ (that is, first) edition due to ‘popular demand’. Such a *jeu d’esprit* was an aspect of early experimentation in marketing by the firm which was to be refined upon in future years by other firms in their own periodicals.


*Blackwood’s* pages would also feature both in anonymous and by-line form works by significant Scottish female periodical and literary figures of the late Victorian period. Among these were individuals such as Margaret Oliphant (1828–97), who got her start in *Blackwood’s* in 1852 with the serialisation of her first novel, *Katie Stewart*, and who, until her death in 1897, contributed over 400 articles to *Blackwood’s Magazine* and others. Of Oliphant’s significant role as literary critic, Henry James would later begrudgingly remark in his obituary notice, ‘I should almost suppose in fact that no woman had ever, for half a century, had her personal “say” so publicly and irresponsibly.’ Others who were equally inspired to break new ground in a variety of periodical and literary genres included Constance Gordon-Cumming (1837–1924), an irrepressible Scottish traveller who published over sixteen books and thirty-six articles during her lifetime on her journeys across Asia, North America and the Pacific; Charlotte Dempster (1835–1913), whose novels and articles would cover fine art, continental fiction, philosophy and religion; and Christian Isobel Johnstone (1781–1857), whose work as co-editor of several Scottish journals (*The Edinburgh Chronicle*, the *Inverness Courier* and *Johnstone’s Edinburgh Magazine*),
and contributor to monthlies such as Blackwood’s and Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine would challenge political, social, religious and sexual mores of contemporary society.

Commerce and the literary periodical

Over the second half of the nineteenth century, further outlets for literary talent appeared in great number, with London-based publishers following the Scottish model of producing their own ‘branded’ monthly journals: among them Macmillan’s Magazine (founded in 1859), Smith, Elder & Co.’s Cornhill Magazine (founded in 1860) and Longman’s Magazine (founded in 1882). Not all were profitable, but as William Tinsley noted when told his Tinsley’s Magazine (founded in 1867) was running at a deficit: ‘What cheaper advertisement can I have for twenty-five pounds a month? It advertises my name and publications; and keeps my authors together’ (quoted in Schmidt’s ‘Novelists, Publishers, and Fiction in Middle-Class Magazines, 1860–1880’ in Victorian Periodicals Review, Winter 1984).

Publishers were quick to realise the benefits to be gained from the relationship between commerce and periodical literature. Viewed historically, the formula pioneered by Scotland-based journals such as the Edinburgh Review and Blackwood’s Magazine can be seen to tie in with the industrialisation of Britain, the shift from piecemeal work to mass production. Similarly, refinements in production techniques and the increasing availability of relevant low-cost raw materials fed into the development of British print culture. For example, the mountains of surplus and discarded rags made possible by the increased industrialisation of the textile and cloth manufacturing business in the late eighteenth century allowed the expansion of an increasingly sophisticated mass paper-making industry throughout the nineteenth century. New technology, such as the invention in the early 1800s of stereotyping, the Fourdrinier paper-making machine and the Stanhope press, enabled publishers to lower production costs and produce books and periodicals more quickly and more cheaply as the century progressed.

Statistics for the period suggest an exponential rise in readership over the first half of the nineteenth century, a point supported through an examination of the printing and sales figures of the Edinburgh Review. From an initial print run of 750 copies for the first issue in October 1802, it rose to 2,150 copies per month in late 1803, 9,000 in 1809 and reached a production figure of 13,000 copies a month by 1815. In the decades that followed, between 1815 and 1832, the market grew exponentially for literary periodicals (in that period over twenty new journals were started, including Blackwood’s Magazine, the London Magazine, the New Monthly Magazine and Fraser’s Magazine). At the same time the market for poetry (the bestselling literary product of the first two decades of the century) shrank, causing publishers to take long hard looks at poets who slipped into their offices trying to peddle their latest poetic wares. After the death of Byron in 1824, for example, the publisher John Murray swore off publishing poetry, turning instead to travel writing and non-fiction. (His tempestuous relationship with the fiery Byron may also have influenced his decision.) In the same year, Longman encouraged authors to write cookbooks instead of verse, explaining, ‘nobody wants poetry now’, and Smith, Elder & Co. informed John Clare they would no longer publish poetry except at the author’s risk.

Commercial imperatives and an expanding readership played their part in shaping nineteenth-century publishing approaches to literary production. William Hazlitt highlighted this conjoining of mass markets and mass audiences, and in particular the role of British literary periodicals in negotiating between the two, in ‘The Periodical Press', his
well-known 1823 contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*. ‘Literary immortality is now let on short leases’, he declared, ‘and we must be contented to succeed by rotation.’ He continued, in ‘The Periodical Press’,

> We exist in the bustle of the world, and cannot escape from the notice of our contemporaries. We must please to live, and therefore should live to please. We must look to the public for support. Instead of solemn testimonies from the learned, we require the smiles of the fair and the polite. If princes scowl upon us, the broad shining face of the people may turn to us with a favourable aspect. Is not this life (too) sweet? Would we change it for the former if we could? But the great point is, that we cannot! Therefore, let Reviews flourish – let Magazines increase and multiply – let the Daily and Weekly Newspapers live forever!

Paralleling this was a shift from pleasing patrons to pleasing a mass audience, which preoccupied many publishers (and writers) seeking to navigate the literary swells of the nineteenth century. Readership expanded as educational opportunities increased throughout the century, with a consequent rise in the range of material developed to satisfy new audiences.

**Chambers and the great march of intellect**

A significant publishing phenomenon spurred on by developments afforded by cheap printing costs was that of mass-market texts and journals aimed at the working-class reader. Social ferment was reflected in increasing demands for wider access to arenas previously confined to elite groupings in British society. Intellectual aspirations among the lower classes, mockingly referred to by contemporary critics from 1827 onwards as the ‘march of intellect’, were in fact a reflection of and a response to the opportunities and challenges thrown up by an increasingly industrialised society. Some saw this as a major threat to social order, particularly in the wake of politically charged changes such as the Reform Act of 1832 or the Chartist movement. ‘What, for example,’ thundered Thomas Carlyle in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1831,

> is all this that we hear, for the last generation or two, about the Improvement of the Age, the Spirit of the Age, Destruction of Prejudice, Progress of the Species, and the March of Intellect, but an unhealthy state of self-sentience, self-survey; the precursor and prognostic of still worse health?

By 1845, however, as one English commentator noted, the sea change in cultural presumptions, encouraged by mass-market print consumption, was now firmly entrenched and unstoppable, with ‘Light postage, quick transit, cheap Bibles and cheap Periodicals, for the Millions of England’!

Chief among those pioneering ‘improving literature’ for the masses were the Peebles-born William and Robert Chambers, who built up a formidable publishing enterprise from meagre circumstances. Although they had been born into a prosperous mercantile family in 1800 and 1802 respectively, the collapse of their father’s business in 1813 led to both leaving school and embarking on difficult and low-paid apprenticeships in the book trade. Both adhered strongly to a belief in self-learning as a means to self-improvement, and followed through on this in their subsequent development as booksellers, authors and successful publishers.
William and Robert Chambers’ work derived from their view of the importance of civic responsibility and cultural interplay: publishing inexpensive reading material was, they felt, crucial to allowing others to make successes of themselves through faith, self-reliance and self-education. Much of the brothers Chambers’ lives were spent in work that reflected these set values. Robert Chambers, for example, made his name quite early on through collecting and publishing important collections of Scottish social and cultural history, such as Traditions of Edinburgh (1824), Walks in Edinburgh (1825) and The Popular Rhymes of Scotland (1826). Both brothers viewed their experiments in publishing inexpensive, self-improving works for the masses as part of their civic responsibilities. As William concluded in his Memoir, in respect of his brother Robert:

His whole writings had for their aim the good of society – the advancement in some shape or other of the true and beautiful [. . .] in the long list of literary compositions of Robert Chambers, we see the zealous and successful student, the sagacious and benevolent citizen, and the devoted lover of his country.

Such philosophy extended to one of the most scientific publishing sensations of the mid-century, the anonymously written Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, published in 1844 to great acclaim and equal controversy. The book, an idiosyncratic exploration of the natural world and biological evolution, was a crucial text in the development of Darwin’s thinking on the evolution of the human species, laying the foundations for a revolution in scientific thinking and a whole new area of scientific endeavour. Penned in secret by Robert Chambers, the work was a mid-Victorian publishing phenomenon, an inexpensive text that drew on Scottish traditions of rational philosophy, reasoned religious interests and enquiry into natural history and distilled the results in accessible form for mass consumption. Although it had its detractors, including David Brewster, who thought the work stood ‘a fair chance of poisoning the fountains of science, and sapping the foundations of religion’, the work succeeded in creating a mass readership for accessible texts on scientific matters, and was to sell more than 20,000 copies in the decade after its first publication. Chambers drew on his own researches and past texts for the project, but preferred to keep quiet about his part as author of the work: it was not revealed until 1884, well after his death.

Robert and William Chambers’ mixture of auto-didactic self-reliance and independent aspiration to self-improvement was to form the cornerstone of a similarly significant venture in February 1832, when William launched the weekly Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal. As William noted in his autobiography, ‘I resolved to take advantage of the evidently growing taste for cheap literature, and lead it, as far as was in my power, in a proper direction.’ He was joined in 1836 by Robert, who took on responsibilities for writing the bulk of the weekly output and acting as co-editor. The journal, containing a mixture of essays, biographies of well-known individuals, reflective works on science, nature and history, and instructive, morally grounded works of fiction and poetry, retailed at the low price of three halfpennies. William Chambers’s aim at the start was to offer affordable and consumable knowledge on a mass scale. As he remembers in his Memoir, he announced in the opening editorial of the first issue:

The principle by which I have been actuated is to take advantage of the universal appetite for instruction which at present exists; to supply to that appetite food of the best kind, in such form and at such price as must suit the convenience of every man in the British dominions.
Although a radical and risky experiment in mass publishing (no previous journal had attempted to reach such a wide audience with such a broad-ranging menu), the formula proved a success: at its start, circulation was a vigorous 30,000 an issue; by 1834, circulation had risen to 50,000; and after the addition of a London agent to enable wider circulation across the UK, circulation rose to a peak of 86,750 a week in 1844. Six weeks after the launch of the journal, a London imitator arrived in the shape of Charles Knight, who with the backing of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge began publishing the *Penny Magazine* in late March 1832. It was less expensive, and while it did not feature fiction or poetry, unlike *Chambers’s Journal*, its pages were laced with woodcut illustrations. For a time, the *Penny Magazine* joined *Chambers’s Journal* in opening out opportunities for mass-market audiences, reaching a circulation in its first year of 200,000. By 1846, however, the *Penny Magazine* ceased publication, a victim of high costs and a loss of its main readership base due to its adherence to an unvarying diet of dull, didactic text.

**Conclusion**

By the 1820s, the literary periodical lay at the heart of British literary culture, shaping literary specialisation in a manner akin to the economic and material ‘division of labour’ seen in the textile and manufacturing industries. (Authors were commissioned to write on specific areas and topics – economics, literature, history, politics, fiction, and poetry – as per their perceived expertise.) It also played a significant role in the increasing commodification of textual production (payments were measured by the sheet and copyright assignments arranged for periodical contributions). By the 1830s, further developments in the mass periodical market ensured a saturation of material across the class spectrum. The history of periodical and journal publication in the nineteenth century can be described as one of development and expansion linked to similar developments and expansions in print technology: texts produced moved from being high-priced miscellanies and review journals aimed at a small sector of the population to mass-market publications providing material for a wide range of audiences at low cost; from productions focusing on the review essay to those incorporating illustration, fiction and personalised reportage.

For the next fifty years, until the rise of ‘New Journalism’ and the development of London-based mass media, daily press successes such as the *Daily Mail* (founded in 1896 and the first to achieve a circulation of one million copies a day), literary journals and periodical publications pioneered, edited or run by Scots played a dominant role in shaping British literary culture. Publishing enterprises such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Chambers’s Encyclopaedia*, and journals such as the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood’s Magazine* and *Chambers’s Journal* had, through being pre-eminent in their niche arenas of textual space, shifted literary interest and matters irrevocably.

But such innovations could not hold up in face of competition from new, ‘entrepreneurial’ publishers such as Chatto & Windus, Methuen, William Heinemann, John Lane and Elkin Mathews (who were not afraid to take on and publish controversial works and new authors in new formats), the rise of professionalisation within the industry (such as the insertion of the literary agent into the negotiation of literary worth), and other changes simultaneously taking place across British publishing. The development of higher printing capacity utilising large, web-fed rotaries and newly developed hot-metal type-setting machines meant cheaper production costs and faster delivery of print runs. Experiments with cheap publishing formats and reprints following the decline and collapse of the three-decker novel in 1894 rapidly combined
with the creative use of new arenas for textual syndication (such as silent films and theatrical performances) and overseas markets in the Empire, North America and Europe, to offer greater challenges for traditional ‘list’ publishers such as Blackwood’s, John Murray or Richard Bentley & Sons. By the start of the First World War, Scottish periodical production and publishing were heading into decline, a plunge only slightly arrested by demands during wartime for reading material of all sorts for both home-and war-front audiences.

Scottish literary periodical production and publishing ultimately failed to keep pace with market and readership changes and expectations. However, the fact remains that it was early nineteenth-century Scottish literary production and publishing innovation that laid the foundations for an activity integral to current mass print media practices, the brand of popular literary journalism now taken for granted in print media outlets such as the *London Review of Books* or the *New Yorker*. The fact that a branch of literary activity now exists that pays others to produce fiction, poetry and pass judgement at length on contemporary culture and literary production is something that owes a great debt to the literary revolution begun in Edinburgh over two centuries ago.

**Further reading**


An ‘important change’ has taken place ‘within these few years in the general taste and literature of Scotland’, observed a reviewer in The Edinburgh Magazine in 1819. The ‘grave and metaphysical propensities of our countrymen’, in a reversal of ‘the usual progress of the human mind’, have succumbed to a ‘rage for works of fancy’. In the five years since Waverley (1814) Walter Scott had become the bestselling, most prolific and influential novelist of the age. Scott’s novels established the major trends in British Romantic fiction publishing, summarised by Peter Garside: the displacement of poetry by the novel, the novel’s heightened definition as a genre, the professionalisation of production and marketing, the standardisation of format for new works (three volumes, post-octavo, 31s/6d the set), and even a masculine take-over of what had been understood to be a feminine genre. As well as boosting a general increase in British novel production in the decade after Waterloo, Scott’s success fuelled a local takeoff in Edinburgh fiction publishing. Scotland had accounted for a mere 0.5 per cent of all novels published in the British Isles in the first decade of the nineteenth century; this figure rose to 4.4 per cent in the 1810s and to 12 per cent in the 1820s, reaching 15 per cent, or fifty-four out of 359 titles, in the peak years 1822–5 – a rate of growth far steeper than the national average.

Scott and his principal publisher Archibald Constable soon faced rivals in the booming Edinburgh fiction market. The most formidable was William Blackwood, who briefly appropriated Scott from Constable (with the first series of Tales of My Landlord, 1816), launched Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (1817) as a Tory counterblast to Constable’s brace of Whig periodicals and became the most productive publisher of fiction in Scotland (bringing out twenty-seven titles between 1820 and 1826, against Constable’s twenty-one). Blackwood’s list established a distinctive profile of fiction on Scottish national and regional themes, some of which first appeared in his magazine. Critics have identified a Blackwoodian school of Scottish Romantic fiction in competition with Scott’s, characterised by a comic and sentimental depiction of traditional, rural or small-town settings and manners, which flourished in the years (after 1819) when Scott himself turned from the making of modern Scotland to more exotic fields. The chief fiction-writers associated with Blackwood were James Hogg, John Galt, John Gibson Lockhart, John Wilson, David Macbeth Moir and Susan Edmonstone Ferrier (who was the only one not also a contributor to the Magazine). Such was the house’s prestige, especially after Constable went bankrupt in 1826, that even the Radical Christian Isobel Johnstone would publish her last and best novel there (Elizabeth de Bruce, 1827). In the early 1820s Hogg and Galt emerged as the most original authors of Scottish prose fiction besides Scott, masters of the distinctive genres developed in the Blackwood orbit: regional tale and fictional autobiography.
The rise of prose fiction and Blackwood’s Magazine occupies the middle decade (1814–25) of a distinctive epoch of Scottish literature, the Edinburgh-based post-Enlightenment of the first third of the nineteenth century. The first stage (1802–13) was constituted by the wartime ascendancy of Constable’s quarterly Edinburgh Review and a vogue for national ballad collections and metrical romances (from Scott’s Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border to Hogg’s The Queen’s Wake). A third stage lasted from the financial crash of 1825–6 through the death of Scott, the Reform Bill, and the bankruptcy of the Edinburgh town council in the early 1830s: events attended by a flowering of reformist periodicals (Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal, Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine) and a decline in the quality and quantity of Scottish fiction. Besides ruining Scott and Constable, the 1826 crash damaged the wider networks of British publishing and depressed the market for new novels into the next decade. When the industry recovered in the 1840s literary production was decisively London-based. Two major works signal the end of this Edinburgh post-Enlightenment: Lockhart’s Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart. (1837–8; the epoch’s official monument as much as its subject’s), and Thomas Carlyle’s anti-novelistic pseudo-memoir and magazine serial Sartor Resartus (1833–4), the parodic deconstruction of a post-Enlightenment aesthetics.

The ‘mighty revulsion’ from philosophy to fiction characterises a larger institutional transformation of Scottish literature after 1800, in which literary production devolved from the civic and academic infrastructure of the Enlightenment to an industrialising marketplace. As Edinburgh became a national publishing powerhouse, the curricular genres of ‘Scotch philosophy’ – history, rhetoric, the human sciences – gave way to the booksellers’ genres that would dominate the nineteenth-century trade, periodicals and novels. Politics hastened this commercial devolution of the Scottish Republic of Letters. The anti-Jacobin crackdown of the mid-1790s broke up the ‘Moderate’ Whig consensus that had sustained the Enlightenment as the Pitt-Dundas Tory junta tightened its regional monopoly over patronage and institutions. The Edinburgh Review, founded during the 1802 political ‘thaw’ brought on by the Peace of Amiens, renewed the liberal projects of Enlightenment by relocating them in the marketplace. In turn, it dignified the commercial mode of periodical publishing with the Enlightenment’s civic and professional ethos as well as its ‘philosophical’ content: reviewers assumed a judicial authority, their status defended by anonymity and Constable’s high fees. Following the cue of the Edinburgh Review, authorship became a professional vocation. ‘The lawyer of former days was esteemed irrevocably lost to his profession, if he meddled with literature,’ Scott remarked in his Provincial Antiquities and Picturesque Scenery of Scotland in 1819: ‘But now the most successful professional men are both aspirants after, and dispensers of, literary fame.’

The ‘Moderate’ consensus restored with the Edinburgh Review proved too fragile to survive the resumption of war against France, however. Escalation of hostilities forced a domestic ideological polarisation that cast the Edinburgh Review as ‘political’ rather than disinterested, the forum of a faction rather than a national public. Over the next dozen years the intensifying debate over electoral reform politicised the field of literature through the periodical press; the respectable quarterlies were outdone in partisan vehemence by newspapers and miscellanies, with Blackwood’s especially notorious for personal attacks and hoaxes. Blackwood’s momentous achievement was its construction of a thorough-going ‘Romantic ideology’ to oppose the Edinburgh Review’s neo-Enlightenment liberalism (tied to the emergent science of political economy). The magazine equipped Tory politics with an aesthetic ideology of cultural nationalism shaped by its innovative mixture of literary forms and discourses – key among which was fiction. Although the quarterlies had descended to review novels, beginning with Maria Edgeworth and then Scott, they tended to
maintain a neo-classical suspicion of fiction as such. Blackwood's, in contrast, became the leading, innovative forum for publishing non-novelistic kinds of prose fiction in the early 1820s, establishing the modern short story as a genre and developing a range of experimental styles and formats, including serialisation (Galt's *The Ayrshire Legatees* and *The Steam-Boat*, 1820–1; Hogg's *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 1819–28; Moir's *Mansie Wauch*, 1824–8). The magazine mixed fictional alongside non-fictional articles; further, it destabilised non-fictional contributions by contaminating them with fictional devices such as disguised or fictitious contributors, narrative and dramatic frames and so on. The genres of ethnographic sketch and satirical mock-autobiography graduated insensibly into outright works of invention, with historical and imaginary characters jostling each other on the page. The most elaborate of these satirical para- or pseudo-fictions included Lockhart's novelised anatomy of the Scottish cultural scene, *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* (1819), and the symposium series 'Noctes Ambrosianae' by Wilson, Lockhart and others, which took off (after several try-outs) in 1822.

This set of political, commercial and generic antagonisms – Whig versus Tory, Blackwood versus Constable, review versus magazine, essay versus fiction – thus had important consequences for the development of Scottish fiction, which it framed. Scott's novels set themselves above the ruck of common fiction by claiming a share in the 'literary authority' of the quarterlies, and thus a measure of critical respectability, through their synthesis of romance with Enlightenment historicism as well as the alignment of Scott's authorial role with the *Edinburgh Review*'s professional ethos. The keenest of the Blackwood's critics, Lockhart, attacked the professional culture of the *Edinburgh Review*, arguing that its commercial base determined a fatal contradiction between the reviewers’ claims to judicial disinterest and their praxis of partisan politics. Instead of extending the critique to Scott's novels, however, Lockhart claimed their occupation of an aesthetic high ground of national representation for the rival camp. In *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, Scott’s totalising representation of Scottish historical life makes him the figurehead of the new Tory cultural nationalism formulated in the pages of Blackwood's *Magazine*.

This symbolic appropriation was based on a wider platform than Scott’s political role as literary viceroy of the ‘Dundas despotism’ in Edinburgh, and patron of several Blackwood’s authors, including his future son-in-law (Lockhart himself). Tory in his politics but ideologically a product of the Whig Enlightenment, Scott stood between the *literati* of his own generation (Jeffrey and the other *Edinburgh* reviewers) and the young Turks at Blackwood’s: strong enough, with his exceptional literary gifts, to encompass both sides rather than fall between them. The anonymous author of *Waverley* could personify the cosmopolitan, ‘Moderate’ Enlightenment ethos that the *Edinburgh Review* had revived and then forfeited with its *parti pris*, and plausibly (although far from uncontroversially) represent a national culture in all its historical variety and contradiction. The author of *Waverley* could play that role more plausibly, certainly, than Sir Walter Scott of Abbotsford, client of Dundas and Buccleuch patronage and backer of Tory periodicals from the high-toned *Quarterly* to the scurrilous *Sentinel* and *Beacon*. Crucial here was the special status newly accorded to the novel as the ascendant genre of national life.

In the early nineteenth century the novel triumphed over periodical genres to become the normative literary form of middle-class culture; the novel rhetorically unified a modern reading public with its invocation of national life, whereas magazines and reviews politicised growing social divisions. Edinburgh was the decisive site for this development and the Waverley novels its decisive agent. It is a version, after all, of the story Scott’s novels are supposed to tell: the history of a modern nation formed from the bitter clash of factions, beyond
‘politics’ and ‘ideology’. Just as crucial to the cultural work done by Scott’s novels as their topical assumption of Enlightenment historicism, in this light, is their powerful, categorical reinvestment in the rhetoric of fiction, under the title of ‘romance’. Hume’s *History of England* provided the model of a ‘Moderate’ historiography, a national narrative of ‘Whig’ progress tempered by ‘Tory’ sentiment and a sympathetic identification with ‘waving heroes’ such as Falkland and Clarendon. Hume also provided philosophical justification for Scott’s combination of history with romance. In Hume’s writing the intellectual trajectory of Enlightenment follows a sceptical dismantling of the metaphysical foundation of reality and its replacement with a sentimental investment in ‘common life’, intermittently recognised as an imaginary construction of reality ratified by custom. Scott’s *Waverley* narrates not just the emergence of modern civil society through the final conquest of an ancient regime, but also a Humean dialectical progress from ‘metaphysical’ illusion through melancholy disenchantment to a sentimental and ironic reattachment to common life. Insistent upon their own fictional status, Scott’s novels make their reader’s relation to history a sceptical rather than a credulous one, able to encompass the reader’s own historical situation.

Following Hume, then, Scott made fiction the performative technique of a liberal ideology, an ideology that stakes its modernity upon the claim of having transcended primitive modes of belief (superstition and fanaticism) by distancing itself morally and cognitively from the submerged life of history, the blind rage of politics. Significantly, Lockhart’s appropriation of Scott (in *Peter’s Letters*) shifted from critical appreciation of the work of fiction to a cult of the author, around whom the category of ‘authority’ could be reassembled, in the fully counter-Enlightenment mode that Carlyle would later call ‘hero-worship’. At the same time, the Tory Romantic apotheosis of Scott required the amputation of Scott’s own roots in the culture of Enlightenment, identified with the sceptical philosophy of Hume. In Lockhart’s account, Scott’s authority compels his readers’ belief, just as Scott’s novels provide a necromantic medium for historical truth and national spirit. The identification of Scott’s works with Tory Romanticism thus required a measure of symbolic violence, which did not go unchallenged. Scott’s death, coinciding with the 1832 Reform Bill, inspired a notable set of attempts by Radical critics (Christian Johnstone, writing in *The Schoolmaster*, and Harriet Martineau, in *Tait’s*) to reclaim his achievement for a liberal and progressive ‘spirit of the age’: the Waverley novels were the property of all humankind, not just of a party interest, and they belonged to the national future as well as the past.

Of the dozen or so novels published in Scotland before Scott’s, the most notable belong to a tradition of moral-reformist domestic fiction by women authors: Elizabeth Hamilton’s *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), Mary Brunton’s *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814, five months after *Waverley*). Reviewers traced the tradition from Frances Burney through Maria Edgeworth, who gave it its ‘national’ (Irish) development. Scott himself differentiated this tradition from his own, and hailed Susan Ferrier (daughter of a fellow Clerk of Session) as its Scots representative. Ferrier admired Hamilton and Brunton (as well as Hannah More, Edgeworth and Jane Austen), and began her first novel, *Marriage*, under their influence in 1810. Despite the anterior presence of the tradition, Ferrier remained its only notable practitioner in Scotland after 1814. (Brunton died in childbirth in 1818, leaving the didactic fragment *Emmeline.*) The only other Scottish Romantic woman novelist to enjoy significant literary success, Christian Johnstone, kept her distance from domestic fiction: mocking it by literalising it, in a quasi-fictional guide to domestic economy (*The Cook and Housewife’s Manual*, 1826), or combining the depiction of Scottish manners with the more dissident Irish mutations of the national tale (*Clan-Albin*, 1815, and *Elizabeth de Bruce*).
The gendered cast of Edinburgh literary culture is made explicit in the Blackwood’s series ‘Noctes Ambrosianae’, where it is represented in the guise of a private party at a tavern – a nostalgic apotheosis of the clubs and societies that incubated masculine literacy in Enlightenment Scotland. The ‘Noctes’ offer the symposium of Tory good fellows as a fantastic masquerade of the commercial and patronage structures of Scottish literary life. Conversation unfolds through a succession of whisky-fuelled, testosterone-charged feats of boasting, brawling, song and recitation: a festive counterblast to the ‘Whig junta’ of the Edinburgh Review. The rarity of female voices at the feast glosses the comparative weakness of the feminine tradition of domestic fiction in Scotland. Statistics gathered by Peter Garside and Rainer Schöwerling show an even stronger correlation in Scotland between the net rise in novel production and the proportional decline in female authorship that characterise British publishing as a whole in the decade up to 1825. They confirm recent critical accounts of the rhetorical accession of masculine ‘authority’ over feminine ‘romance’ that characterises the reception of Scott’s novels, and those novels’ internal allegories of a male appropriation of primitive female powers.

Not just Scott’s example, then, but also the patronising and professionalising ethos that framed it, the larger cultural legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, contributed to a relative exclusion of women authors from the literary boom in Romantic Edinburgh. Brunton and Ferrier, gifted as they were, followed the respectable path of female authorship mapped in the early career of Burney, eschewing public visibility and professional status. Christian Johnstone, the most versatile of the women writers, presents the contrasting case of a successful professional career. Johnstone’s forays into prose fiction were framed by her journalistic experience, first at the Inverness Courier (1812) and later (from 1832) at a succession of Edinburgh Radical magazines. She was able to sustain this literary career by standing behind her husband, master printer John Johnstone, whose name appears on the title-pages of the magazines she edited. When Elizabeth de Bruce did not meet with the anticipated success, Johnstone gave up writing novels for the magazine genres of tale, essay and review. She achieved her most influential literary work as chief contributor and de facto editor of The Schoolmaster, Johnstone’s Edinburgh Magazine and (after 1834) Tait’s.

Ferrier’s Marriage was one of two prose fiction titles with which Blackwood launched the movement of ‘secondary Scottish novels’ in 1818. The other was James Hogg’s The Brownie of Bodsbeck and other Tales. Although Hogg claimed (plausibly) that he had written it earlier, the title story appeared as a popular riposte to Scott’s polite, ‘moderate’ depiction of the insurgent Covenanters in Old Mortality, the main work in Tales of My Landlord, which was published (also by Blackwood) at the end of 1816. Tales of My Landlord opened a path for the characteristically ‘Blackwoodian’ fiction that would follow. Compared with the studiously approximate settings of his first three novels, Scott emphasises a more decisively regionalist representation of national life in the medium of a set of ‘tales’: ‘To his loving countrymen’, goes the dedication, ‘whether they are denominated Men of the South, Gentlemen of the North, People of the West, or Folk of Fife, these Tales, illustrative of ancient Scottish manners, and of the Traditions of their Respective Districts, are respectfully inscribed.’ The most gifted of the Blackwood authors would develop this emphasis, making regional identity (the traditions of their respective districts) the foundation for their own claims upon originality. Hogg’s tales – The Brownie of Bodsbeck and its successors, Winter Evening Tales (1820) and The Shepherd’s Calendar (1823) – ground their narrative matter and manner on the popular traditions of the Scottish Borders, centring on Ettrick but ranging from Berwick to Dumfries. Galt conceived of his most characteristic fiction as a series of ‘Tales of the West’, emanating from and representing Glasgow and Ayrshire as a region socially and culturally
distinct from Edinburgh. Hogg and Galt gave the tale its most striking formal development, the first-person fictional memoir grounded in local patterns of experience and discourse (derived in the case of Galt’s *Annals of the Parish* and *The Provost* from Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*). Galt had his own imitators in the vein, such as Moir (*Mansie Wauch*), Thomas Hamilton (*Cyril Thornton*, 1827) and Andrew Picken (*The Dominie’s Legacy*, 1830). Hogg’s masterpiece, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), affiliates itself with a group of one-volume novels of ‘fatal psychology’ published by Blackwood in the early 1820s (Lockhart’s *The History of Matthew Wald*, 1824; Galt’s *The Omen*, 1825). The novels and tales of Lockhart and Wilson – who also emerged, like Galt, from ‘the West’ (but via Oxford) – forego regional specificity for typical rather than particularised rural settings, drawing upon the moral-evangelical ‘feminine’ tradition.

It would be a mistake, however, to associate the world-class literary output of Scotland during the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment exclusively with the social and intellectual elite based in Edinburgh. This is far from being the whole story, as (for example) the poems of Robert Burns and Duncan Ban Macintyre amply demonstrate. Another such example is provided by Hogg’s remarkable periodical *The Spy*, which was published weekly in Edinburgh in 1810 and 1811, but which was emphatically not a product of Edinburgh’s elite. As Susan Manning has argued in *Studies in Hogg and his World*, this somewhat radical periodical had its roots in ‘a fascinating, dense alternative if not counter culture flourishing in early nineteenth-century Edinburgh’. Hogg was something of an outsider at the time of *The Spy*. He did not achieve fame as the ‘Author of *The Queen’s Wake*’ until 1813, and, as Manning points out, the world that produced *The Spy* was not

a world of lairds, lawyers and aristocrats, the visible face of Scotland’s official literary landscape in the Regency period, where Scott, Jeffrey, Mackenzie and Wilson were the legislators and Hogg would always, as an outsider, be an easy target.

Instead, *The Spy* was the product of a non-elite world of ‘professionals: printers, school teachers, physicians, working farmers’.

The ‘dense alternative if not counter culture’ that produced *The Spy* was willing, in the 1810s and 1820s, to question and challenge some of the assumptions of the ‘world of lairds, lawyers and aristocrats, the visible face of Scotland’s official literary landscape’. This alternative culture was not confined to Edinburgh: John MacQueen has pointed out that, while Scott’s natural haunts ‘were the monuments and antiquities of Edinburgh and Tweeddale’, John Galt had his roots in ‘the commercial and radical west, which formed the scene of many of his novels, and usually served for the rest as ultimate background’. Galt’s roots in a culture with strongly radical aspects can be detected in his reaction to *Old Mortality*. In his *Literary Life*, Galt writes of his novel *Ringan Gilhaize* (1823):

The book itself was certainly suggested by Sir Walter Scott’s *Old Mortality*, in which I thought he treated the defenders of the Presbyterian Church with too much levity, and not according to my impressions derived from the history of that time. Indeed, to tell the truth, I was hugely provoked that he [. . .] should have been so forgetful of what was due to the spirit of that epoch, as to throw it in to what I felt was ridicule.

In *The Tale of Old Mortality* Scott constructs a story that offers a particular view of seventeenth-century Scottish history. In this story Covenanters are violent, revolutionary fanatics, whose dangerous activities, in threatening social order and stability, offer an implied
parallel with the excesses that had followed in the wake of the French Revolution – traumatic events of the 1790s that took place when Scott was in his early twenties. If The Tale of Old Mortality articulates Scott’s fears about potential revolution, Galt in Ringan Gilhaize constructs a competing egalitarian story in which the Covenanters are seen not only as defenders of the Presbyterian Church, but also as defenders of the rights of the people. In his ‘Postscript’ to Ringan Gilhaize Galt writes about the particular ‘character of liberty’ among the Scots, and goes on to support his argument by printing a translation of the fourteenth-century Declaration of Arbroath, which he sees as a ‘sacred’ Scottish equivalent of Magna Carta: for Galt, these are ‘the two most important public documents extant’.

What is at stake in the contest between Galt’s story about liberty and Scott’s story about the threatened anarchy of revolution? The Union of 1707 had given Scotland an opportunity to participate as an active junior partner in the British Empire – and Scotland, especially at the elite levels of its society, quickly adjusted to and took advantage of that situation. However, there was a price to be paid for this opportunity, and Scottish society (especially at its non-elite or ‘subaltern’ levels) also experienced aspects of the process of being colonised, of being at the receiving end of imperial power. In The Tale of Old Mortality, Scott constructs a story about Scotland’s past that is in tune with the aims and assumptions of the North British elite of his time: this story seeks to place Scotland securely within a British framework, and is in effect an eloquent defence of the political status quo of Britain’s Regency period. Responding to this, Ringan Gilhaize is one of the stories through which the people of subaltern Scotland ‘assert their own identity and the existence of their own history’ (to borrow a phrase from Edward Said’s Culture and Imperialism).

Ringan Gilhaize, The Spy and other writings by Galt and Hogg have strong roots in the long-established Scottish Presbyterian tradition that also produced the Covenanters. Particularly strong in the ‘commercial and radical west’, this tradition had its influence on Burns as well as on Galt and Hogg. The Covenanters of the later seventeenth century – the period depicted in The Tale of Old Mortality – took up arms against what they perceived as arbitrary royal power, and in defence of an anti-hierarchical Presbyterian Church to which (rather than to the king or the state) they gave (under God) their ultimate loyalty. Crucially, the Kirk was felt to be under popular control, because all its members were believed to be equal in the sight of God: a notion that appealed even to the anti-clerical Burns, who wrote: ‘The Solemn League and Covenant/Now brings a smile, now brings a tear./But sacred Freedom, too, was theirs;/If thou’rt a slave, indulge thy sneer’.

There was elite opposition to such radical ideas, of course. However, attempts to wrest control of the Kirk away from the people were resisted fiercely: examples are many, ranging from the anti-Covenanter ‘Killing Times’ of the reign of James VII and II to the Victorian Disruption (1843), in which the Church of Scotland split in a dispute over the asserted right of congregations to choose their own ministers, rather than having them imposed by local landowners. In short, because of the particular form that the Reformation took in Scotland, the Presbyterian tradition helped to produce a distinctively Scottish version of radical politics. In late eighteenth-century France, the Church was associated with elite power, and consequently the Jacobins were secular and anti-clerical. In late eighteenth-century Scotland, on the other hand, those who sympathised with the Jacobins were apt to hero-worship the Covenanters, and tended to see defence of the religion of the people as a radical virtue. Correspondingly in the nineteenth century, working-class writers like Hugh Miller combined radical political sympathies and a strong attachment to empirical science with deep piety.
While the subaltern Presbyterian tradition that influenced Burns, Hogg, and Galt was both radical and religious, it was also culturally nationalist – in part in response to the cultural pressures generated by the Union of 1707, and in part because of a desire among the people to ‘assert their own identity and the existence of their own history’. Such considerations provide part of the context for the memorable passage in the opening pages of Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), in which Daniel Bell and his wife argue about whether one should speak Scots or speak English. Disputes of this kind connect with the systematic suppression of Scots and Gaelic in Scottish schools from the mid-eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, and provide part of the context for the radical cultural nationalism that underlies Burns's ‘Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn’ (‘Scots Wha Hae’), a song whose concern for ‘Liberty’ is in tune with the Declaration of Arbroath, and which gives expression to the radical and revolutionary hopes of the year 1793 by means of a celebration of Scottish defence of freedom during the fourteenth-century Wars of Independence.

Hogg and Galt perforce operated in the publishing marketplaces provided by Edinburgh and London in the 1810s and 1820s, but in these marketplaces they attempted to follow Burns (and to debate with Scott and other leading figures of Scotland's cultural and social elite) by giving expression to the concerns, insights, culture and experiences of the subaltern and Presbyterian Scotland in which their own roots lay. However, the potentially radical and challenging story they sought to tell was not necessarily what Britain's social and literary elite wished to hear in the period between Waterloo and the Reform Bill of 1832. In this situation Galt and Hogg displayed real ingenuity in their attempts to gain a hearing for those whose lives lay outside the 'world of lairds, lawyers and aristocrats'.

In particular, Galt and Hogg devised methods of making narrative authority available to non-elite first-person narrators, some of whom are figures from the margins of society. One of Hogg's favourite techniques is to make use of multiple narrative voices. An example is provided by *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, which was probably first drafted in the early 1810s as part of a projected series of 'Rural and Traditionary Tales'. The third-person narrator of *The Brownie*, like Hogg himself, appears to operate partly within and partly outside the culture of Hogg's native Ettrick. However, this narrator constantly makes way for first-person narratives by characters from Ettrick, who recount their own experiences during 'the Killing Times', a period in the 1680s when many Covenanters were in hiding after their defeat at Bothwell Bridge. For example, when making way for a first-person narrative sequence of this kind the third-person narrator writes: 'such scenes, and such adventures, are not worth a farthing, unless described and related in the language of the country to which they are peculiar'. Something similar happens in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), when the prostitute Bell Calvert is given the opportunity to tell her own story in her own words – an opportunity she takes in a way that devastatingly questions and undermines the confident narrative authority of Hogg's gentlemanly 'Editor'. Galt, for his part, shows himself to be a master of the 'fictional autobiography' in books such as *Annals of the Parish* and *The Provost*. Indeed, *Ringan Gilhaize* is a *tour de force* in this genre, as Ringan tells not only his own story but also that of 'my grandfather', in a narrative that extends from the first half of the sixteenth century to the closing years of the seventeenth century. Arguably, the first-person narrators of Hogg and Galt echo the unruly and subversive voices to be heard in Burns's cantata 'Love and Liberty'.

Like *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, Scott's *Tales of My Landlord* deals with the Covenanters and Bothwell Bridge. Furthermore, Scott's *Tales* present themselves as conveying in print the substance of oral tales told by various travellers at the Inn of Ganderclutch, and can thus be seen to connect with Hogg's orally based first-person narrative sequences in *The
Brownie and in other texts from his ‘Rural and Traditionary Tales’ project. Hogg claimed that *The Brownie* was written before Scott’s *Tales* (although published after them), and that Scott was aware of *The Brownie* before writing *Old Mortality*. Might Scott, then, have drawn inspiration from *The Brownie’s* experiments in narrative technique when writing *Old Mortality*? For an earlier generation of critics it was simply inconceivable that the Ettrick Shepherd could have ‘influenced’ Scott in this way: self-evidently the Master, Scott showed the way and Hogg (the ‘peasant-poet’) stumbled along in his wake, not quite getting the point. However, the surviving documentary evidence seems entirely consistent with Hogg’s claim, and it no longer seems absurd to suppose that the omnivorous author of *Waverley* may have been interested in experiments in narrative technique being made by the man who was to become the author of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. In short, it does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility that Scott, in *Tales of My Landlord*, did indeed pick up and respond to Hogg’s breakthrough in narrative technique in the as-yet-unpublished *Brownie of Bodsbeck*.

If so, he adapted Hogg’s innovations for his own purposes. Hogg contrives to give narrative authority to subaltern voices, but Scott’s narrative manages to keep control of the stories from the Inn by filtering them through the gentlemanly post-Enlightenment sensibility of Peter Pattieson, who converts the oral tales to written form. The Hogg of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* and *Rural and Traditionary Tales* would have set out to tell the tale of *Old Mortality* in his own words – and the result would of course be very different from the scholarly tone and studied reasonableness of Peter Pattieson’s version of *The Tale of Old Mortality*. Hogg’s debate with Scott about orality goes back to an early stage in the careers of both men. When Scott was collecting traditional ballads for *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3), he received significant assistance from Hogg. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), Scott expresses the view that the old Border minstrelsy ‘was not framed for village churles, /But for high dames and mighty earls’. Responding to this notion in books such as *The Mountain Bard* (1807), *The Queen’s Wake* (1813), and *Mador of the Moor* (1816), Hogg uses his own poetry to present the old oral ballads as poems of the people, poems that are none the worse for belonging to ‘churles’ like the Ettrick Shepherd.

Non-elite voices also play an important part in Hogg’s most famous novel, the anonymously published *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The life-story of the long-dead Robert Wringhim is first told by a gentlemanly ‘Editor’, a member of Edinburgh’s social and intellectual elite, who follows the example of Peter Pattieson in *Old Mortality* and constructs his tale on the basis of a detached and allegedly objective sifting of the evidence provided by documents and by oral tradition. The Editor’s narrative is followed by Robert’s own private memoirs and confessions, and the novel concludes with a coda in which the Editor describes how he and some friends discovered Robert’s manuscript while opening a suicide’s grave on a mountain-top in Ettrick Forest. The two main narratives turn out to be disconcertingly different accounts of Robert’s life, but the two main narrators also turn out to be (at a deep level) disconcertingly alike: each sees himself as a member of a special or elect group, and each sets himself above and apart from ordinary common humanity. Other, more varied, voices intervene, however. The Editor’s narrative is challenged and subverted, towards its end, by the reported oral narrative of the prostitute Bell Calvert. Likewise, Robert’s narrative is challenged and subverted, towards its end, by the reported oral narrative of the servant Samuel Scrape. Furthermore, a disconcerting voice from the people is also heard in the coda, when an unruly Ettrick shepherd called James Hogg tries to obstruct the grave-robbing project of the Editor’s evidence-gathering party. Like *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, the *Justified Sinner* has many narrative voices – and, in both novels, voices from and of the
people carry greater moral and narrative authority than the voice of any elite. Arguably, however, it is in the *Justified Sinner* rather than the *Brownie* that Hogg’s response to *Old Mortality* is to be found. Like Galt, Hogg responded to *Old Mortality* as a non-elite and Presbyterian sympathiser with the Covenanters. However, Hogg’s questioning of Scott’s novel is less direct (but perhaps more subtle) than Galt’s. Clearly having the controversy over *Old Mortality* in mind, the Editor of the *Justified Sinner* concludes his main narrative with the words: ‘We have heard much of the rage of fanaticism in former days, but nothing to this.’ Robert Wringhim’s career in murder in the cause of God does indeed involve actions even more appalling than anything perpetrated by the fanatical Covenanters of Scott’s novel. In *Old Mortality*, Habakkuk Mucklewrath is presented as an object of horror, as a terrifying embodiment of the dangers of revolution. Unlike Mucklewrath, however, Hogg’s even more extreme Presbyterian fanatic gets to tell his own story – and Hogg’s ultimately questions Scott’s rejection of the Covenanters by contriving to make it possible for its readers to empathise with the ordinary common humanity that underlies the tortured and deluded fanaticism with which Robert pushes Presbyterian doctrines to dangerous and distorted extremes.

In view of their links with the potentially radical Presbyterian tradition, it may seem odd that Hogg and Galt were both associated with the Tory *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. The Presbyterian tradition was radical in politics; sympathetic to aspects of religious culture; culturally nationalist; and enthusiastic about reviving and maintaining Scottish pre-Union cultural traditions. Aspects of these concerns matched aspects of the *Blackwood’s* project, and this helped to open the pages of the magazine to Hogg and Galt. John Wilson (the leading figure of *Blackwood’s*) tended to present Hogg (and Burns) as writers about pious peasants, peasants who keep up the good old traditions of the good old days, peasants presented by Wilson as the salt of the earth and the backbone of Britain. That is one way to read Burns’s ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, but an egalitarian and radical reading is also possible, in which the poem can be seen to assert that real worth and value lie with the Cotter’s family rather than with decadent aristocrats. Freed from Wilsonian spin, and seen in their relationship to a radical Presbyterian tradition, Galt and Hogg no longer seem to be satellites of a world of lairds, lawyers and aristocrats. Instead, they emerge as writers who speak from and for ‘a fascinating, dense alternative if not counter culture’.

**Further reading**


The Scottish Book Trade at Home and Abroad, 1707–1918

Bill Bell

While the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of Scottish publishing is often attributed to the first three decades of the nineteenth century – sandwiched between an eighteenth-century period of ‘rise’ and late nineteenth-century ‘decline’ – the real story is of course far more complex.

The changing status of literary production in any period is intimately implicated in the economic and cultural history of its time. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the fate of the Scottish book trade was tied, like many of its other manufacturing interests, to the nation’s rising fortunes as an international trading power. In much the same way that textiles, tobacco and ship-building were transformed throughout this period from cottage industries to mass manufacturing interests, so printing and publishing were to become important elements in Scotland’s financial expansion, their ultimate success relying on an ability to negotiate a larger imperial market.

While in previous decades a minority of Scottish printers had benefited from royal patronage, the lapsing of the licensing laws in 1694 was temporarily to loosen the hold of the Stationer’s Company and provide new opportunities in a hitherto restricted literary marketplace. The additional benefits brought by the Union of 1707 were also to create important financial opportunities for a number of Scottish entrepreneurs, not least those printers and booksellers who were coming to see themselves as part of a larger British economic environment. With new opportunities came new challenges and it is in this period that the Scottish book trade earned its reputation for opportunism and ambition.

A number of other causes have been cited for the success of the eighteenth-century Scottish book trade, not least the favoured status that books and learning had come to hold in post-Reformation Scottish life. While literacy figures are difficult to establish for the early eighteenth century, it is generally conceded that by mid-century approximately 75 per cent of Scottish people were literate to some degree, well ahead of the European average for the same period. Although never fully realised, a late seventeenth-century scheme to establish a library in every Scottish parish was typical of a number of philanthropic efforts – most notably through the agency of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) – to make ‘improving’ reading matter generally available to the Scottish reading public. Through these and similar initiatives the ethos of self-help was to take root in Scotland’s towns and cities more than anywhere else in the British Isles.
Publishing the enlightenment

Increasingly conspicuous attempts to meet this growing demand for print are evident within Scotland from the mid-eighteenth century, resulting in the consolidation of Edinburgh and the rise of Glasgow as centres of production. While it is generally agreed that Scotland's printers had not hitherto distinguished themselves, by the mid-eighteenth century a number were earning reputations for superior production. Perhaps the most noteworthy example was provided by the press of the Glasgow brothers Andrew and Robert Foulis, who produced over 600 titles between 1740 and 1776. Using Alexander Wilson's ‘Scotch Roman’ type, Foulis classics such as their 'immaculate' Horace (1774) and the four-volume Homer (1756–8) were regarded as among the most innovative and distinguished literary texts of their day.

The decades that followed were to witness the emergence of an influential class of intellectual entrepreneur who, together with a number of ambitious writers and editors, did much to promote the interests of Scotland within the Republic of Letters. While the emphasis of the literary historian is predominantly on the role of the author in the dissemination of ideas, it is doubtful whether the Enlightenment could have manifested itself to the same extent in Scotland without the presence of such innovative bookmen. Their understanding of contemporary intellectual life as well as the economic imperative resulted in some of the most important literary productions of the day.

As His Majesty's Printer for Scotland, Alexander Kincaid had come to occupy an influential position among the intelligentsia by the 1740s. It is a tribute to his pragmatic and wide-ranging intellectual interests that the principal producer of Bibles in Scotland was also responsible for bringing the philosophical works of David Hume to the reading public. It was as a young bookseller in Kincaid's shop that William Creech learned his trade. Creech, of whom Burns once remarked that of all the literati he wrote 'most like a gentleman', was instrumental in the production of periodicals like Henry Mackenzie's *Lounger* (1785–6) and *Mirror* (1779) and the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* (1773–6), in whose pages were published some of the most eminent writers of the day. Presiding over one of the most successful publishing enterprises of the eighteenth century, Creech is said to have been worth £30,000 by 1799. Another man of letters in his own right, Creech's associate, William Smellie, was a highly influential editor and translator who operated at the centre of Scottish intellectual life. An obvious high point was his production of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1768–71. Although he is now most famous as Burns's first Edinburgh printer, it is a tribute to his influence that Smellie was also responsible for bringing to light works by Lord Kames, William Robertson, Henry Mackenzie and others.

The definition of what constituted 'literature' before the rise of Romanticism affords the term a meaning quite distinct from today's assumptions about the distinctiveness of 'imaginative literature'. Consequently, Scottish publishers in the eighteenth century appear to have been far more interested in commissioning works of science, medicine and history. Using the English reprint trade for the production of plays, poems and novels, the concentration of financial resources was on less 'literary' publishing in this period. The overwhelming financial success of works like *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and the poetry of Burns are notable exceptions and can be misleading. In this respect, as in others, the lists of mainstream Scottish publishers might be said to have differed substantially from their English counterparts.

Whatever their achievements at home, a legal battle between Scottish printers and the London trade had been ongoing since the 1710 Copyright Act (in the eighth year of Anne's
legislative reign), and continued to meet with resistance from those who for decades continued to flood the metropolitan trade with ‘pirated’ editions. The controversy came to a head with the watershed court case of 1774 in which the London Scottish bookseller William Donaldson successfully challenged the concept of ‘perpetual copyright’, finally leaving the way open for Scottish printers to issue legitimate reprints of the English classics.

An ever-increasing flow of labour and capital between Scotland and London meant that, from the middle of the eighteenth century, a network of ambitious Scots were coming to dominate the London book trade well into the nineteenth century. Andrew Miller is most famous today for having played midwife to Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755), but no less impressive is his involvement in the production and distribution of a number of the period’s seminal Scottish works of some of the most influential writers including, for example, Adam Smith, Lord Kames and Adam Ferguson. Associated with a network of London Scots, including the printer William Strahan (who changed his name from Strachan on moving south, to avert anti-Scots prejudice) and his sometime apprentice Thomas Cadell, Millar’s success was largely due to an ability to keep up his associations with fellow-Scots while cultivating an impressive range of influential English authors and book traders. Surviving records relating to the opportunistic Charles Elliot’s vigorous trade in books to and from London suggest something of the volume of activity that was going on between booksellers in both capitals. By way of Elliot’s Edinburgh shop, copious numbers of literary works (many in pirated Irish editions) by Pope, Fielding and Rousseau made their way to readers in the metropolis. A figure who was to dominate the London trade in the later eighteenth century was the Scottish publisher, the first John Murray (formerly McMurray). Through his business dealings, Murray remained strongly connected with his Scottish counterparts and was conscious of discovering as well as promoting Scottish authors in the metropolis, publishing among others the works of John Millar, Gilbert Stuart and Sir David Dalrymple.

As with other industries, the Empire was to provide Scottish booksellers and publishers with new economic opportunities and new markets. Early in the period, trade links with North America, established largely along the tobacco routes, meant that Scottish reprints of English classics were making their way from Scottish docks to principal ports such as Philadelphia in vast quantities by the mid-eighteenth century. Scots, too, would come to dominate North American bookselling, many of its leading figures having learned their trades in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. While there was a considerable transatlantic trade in Scottish reprints, Scots also led the way in exporting London imprints and it was not unusual for Glasgow booksellers to supply their American customers with copies of *The Spectator*, Cervantes, Milton and Locke. Since the early eighteenth century a shrewd eye for market demand had taught the most ambitious booksellers relative indifference to the ‘Scottishness’ of their lists as they saw themselves as cosmopolitan businesses within an expanding world economy.

The ‘Golden Age’, 1800–30

The early expansion of the book trade in Scotland is often attributed to the existence of relatively favourable credit terms in combination with a widespread regard for the ‘democratic intellect’. Whatever the reasons for the rise of Scottish publishing, it soon became apparent that by the turn of the nineteenth century Edinburgh saw itself as a competitor to London as the centre of British publishing. By the 1820s, the names of Scottish firms were to be found on the title-pages of some of the most important literary successes of the
day. It was Archibald Constable who first published the *Edinburgh Review* (1802), and a few years later acquired the rights to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In a brilliantly daring move, he was to pay Walter Scott an extravagant £1,000 for *Marmion* (1808), and presided over arguably the most important Scottish publishing venture of the age, Scott’s Waverley novels. Among his financial successes was *Rob Roy* (1817), which was reputed to have sold no fewer than 10,000 copies in a fortnight.

It was such self-confidence that led the Edinburgh booksellers into their substantial and controversial ventures in journal publishing. *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* main rival, the *London Magazine*, had been launched under the editorship of Aberdonian John Scott in 1820, while the Tory *Quarterly Review*, established by Walter Scott after his break with the *Edinburgh Review*, was published by the London Scot John Murray. Therefore, the four principal intellectual organs of the early nineteenth century may all be attributed to Scottish editors and publishers.

The influence of Scots in the London book trade continued to be felt in the establishment of a number of partnerships between Scotland and London. Based on mutual self-interest, the relationship between Robert Cadell (Scott’s publisher from the 1820s) and the London firm of Whittaker and Company was typical in ensuring an increased market for Scottish books in the south while at the same time providing an outlet in the north for the products of the London press. For all of its mutual benefits, it was exactly this kind of interdependence that led to the domino-like collapse of Constable, after the failure of his London agent Hurst and Robinson. Also affecting the fortunes of Constable’s associate Ballantyne, the ‘crash’ of 1826 left the Edinburgh publisher with a debt of £100,000, which Scott famously undertook to repay by writing: his *Life of Napoleon* (1827), the novels *Woodstock* (1826), *The Surgeon’s Daughter* and *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828), *Anne of Geierstein* (1829), *Count Robert of Paris* (1831), *Castle Dangerous* (1832) and the unfinished *Siege of Malta* (1831), alongside these novels, a series of plays, substantial essays and periodical works were only some of the publications he produced under financial duress between 1826 and his death in 1832. Scott’s resulting negotiations with the market were to have deep and lasting implications for the professionalisation of writing, his Magnum edition inaugurating the phenomenon of what would come to be called ‘Collected Works’.

Despite a number of celebrated failures, it is unlikely that the financial collapse was quite as widespread as is sometimes supposed. What is certain, however, is that it contributed to a growing sense of the need to restructure trade practices at a time when new industrial technologies were coming to the fore. The death of Scott and the departure of Carlyle for London, so often taken to symbolise the end of an era for Scottish literary production, were to have few repercussions on the nation’s publishing industry. This proved more than equal to the coming economic and technological changes that would transform book production over the next five decades from a small-scale process that had changed little since the days of Johann Gutenberg into a mass industry with a global reach.

**Industry and empire**

With the implementation of the steam press in the second decade of the nineteenth century, more efficient means of paper production, and the widening use of stereotyping (an industrial method attributed to the Scottish printer William Ged), Scots led the way in exploiting the new economies of scale. By 1845, Robert and William Chambers were
reputed to be printing as many sheets in a week as the whole of the Scottish press had produced in a month only a decade earlier.

If the appeal of Scott and Burns had done much to provide a newly literate population with a literature with which it could readily identify, by the 1830s a number of Scottish publishers were coming to cater to the new reading public in the form of cheap reprints and popular classics. The Scottish tradition of self-help was perhaps best exemplified in the publications of the brothers Robert and William Chambers who were to dominate the popular literary market throughout the rest of the century. In 1832, *Chambers*’s *Edinburgh Journal* was launched for the ‘elite of the labouring community; those [. . .] who are anxious to improve their circumstances by judicious means’. Here, if it were needed, was a clear indication of the existence of a new popular reading public: in the 1840s, at a time when the celebrated *Blackwood’s Magazine* was achieving sales of around 10,000, *Chambers*’s enjoyed a circulation of 87,000. A miscellany of informative articles on everything from geography and history, to science and contemporary morals, *Chambers*’s represented to the aspirant working classes what *Edinburgh* and *Blackwood*’s had previously for more respectable middle-class readers.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly difficult to speak in terms of a separate Scottish book trade, not only because of the permeation of the London book trade by Scots, but because printers and publishers throughout Britain found themselves competing for the same expanding market. Scottish firms would come to dominate large-scale printing, providing a vast proportion of texts for Britain’s publishers until the middle of the twentieth century. The competitive rates charged by firms such as R. & R. Clark of Edinburgh and James Maclehose of Glasgow meant that London publishers often turned north of the border for the production of what were to become classics of ‘English literature’. It is a mark of the important place of Scottish printing that by the mid-nineteenth century even the works of the ‘English’ Poet Laureate were being printed in Scotland on Scottish paper at a time when the ‘Edinburgh scale’ had become the standard method by which the British book trade estimated its costs.

Pragmatic attitudes towards the business of literature meant that the members of the Scottish book trade were not always respecters of the idea of an indigenous Scottish literature and the lists of major companies underwent increased anglicisation as they gained a share in an expanding and eclectic market. *Chambers*’s *Edinburgh Journal* (founded in 1832) became after 1853 simply *Chambers*’s *Journal*, reflecting the metropolitan ambitions of its publishers, who were to open a London agency for the company in the same year. In the early decades of the century Blackwood’s publishing house had been associated almost exclusively with Scottish writing, reflected in the overwhelmingly Scottish flavour of the content of *Blackwood’s Magazine*. As the years passed, the magazine that had promoted the names of John Galt, J. G. Lockhart and John Wilson was to turn to a much broader literary fare, reflecting the company’s ambitions within a larger British, American and imperial market.

While readers of early editions of Burns and Scott were left in no doubt of the Scottish origins of their books, as such writers passed out of copyright, they began to appear uniformly bound alongside the other greats of English literature. One example of the extent to which Scottish writing had become absorbed into the larger orbit of English literature was that, throughout the 1870s and 80s, even the Macmillans, staunchly proud of their Scottish origins, could issue biographies of Burns, Carlyle and Scott, under the rubric of their highly successful ‘English Men of Letters’ series.

If the distinctiveness of Scottish writing was in danger of becoming lost to an expansive British market, it might be argued that English authors just as often found themselves at the
behest of Scottish publishers. From the 1860s on, Blackwood’s was to publish from their offices in Edinburgh many of the leading non-Scottish writers of the day, including among others, George Eliot and Anthony Trollope. Well into the twentieth century, the firm would remain a major player in the world of literary publishing, eventually bringing the works of Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster and a host of other major writers to the English-speaking world. In the meantime, high-earning Scottish writers would come to capitalise on the late nineteenth-century imperial market, with the likes of J. M. Barrie, R. L. Stevenson and Arthur Conan Doyle making their marks on the metropolitan book trade and reaping the rewards of international success.

While the late nineteenth century is often regarded as a period of relative decline for Scottish literary culture, the business of printing and publishing in the period leading up to the First World War was more vigorous in Scotland than ever. Well into the twentieth century, firms like Collins, Blackie and Nelson were to dominate important sectors of an ever-increasing imperial trade. Consequently, one issue that continues to dominate discussions is how far Scotland’s literature industry can reasonably be regarded as indigenous, and how far its contribution to the production of culture can be regarded as an aspect of a larger British imperial phenomenon. It is therefore all the more remarkable that, despite over three centuries of integrated participation by Scotland’s authors and publishers in the Greater British marketplace, there have been a number of recent attempts to claim a ‘marginal’ status for Scottish literature during this period.

While literary critics have tended to emphasise, on the one hand, the biographical author and, on the other, the text as discourse, relatively little attention has been paid to the historical nature of textual production itself. It may well be that a more detailed consideration of the materiality of literary texts, in all of their historical and economic aspects, can lead us to think in more complex ways about what may, or may not, constitute a national literature. The concept of the literary cannot be accounted for exclusively in terms of its textuality, but has long been an important feature of intellectual commerce; as such it becomes clear that the printed text is no respecter of national boundaries. It should come as no surprise that ordinary Scots throughout this period were not particularly patriotic in their reading habits. While many Scottish readers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries identified, with a sense of pride, with their native literature, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Scottish mentality was informed as much by the work of non-Scottish writers as it ever was by Burns and Scott. Reflecting on his use of the Peebles Circulating Library in the first decades of the century, Robert Chambers later recalled having been absorbed from an early age in the works of Swift, Cervantes, Pope and Goldsmith. And as contemporary library catalogues demonstrate, Wordsworth, Byron and Dickens were just as popular throughout provincial Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century as they were in the southern counties.

What is certain is that by 1918 Scotland’s book trade could still look back with confidence on its achievements, as the names of Nelson, Collins, Blackie and Bartholomew were firmly established in the constellation of international publishing. Well into the twentieth century, Scottish publishers would lead the way in the educational and reference markets, able to draw on a highly skilled workforce and benefiting from the communication links that were made possible by the nation’s effective shipping lines. By contrast, the story of the Scottish press in the late twentieth century is one of decline, the gradual withdrawal of printing and publishing mirroring the general erosion of Scotland’s industrial base.

It is difficult today to appreciate the importance that the Scottish book trade once held at a time when the great publishing names of the past, if not defunct, are now mere imprints
of larger conglomerates. It is perhaps worth remembering, however, that the global impact that Scottish literature was to enjoy over three centuries owed as much to the nation’s publishers and printers as the ‘native genius’ of its authors.

Further reading

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods of enormous change for the fortunes of the Scottish theatre, which encompassed religious and civil opposition, a renaissance in play-making and play-going, the rise of a modern industry, and a period at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century when Scottish artists laid the foundations of European Naturalism in drama, with a revolution in realistic dialogue and settings. There was also a connection made between audience and art form that created in Scotland a type of national theatre emerging out of public debate quite unlike anything in Europe.

The manner in which the departure of the Stuart court for London affected patronage for the arts has been well documented by Adrienne Scullion and Donald Campbell. Without the protection of powerful patrons, theatres and actors had little chance of succeeding. Their efforts were fragmented at best and hampered by the ongoing political and religious struggles for civil power as the Presbyterian Church sought to tighten its hold on public life in part through the suppression of popular entertainments and traditional art forms. Presbyterian clerics and politicians were not simply wary of practices irredeemably associated with the Roman Catholic Church; they also had fundamental objections to collective engagement with a public act unashamedly based on ‘deceit’.

Nevertheless, there were efforts at establishing a permanent theatre in Edinburgh, supported by groups of influential citizens. Allan Ramsay’s involvement with the stage began in 1719 with a prologue written for an amateur performance that included the rallying cry of ‘Knock down the fools, who dare with empty rage/spit in the face of virtue and the stage’. Over almost twenty years Ramsay would support one or other company or theatre. His pastoral opera The Gentle Shepherd was first performed by schoolboys in Haddington in 1729, but Ramsay had less socially acceptable dramatic friends, notably the actor Tony Ashton, whose company performed around 1725–6. Ramsay wrote Some Hints in Defence of Dramatic Entertainment (1727) in support of Ashton, but the actor eventually gave up the unequal struggle to perform legally and fled Edinburgh in 1728 ahead of creditors. A broadside ballad entitled ‘A Pil to Tonny Ashton; or, the Play-House Puld Down’ gives a flavour of the atmosphere in which the company left, calling Ashton a ‘Stroter [. . .] black with every crime/Varlet below the dignity of rhime’ and a ‘Bogle to the crying Child’.

The longer-lived Edinburgh Players fared somewhat better, touring several other Scottish towns until finally defeated by the 1737 Licensing Act that made their activities illegal. Walpole’s Act, establishing the UK-wide system whereby only theatres holding a patent granted by Parliament were entitled to play ‘serious’ drama and call themselves Theatres Royal, and whereby all pieces to be performed had to be licensed in advance by

Barbara Bell
the Stage Censor in the Lord Chamberlain’s office, was a blow to Scottish drama beyond the dissolution of one company, in that it stifled playwriting on Scottish subjects. Fractions in Scotland were twice in armed revolt against the government during the period, and with limited opportunities for public assembly, it became a matter of priority that anything that might ferment trouble (which in London meant national/Jacobite material) was banned from potentially volatile Scottish stages. Finally, when in 1736 a Bill put before Parliament by Lord Glenorchy to obtain a patent for a theatre in Edinburgh ran into the united opposition of the Council, the Dean of Guild and the University, all of whom were appalled at the prospect of such a corrupting influence being set in their midst, Ramsay retired from the fray. For the next twenty years only plays presented ‘gratis’, after concerts of music, would be played in Edinburgh; but Ramsay had gifted Scotland one of the great amateur plays of the period: The Gentle Shepherd was performed repeatedly by groups the length and breadth of the country.

In the light of the volume and vituperativeness of the pamphlets, sermons and official pronouncements against plays and play-actors, that eighteenth-century Scotland saw any theatre at all is greatly to the credit of those like Allan Ramsay and John Home who battled against official hostility, clerical opprobrium and audience apathy. Home’s contribution to Scottish drama was a notably brave stand, given that he was a minister of the Church of Scotland. When his verse tragedy Douglas premièred in the Canongate Theatre under the management of West Digges in December 1756, Home unleashed a storm of controversy, in which popular enthusiasm for a play set in Scotland was matched by the outrage expressed by sections of the Church towards Home and other Moderate clergy who had been rash enough to support the venture. Enlightenment figures such as Adam Ferguson, David Hume, Dr Carlyle and Hugh Blair took parts in a rehearsed reading of the play, whereas, for the Popular faction of the Church, John Witherspoon (later a signatory to the American Declaration of Independence and President of Princeton University) produced a pamphlet entitled A serious enquiry into the nature and effects of the stage. Being an attempt to show, that contributing to the support of a public theatre, is inconsistent with the character of a Christian (1757). The debate was bitter and the Presbytery of Edinburgh acted against those ministers who had attended the play; however, the tide had turned and, whilst economic worries might plague Scottish managers for decades to come, they were much less likely to fall foul of magistrates and clergy.

Whilst the Kirk railed against the players, Scotland became increasingly performative and voluble. Society was ‘performative’ in the sense that the conscious performance of role and ritual was an everyday occurrence. It was a voluble society in the sense of being steeped in an oral tradition and Scotland particularly valued the professions based in that tradition. Pulpit, courtroom and lecture hall were all public stages where Scots, in their own accents, could develop and practise skills of oratory and persuasion. Actors of the period were known to offer their services as vocal coaches to those wishing to speak ‘English’; indeed, Angus Keith’s history of the Aberdeen Theatre, A Scotch play-house; being the historical records of the Old Theatre Royal, Marischal Street (1878), notes a 1789 advertisement announcing that a local minister, Dr Chandler, ‘continues to teach ladies and gentlemen the English language, both at home and abroad’.

Although the legislation which had established Edinburgh’s New Town had also given Scottish authorities the right to grant patents for Theatres Royal, until the coming of the National Drama, it was small itinerant companies, criss-crossing the country and playing their popular repertoire, which kept Scottish drama moving forward. Unfortunately, the national works written for the smaller companies struggled to extend beyond their original
spheres. Soldier/actor/playwright Archibald Maclaren wrote around ninety pieces, which offer a glimpse into the hidden sub-strata of works performed by minor theatres and itinerant companies, never submitted for licensing and rarely put into print. Maclaren's economic dependence on his writing saw most of his plays printed and the text of *Kenneth, King of Scots* (1807), an Ossianic history piece, says it was performed at Dumfries, Berwick, Kelso, Paisley, Dundee, Perth, Aberdeen and Greenock. Maclaren was a highly flexible playwright, working in varied forms and on a wide variety of popular and topical themes. In *The Humours of Greenock Fair* (1789) and *The Highland Drover* (1790), he pokes fun at the collisions of Highland and Lowland cultures in a mixture of Gaelic and Scots-English. Maclaren's enduring poverty and eventual move south were symptomatic of the dismissal of popular national materials before the coming of the National Drama, and the precariousness of the profession.

The more literary late eighteenth-century growth of Gothic Romanticism also produced drama. Scott, Hogg and Galt wrote closet dramas heavily influenced by the Gothic and the Scottish ballad tradition. These were plays written to be read, in which it was possible to conjure up the most fantastic of stage effects. Some would not have passed the Censor, whilst others, like Scott's *Auchindrane*, had brief, unsuccessful stage careers; however, one of the most intriguing features of these 'Gothic' plays was that frequently the plot revealed the supernatural effect to be artificial – an illusion or a delusion. Even *The Doom of Devorgoil: A Melo-Drama* (1818), which Scott wrote as a gift for his godson, child of the actor Daniel Terry, featured both an authentic ghost and two fake spectres. In fact, Scott's best single work for the stage, a prologue written for Charles Mackay (the 'real' Mackay) to deliver in character as Meg Dods, the landlady in *St Ronan's Well*, deliberately blurred the boundaries between page, stage and auditorium.

The writer who crossed the closet/stage divide with most authority was Joanna Baillie, the leading British playwright of her generation. Her long career encompassed plays, poems, religious writing and a substantial body of dramatic theory, contained in the lengthy prefaces preceding each volume of plays. Recent scholarly reassessment of 'closet' drama now accords Baillie the critical importance in the period with which her contemporaries had long credited her. From the first, Baillie declared her ambition to explore the unspoken and hidden in human experience. The result was that, as Catherine Burroughs points out in *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Women Romantic Writers* (1997),

as early as 1789, Baillie's theory suggested that the closet play, rather than being anti-theatrical and politically irrelevant, had the potential to dramatize publically [sic] the realities of closet life.

In addition, with the production of *De Montfort* at Drury Lane in 1800, she became one of the most committed writers of challenging female roles, focusing on women's experience of societal pressures. Jane Montfort is a woman caught up in events not of her making, whilst *The Tryal*, a meta-theatrical play about 'playing', sees young women challenging the right of others to shape their destinies, through disguise and performance. One of her last works, *Witchcraft*, sees one woman accused of witchcraft, whilst another is so damaged by past events that she believes herself to be possessed and becomes dangerous as a consequence.

Baillie was considered by some of her contemporaries to be freakish, as a woman writing tragedy, and she fought tenaciously for her right to explore all avenues of the human condition. Yet her strong Unitarian beliefs (convictions she shared with, among others, Elizabeth Gaskill and George Eliot) meant that she also considered her play *The Martyr*, dealing with
the conversion of a Roman centurion to Christianity, to be unfit for the stage because of its religious content. In the end, Baillie’s abiding concern was with the practicalities of communication. She was shrewd in her assessment of the mechanisms of audience reception, analysing the effects of blocking, theatre architecture and stage lighting on the performance and reception of psychological truth, whilst locating the basis of audience responses within the theatre to performative elements within society, such as public executions.

Closet drama was not solely the province of the middle class or educated elite; the period produced ‘peasant playwrights’ much as it saw ‘peasant poets’. William Harriston is known primarily for *The Steam-Boat Traveller’s Remembrancer* (1824); however, this weaver/soldier/fisherman poet also wrote ‘closet’ dramas, including *The Fortunate Ploughman* (1816) and *The Intended Emigrants* (1817). Certain themes recur throughout Harriston’s work. There is a strong belief in the positive power of education, exemplified in ‘books’, and warnings of the potential waste of men and gear by drink. The knowledge of their ruin leads the father in *The Intended Emigrants* to go on a drinking spree that deepens their distress, the memory of which haunts him. The strength of the pieces lies in the detail of working lives and the emotion conveyed by Harriston’s uncomplicated characters. There is sentiment aplenty, but humour too and an overwhelming sense of the precariousness of life.

As the nineteenth century began, the isolated examples of Baillie’s *The Family Legend* (1810) and adaptations of Burns served to accentuate the dearth of material that spoke to audiences in their native accents. The Scottish National Drama, emerging as Harriston was writing, dominated the Scottish stage for the next twenty years. It was a hugely popular repertoire of performed plays, with a core of dramatisations from Scott. In England the epithet ‘national’ was frequently applied to military or naval pieces celebrating British forces; but, in Scotland ‘national’ pieces were Scottish in character and often historical in setting. Impetus for the National Drama arose out of the early nineteenth-century tension between a resurgent cultural identity, expressed in growing audience expectations, and the limited national repertoire. Alongside occasional performances of *Macbeth* and Friedrich Schiller’s sweeping, romantic and historically inaccurate *Maria Stuart* stood Home’s *Douglas*, Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd* and ‘Scotch’ ballets like *Jockey and Jenny; or, Love in the Highlands*, featuring nimble-footed peasantry. Throughout this period, *Douglas* and *The Gentle Shepherd* were the favourite plays of the amateur groups whose performances for charity went, in the view of *The Weekly Review and Dramatic Critic* (1 October 1852), ‘far to negative [sic] the thunders of the Church’.

The minor theatres were the first to play dramatisations of the Waverley novels and the first to call them ‘National’ dramas. In Hawick in 1817 *The Lady of the Lake* was described as a ‘National Drama’, while the Edinburgh Theatre Royal still described it as a ‘melo-dramatic’ romance or entertainment. When *The Heart of Midlothian* opened in 1819, the Theatre Royal described it as a ‘Romantic Play’ for six weeks before it changed the description to ‘National Drama’. The first National Dramas were not considered to be ‘serious’ drama by the Patent Houses until they became a recognisable marketing brand and a thus a source of economic rivalry between Patent House and minor theatre. These pieces were a cut above the material usually accessible to minor theatres, who relished the opportunity to compete with the Theatres Royal in producing what both theatre professionals and audience alike recognised as a ‘serious’ genre. Out of 1,024 identified performances of plays derived from *Rob Roy* on Scottish stages, only nine were advertised as ‘melodrama’ – and eight of those performances were at the Caledonian Theatre, Edinburgh, locked in a legal battle with the Theatre Royal and its manager, W. H. Murray. In 1825 Murray tried to have the Waverley dramas declared the sole property of the Patent House, and won his case, but could only claim individual
dramatisations. The key element of the most successful National Dramas was Scott’s dialogue, which was in the public domain and therefore available to all, from Theatre Royal to travelling tent, or ‘gegge’. The Scott adaptations gave minors a repertoire with which they could compete on equal economic and artistic terms; after the 1843 Theatres Act abolishing the division between legitimate and illegitimate plays, some theatre professionals credited Scott with bringing about the end of the patent system.

Legislation had made access to and acknowledgement of Scotland’s history and distinctive cultural identity live political issues; the National Dramas fulfilled the twin roles of allowing audiences to indulge in ‘national’ sentiment without feeling themselves to be perpetuating old enmities, and made attendance at the theatre an acceptable choice for a much wider range of people. The romantic invention of Schiller’s *Maria Stuart* was overtaken by the familiar history of W. H. Murray’s *Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland; or, The Castle of Loch-Leven* (1825). Their subject matter was woven into, and from, the fabric of Scottish cultural life and the *Glasgow Dramatic Review* (18 December 1844) attributed their popularity to ‘their causing a running commentary to fill the mind as we witness them’.

The Whig *Scotsman* newspaper declared of a production of *Rob Roy* at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, ‘[why] should we not be proud of our national genius, humour, music, kindness and fidelity? – *Why not be national?’* (20 February 1819). To previously reticent sections of society that already had a regular engagement with scripted dialogue in a wide range of ‘closet’ formats, the National Drama represented an acceptable bridge to live and public performance. A much wider range of social groups now attended the theatre, content to be identified with performances of national pieces, which were also routinely used for special occasions: theatre openings, charity performances and benefits. Audiences flocked to see *Guy Mannering*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *The Abbot* and others on stage, returning again until the National Drama reshaped theatre and theatre-going practices in Scotland.

The National Drama provided some measure of financial security to an industry that expanded rapidly, and an arena for ambitious actors, managers and scene painters. Whereas the Censor had in 1819 banned the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, from producing a play depicting the flight of Bonnie Prince Charlie, by 1828 it could advertise a similar work ‘by the son of [. . .] Flora Macdonald’. Scots voices and dialects escaped the comedic ghetto to articulate a range of much-loved characters, and audiences came to expect some accuracy in the depiction of Scottish scenery. The adjective ‘Scotch’ disappeared from Scottish bills and during the peak period of popularity between 1825 and 1832 pieces taken solely from Scott were seen on one night in three. However, the most important single impact was undoubtedly on the artificial division between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ theatre.

W. H. Murray is a key figure in theatre of the period, not only because he was himself the playwright of some notable dramas, including *The Heart of Midlothian* (1820) and *Cramond Brig* (1826), which included popular declarations of Scotland’s rights, but also because he trained a generation of actors and managers of major Scottish/British theatres. His insistence on thorough rehearsals was legendary and one pupil, the Victorian actor-manager John Coleman in *Fifty Years of an Actor’s Life* (1904), declared that ‘The National Theatre of Scotland occupied a position so unique and so dignified that nothing like it now remains in existence.’ Throughout a long career he managed to place the Theatre Royal (located in Shakespeare Square opposite Scotland’s Register House in the centre of Edinburgh) at the heart of Scottish artistic life. In fact his success in portraying the Edinburgh Theatre Royal as the true home of the National Drama has rather obscured the origins of the genre in the minor houses and small companies, and its spread across Scotland.
Although he was single-minded enough to effectively drive rival managers, such as Corbet Ryder, from Edinburgh, Murray's instinct was to avoid the type of political dissent that regularly dogged theatres in London. It was a similar impetus that impelled Walter Scott's construction of a national performance of unity in what he termed 'The King's Jaunt' – the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822. In this, Murray ably assisted Scott and the attention to detail that Coleman identified in Murray's stage work found its most potent outlet on a larger stage. The novelist combined forces with the proto-director to create community performance on a large scale, putting the contemporary theatre's passion for picturisation and spectacle to use. The scenes, whether on the Royal Mile or in Parliament House, were set with a director's eye for mass, detail, form and movement, the sight lines being carefully considered. Old icons, such as the Scottish Regalia, became properties in scenes that emphasised reconciliation. There were new costumes, extensive rehearsals and inbuilt opportunities for community participation.

Those who had no official role could participate in the spectacle simply by their presence in appropriate costume. The procession that brought George IV up Leith Walk saw the cavalcade, escorted by tartan-clad 'warriors', pass through a sea of blue and white 'extras', the Edinburgh magistrates having requested that all onlookers dress in the colours of the Saltire. The invitation to clan chiefs to contribute to the event with their 'tails' (or full retinue) saw these symbolic warriors welcomed back into the nation's capital as honoured participants in a symbolic representation of Scotland's martial heritage, while the serving officers in their government tartans portrayed the stability that the populace should now enjoy. Between these two extremes of authenticity and political expediency walked the Celtic Society, an inclusive cultural construct of those engaged by Highland traditions. Although on opposite sides politically, The Scotsman and The Sentinel of 4 September 1822 agreed that George's visit to the Theatre Royal to see Rob Roy was the occasion when he was closest to the populace. The Sentinel felt the theatre trip to be 'an apt and proper conclusion to the processions, reviews, balls, and festivals', whilst The Scotsman was sure that that 'THE KING was here, for the first time, literally in the midst of the Scottish People'. Once George had left Edinburgh, this grandest of performances was reflected back on to page and stage alike.

William Harriston probably had the most exciting experience of the event itself. Travelling to Edinburgh, he had been a passenger on the steamship Dumbarton Castle that ran aground off Leith. Harriston used the occasion for a closet sketch, 'The Rocks of Granton; or Hospitality in Perfection' (1823). The scene is laid on the deck of a steamship, aground on rocks and surrounded by fog. There are 300 characters, some fifty speaking parts and they are mostly named for their professions. The occasion has brought together a cross-section of the Scottish nation who would otherwise be unlikely to have met, and the accident has loosened tongues. Some of Harriston's familiar themes are aired: a sailor and vintner argue about the evils of drink; however, there are wholly individual voices too, one mother declaring her firm intention never to set foot on a steamship again. Harriston's sketch ends with the local landowner and his guest, a Highland chieftain, rescuing the passengers, but in the first edition Harriston continues the scene with a poem, describing Leith harbour, as it fills with people awaiting the king, 'Like seated amphitheatre/Is Leith's extensive pier'.

By 1830 the widespread continental success of Scott adaptations was well known. Scottish theatre had become, particularly through the writings of its premier playwrights, Joanna Baillie and 'at one remove' Walter Scott, an arena of debate and innovation. In addition the theatrical work of Alexander Naysmyth and of David Wilkie – whose art would so influence the school of German Domestic realism and through it the naturalist
playwright Gerhart Hauptmann – created influential pictorial scenes of domestic realism and historical authenticity.

Coleman called the Edinburgh Theatre Royal ‘Scotland’s National Theatre’ and its standing was high, but it was not the Scottish national theatre. In Europe during the period, numerous national theatres were being created based around individual theatres and companies. Some had theatre schools attached, whilst their artistic policies frequently included aims that consciously moved away from the popular stage, seeking to ‘purify’ the debased popular taste. Loren Kruger, in The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France and America (1992), has identified Schiller’s hope that a ‘national theatre might [. . .] call the nation into being’ by seeing a nation in harmony in the assembled audience, with the formation of some National Theatres as cultural consolations for nation-states and peoples lacking real political self-determination. However, in Scotland the cumulative effect of the rise of the National Drama, alongside the Enlightenment spirits of enquiry and ownership and the consciously theatrical shaping of public occasions, meant that this National Theatre emerged from the actions of the people rather than being refined by an elite. Scottish society now supported the institutions that suited them and had the confidence to engage with them in such a way as to by-pass officially sanctioned structures.

As the century progressed the changing nature of the theatre industry saw an increasing split between the major theatres and the popular venues that ranged from sizeable theatres and music halls to the geggie theatres that still toured at fair times. The national repertoire was now being treated very differently by the serious stage and by popular performers. The largest theatres were increasingly run as receiving houses, part of UK-wide chains of theatres run by commercial managements, in place of actor-managers with a stake in the artistic output of the venues. Here, the National Drama had an iconic status, blazoned on programmes alongside ‘Comedy, Tragedy and Farce [. . .] all the year round’; but, this commitment was largely symbolic and the effect was to mummify the work, treating it with a heavy reverence which stifled both innovation and the lively exchange between audience, actor and material that had been at the heart of the movement.

The popular stage and the amateur stage – in a return to eighteenth-century practices – continued to engage with national material, a habit which was approved of in the amateurs but frowned on in the professionals. In 1881 The Quiz reviewer complained of a burlesque entitled Robbing Roy; or, Scotch’d and Kill’d showing in Glasgow that 'there is a sort of vandalism in the very act of laughing that for me, at any rate, blunts the point of every witticism'. A reviewer in The Chiel in July 1883 seemed to disapprove of repeat productions of national pieces at popular theatres on principle; he sniffed, 'The artistic and pecuniary success of the former production [i.e. Jeannie and Effie Deans], a few weeks ago, no doubt warrants this burst of national dramatic enthusiasm. Imph’m.’ It was a brave Scottish author who now sought to dramatise his or her work, expectations were high and a sense of humour noticeably absent. R. L. Stevenson’s adaptation of his tale of Deacon Brodie, played in Glasgow in 1883, was called by The Chiel critic ‘one of the most tedious plays I have had the misfortune to witness for a long while’.

Another, rather more accomplished playwright, found dramatising his own writing also met with disapproval at home. J. M. Barrie had dramatised The Little Minister as a star vehicle for an American actress, Maude Adams. The draft notes for the play reveal that Barrie had originally written something rather darker than the piece that finally emerged, but had gradually stripped out the historical background. This left his chorus of ‘Auld Licht’ elders as a comic backdrop to the romantic fantasy of the free-spirited Lady Barbara and her minister husband, Gavin Dishart. The Scotsman critic in November 1897 was damning, declaring that
Barrie had replaced hope with ‘disappointment in the hearts of those who think seriously
about our national drama’. In fact, the critic was falling into the trap of judging Barrie’s work
in terms that no longer applied at the end of the nineteenth century.

Whilst early nineteenth-century Europe looked to Scott and Baillie for writing to influ-
ence drama that moved away from Romanticism, the National Drama of Scotland had
been as much the product of the social and cultural politics of the society from which it
emerged as of its playwrights. Although The Little Minister was a commercial success, Barrie
himself came to dislike the piece, recognising its limitations. Nonetheless, in J. M. Barrie
the development of nineteenth-century Scottish drama had come full circle to be embod-
ied in the work of a playwright who combined the rich narrative traditions of his native
land with the play-writing skills of a European master craftsman. His would be the works
that would play into the twentieth century, and his the lasting theatrical vision.

Further reading

Campbell, Donald (1996), Playing for Scotland: A History of the Scottish Stage, 1715–1965,
Edinburgh: Mercat Press.
Meisel, Martin (1983), Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-
The literature of industrialisation in Scotland is foreshadowed by John Knox’s famous 1820 painting of the first steamboat on the river Clyde, which may have earlier carried Robert Burns as a passenger. Just as the agricultural economy that Burns inhabited was about to give way to industrialism, the dichotomy between the depiction of country and city was entering the national literary fabric. On the one hand, Scotland might be evoked as a pastoral world of gentle shepherds or an exotic wilderness of Highland rogues; on the other, the industrial city was becoming the location in which most of the nation’s population was occupied. The city-centred merchant mentality of Bailie Nicol Jarvie is first cousin to the Robin Hood-like Highland outlaw in Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1817), where the Great Western Road is a bridge from the international merchant city of Glasgow to the pre-industrial north, and back again.

Industrialising Scotland changed the nation’s character. The rate of urbanisation in Scotland, the rising number of emigrants leaving the country in the early nineteenth century, and the increasing concentration of the population in the cities (particularly in Glasgow through the late nineteenth century) had a deep legacy in terms of modern national self-representation. While most Scots were urbanised by the early twentieth century, Scotland’s transformation from a rural and agricultural ethos to a city-centred one happened more quickly than was generally represented in most modes of cultural production, and particularly in literature. This was partly because the international readership for images and icons of Scotland yearned for the consolations of the country, not the unpalatable imagery of city squalor. It was also partly because the rate of change to an industrial economy meant that a rurally grounded sense of community could be maintained, albeit in evolving forms, in the alienating world of late Victorian capitalism.

This was rich ground for writing. Ideals of communal morality might confront amoral economic imperatives and the excesses of capitalist individualism in fiction, from John Galt to Robert Louis Stevenson and George Douglas Brown. The context of growing industrialism gave these confrontations sharp focus. The industrial city appears rarely as a valorised centre for labyrinthine social drama, as in Dickens’s London, yet James Thomson’s *The City of Dreadful Night* (while more nightmare-visions than actual industrial city) does represent a vital, maze-like, multi-dimensional world promising complex modernities; it deeply influenced T. S. Eliot.

The commercial disposition described in John Galt’s *The Entail* (1822) enforces a moral perspective evoking rural ideals of community. The tension between industrial commerce and rural hinterland is brilliantly realised in both the narrative and texture of the novel, as it moves between Glasgow and the Ayrshire countryside, with reference to the Muirkirk iron works, the merchants of Glasgow, the city’s theatre world and the different characters of the
two principal cities: Glasgow open, materialist and communal, Edinburgh walled and self-important with pomp and pageantry. The west’s proto-industrialism is pre-eminent in this configuration but it would be wrong to overlook the burgeoning industrial darkness from whose shadows Edinburgh’s most threatening characters emerge. James Hogg, coming to the city from the Borders, must have been hypersensitive to the duplicities and hypocrisies of the city’s social mores. It is not only psychological and supernatural ambiguities that are exploited in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) but also those of urban self-representation. Robert Wringhim’s evil nemesis Gil-Martin flourishes in the anonymity of the city crowd. Similarly, it is a city crowd, the mob, that Scott describes in the Porteous riot scenes at the beginning of *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818). These are not industrial workers but they are city-people moved by deep feelings of injustice relating to social order and authority. These feelings are proto-typical of those which will occupy the workers in Hugh MacDiarmid’s poem, *The Dead Liebknecht* (from *Penny Wheep*, 1926) and the marchers and strikers in Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *Cloud Howe* (1932) and *Grey Granite* (1933) over a century later. In the latter novel, the description of a police charge putting down a rising of industrial workers is set in the fictional city of Dundon but is very possibly based on Gibbon’s experience of the General Strike in Glasgow in 1926.

There are similar foreshadowings in nineteenth-century Scottish poetry. Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), one of the most popular poets of his era, in ‘Lines on Revisiting a Scottish River’ laments so-called progress as industrial effluvia have turned the rippling beauty of the Clyde into a seething, polluted mess. The poem begins with a bitter rhetorical challenge: ‘And call they this Improvement?’ Campbell’s Clyde is now a place where ‘Nature’s face is banish’d and estranged’ and the riverbanks are ‘With sooty exhalations cover’d o’er’ and ‘Unsightly brick-lanes smoke, and clanking engines gleam’. It is not only the destruction of scenic beauty Campbell abhors but the way in which ‘the human breed/Degenerate as they swarm and overflow’. The poem’s resolution sets a prophetic tone: ‘To gorge a few with Trade’s precarious prize, /We banish rural life, and breathe unwholesome skies’.

Similar abhorrence of industrialisation is present in the mid-century poetry of Elizabeth Hamilton and William Thom. However, pre-industrial Glasgow is frequently praised and the legacy of the image of the ‘Dear Green Place’ (the popularly supposed Gaelic meaning of the city’s name) suggests a foundation in rural idealism that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century representations of the city were to ironise bitterly. Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), in his decidedly unionist *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–6), most famously presents Glasgow as ‘a very fine city’ where ‘the four principal streets are the fairest for breadth, and the finest built that I have ever seen in one city together’. Dougal Graham (1724–79), in his poem ‘John Highlandman’s remarks on the City of Glasgow’, makes fun of the Highlander’s naivety from the Lowlander’s perspective, but there is also a sympathy for the Candide-like, awe-struck vision: ‘she never saw a ponnier town/standing on her feet’. Industrialism is incipient in ‘Glasgow: A Poem’ by John Mayne (1759–1836), where the merchants at Glasgow Cross ‘shine like Nabobs’ and ‘Commerce engages a’ their care, /And a’ their chat’. And in ‘Glasgow’ (1857), Alexander Smith (1829–67) depicts a now heavily industrialised city in vivid images of haunting ferocity and spectacle, presenting ‘Another beauty, sad and stern’ in which ‘fierce streams of blinding ore [. . .] roar/Down to the harbour bars;/Smoulder in smoky sunsets, flare/On rainy nights [. . .]’. There is the ‘flap of foundry fires’ and the ‘long dark river of the dead’ and, while Smith dwells fondly on the suburbs and ‘happy Summer smiles’, there is a feeling of dark belonging in the poem which takes pride in the scale of industrialisation and identification of the poet with a world of ‘Black Labour’ and
‘secret-moaning caves’: ‘City! I am true son of thine’. This ringing, yet keen-eyed exclamation of the pleasure of presence and familiar inhabitation of the industrial city is an augury of the developments of the 1980s and 1990s in Alasdair Gray’s Lanark (1984), the fiction of James Kelman, Agnes Owens and Irvine Welsh, and Edwin Morgan’s post-industrial Glasgow in Cathures (2003).

Morgan’s contemporary Tom Leonard, in his ground-breaking 1990 anthology Radical Renfrew, drew attention to a vast amount of neglected poetry of nineteenth-century industrial Scotland and crucial ways of reading it, including consideration of emigrant poets like John Barr, who went from Paisley to New Zealand to sing the praises of a non-industrialised social order in which capitalist economics might be worked out without tyranny and the agonies of class discrimination. Other poets, and particularly women writing between 1850 and 1900, reflect and protest about the social conditions of industrialised Scotland and much work is still to be done to republish and re-evaluate these poems. Janet Hamilton writes in ‘Oor Location’ of ‘the whisky-shop and pawn’ and the ‘ruination’ characteristic to cities of ‘ragged ladies [. . .] enginemen, and Paddies [. . .] colliers [. . .] fechtin’, drinkin’[. . .]’ while Jessie Russell in ‘Woman’s Rights versus Woman’s Wrongs’ is magnificently unforgiving in her feminist priorities:

Workmen’s wages have risen, but so has the price of bread.  
While female work is so poorly paid, can women be clothed or fed?  
Many a homeless orphan girl is mounting a stranger’s stair,  
Weary and sad, to the room she rents, with little of comfort there.

For Russell, there are innumerable ‘slaves’ and drudges to be found in ‘our city gentlemen’s houses’ and many wives who are beaten by husbands who never suffer due punishment: ‘a life for a life, and the murderer’s hung, and we think not the law inhuman, /Then why not the lash for the man who kicks or strikes a defenceless woman?’

When James Easson writes in ‘The Factory Girl’ of ‘the rapid wheel/That merrily whirls the while’ and ‘the mighty arm/Of the engine’ sweeping its track, he evokes not only the engines and machinery of industrial factory work but also the daily round of the thrifty, dutiful girl, which extends into all her days: ‘An endless scene of activeness’ and obscure toil. Marion Bernstein’s ‘A Song of Glasgow Town’ and ‘A Song for the Working Man’ similarly depict starving children, factories polluting the Clyde, oppressed women, while William Thom’s ‘Whisperings for the Unwashed’ (with its bitter, mock-comic refrain, ‘Rubadub, rubadub, row-dow-dow!’) has laughing lairds, ragged weavers and squalid drunks in a social order that spurs violent exclamation: ‘Oh! hasten it Heaven! Man longs for his right’.

The poetry of the neglected James Young Geddes (1850–1913) also presents the sense that industry might have a strange, terrible beauty and value of its own but it is charged with moral force at the civic hypocrisies evident in industrial Dundee. ‘Glendale & Co. (After Walt Whitman)’ begins with the great American poet’s sense of social justice and democratic constitution and employs Whitman’s long line and free verse, chanting a litany of bitter indignation as he describes the firm of Glendale & Co., ‘grown from small beginnings’ to something now hellish that ‘dominates the town’: ‘Lit up at night, the discs flare like angry eyes in watchful supervision, impressing on the minds of the workers the necessity of improving the hours and minutes purchased by Glendale & Co.’ The bitterness and irony of the poem escalates in Blakean indignation: ‘A great Firm! a wonderful firm.’ We are introduced to Mr Glendale himself (‘a methodical man, /A man of undoubted honesty, of unquestionable morality’) and to ‘An army, the workers’ and we are taken to ‘The home of the
workers, /Some of them two- or three-roomed, comfortable enough;/Some of them – abodes of the lowest – miserable dens'. And the poem finally turns to confront Glendale with the iniquity of social division and squalid poverty, judging the industrial world with massive conviction: ‘Heaven deems a man of more value than many sparrows, possibly also it will look upon him as of more importance than many cattle, or of the production of so many jute bags.’ Other important works include ‘The New Jerusalem’ (where ‘the noisy clang and clash/Of hammers plied incessantly’ and ‘Machineries/Are there whose vast pulsations tear and thrash/the groaning air’), ‘The New Inferno’ (full of ‘harsh dissonance’), ‘The Spectre Clock of Alyth’ and ‘The Man and the Engine’. Geddes is one of the most neglected poets of the nineteenth century and Scotland’s most radical social poet between Burns and MacDiarmid.

By contrast, the far-too-familiar William McGonagall (1825–1902), in ‘Glasgow’ (1889) praises the city's statuary (the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Wellington, Scott, Burns, Queen Victoria) and only hints at the effects of industrialism: ‘So let the beautiful city of Glasgow flourish, /And may the inhabitants always find food their bodies to nourish’.

Characteristically, these poets are local to specific places, most frequently Glasgow or Dundee. A literature committed to describing Scotland as an industrial nation only began to arise in the early twentieth century and in the 1920s it was almost entirely hostile. The depictions of the industrial city in writing by Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, for example, are largely appalled: there is very little in them of celebration (although there is a beautiful representation of lovers falling into exhausted sleep as the city slowly winds down in MacDiarmid's poem 'In the Slums of Glasgow', from Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems (1935).

Their precursors in this regard are John Davidson, James (B.V.) Thomson and Robert Buchanan, poets of a Scotland of doom-laden darkness. Davidson, in ‘A Boy’s Poem’, gives us the steamer leaving the ‘oozy wharves’ and passing ‘swarming streets’ and ‘noisy mills’, ‘Great bellied chimneys tipped by tongues of flame’ and ‘the loud roar of commerce’ of ‘the proud/Metropolis which turns all things to gold’ in a cityscape beyond which ‘the grand and solitary hills’ rise ‘far away’. For Davidson, ‘Greenock’ is ‘this grey town/That pipes the morning up before the lark/With shrieking steam [. . .] where hammers clang/On iron hulls’ and ‘men sweat gold that others hoard or spend, /And lurk like vermin in their narrow streets’. While Davidson’s vision is clearly of an industrial city, the fantastic vision of a metaphoric city of darkness informs it, and in Thomson's The City of Dreadful Night (1874), the vision is all nightmare or rather an insomniac’s dream-vision. Thomson’s vision is not, like that of James Young Geddes, one of an actual industrialised city, nor like Davidson’s, one of moral turpitude firmly based in historic fact; it is rather a metaphoric, illuminated nocturnal city, like Dante’s subterranean Inferno, whose inhabitants are doomed by something more inescapably human than alterable social conditions. Thomson’s injustice is not curable in economic terms, though the moral authority of his poem might charge us to address social and remediable economic causes of alienation. Perhaps all cities bleed into one emblematic ‘dreadful’ city in a vision where industrialism has brought about a dark spiritual uniformity.

The major nineteenth-century non-fiction prose writers who face industrialisation are Thomas Carlyle and Hugh Miller. The moral force of their indignation at the ways in which industrialism affronts both the material conditions of social structures – living conditions, human relationships with the natural world – and humane forms of social behaviour is a lasting record and deep protest against the dehumanising forces of industrialisation. Neither, however, carries this into fiction or poetry. Carlyle’s preferred mode is social prophecy. From Signs of the Times (1829) to The French Revolution (1837)
and Chartism (1839), social unrest and conflagration are depicted with emotional and moral urgency. For Miller too, spiritual regeneration was more deeply and urgently required than material advancement. Both come out of the world of Romantic idealism and end in a lonelier, more alienated era. However, if Carlyle is understood to be a vital influence on Herman Melville, then the Scottish literature of industrialisation might take a broad enough perspective to note Moby-Dick as, both literally and allegorically, a novel of America’s greatest nineteenth-century industry, by an author profoundly curious about his own Scottish forebears.

The work of William Alexander (1826–94), in Johnnie Gibb of Gushemeuk (1871) and The Laird of Drammochdyle (1865), as rediscovered by William Donaldson along with a great deal of nineteenth-century popular fiction, often in Scots, charts closely the relation between the rural world of Aberdeenshire and the urban, industrialised world that was bringing its harder commercial imperatives. The research leading to the republishing of Alexander's work has brought to light a remarkable body of work fleshing out Scottish literature’s dealings with the urban nineteenth century, yet as with Carlyle and Miller, moral sensibility in these stories and serial novels often outweighs the comic appreciation of human susceptibility and fallible aspirations.

A more accommodating, eel-like intelligence and humour is at work in W. E. Aytoun (1813–65), whose story 'How we got up the Glenmutchkin railway and how we got out of it' (1845) is reminiscent of Mark Twain in its wry engagement with the priorities of the new commercialism that industrial society made flourish. Railways, indeed, are crucial in any survey of the literature of industrialisation in Scotland. Alexander Anderson, known as 'Surfaceman' (a railway worker) in a well-known poem of the 1890s, 'Nottman', tells the story of how Nottman, the engine-driver, one day sees a small dim object ahead and recognises a child asleep on the track. Knowing that even with the brakes on full they will still hit the child, Nottman gets to the front of the train and kneels on the beam with one foot reaching down in front of the wheels. A micro-second ahead of the wheel, Nottman gently kicks the child to one side and off the rails, recognising as he does so his own son. From then on, Nottman always shuts off the steam at that turn of the track. The moral homily is delivered in rhyming couplets and would seem to be typical of many stories and poems that refer to the mortal dangers associated with the railways.

In S. R. Crockett’s novel Cleg Kelly, Arab of the City (1906), signalman James Cannon brings about a train crash because he has endured a sixteen-hour shift at the levers (having been up all the previous night with a sick child). The noble giant Muckle Alick recognises that the derailed waggons is lying in the way of the boat express with a ‘hundred folk and their wives and bairns!’ and rushes to lift it off the rails. Crockett describes ‘his whole soul in the muscles which gripped the iron’. He shifts the waggons, seeing the boat express pass safely, ‘each winking carriageful [. . .] the travellers within reading their papers or settling themselves to sleep, alike unconscious of their deadly peril and their brave deliverer’. But the iron framework of the last carriage catches Alick and hurls him thirty feet away and, as the express flies past into the night, its whistle sounds Muckle Alick’s death-knell.

The melodrama and praise of moral fortitude are characteristic of Crockett but the context of late Victorian industrial Scotland is unusually vivid and evocative of the world of steam, iron and proximate mortality, life given in the service of others, whether innocents of the industrial world or – by extension – protected citizens of the British Empire. It is worth noting that the novel begins with Cleg Kelly’s astonishing exclamation that throws his entire Sunday-school congregation into astonished silence: ‘“It’s all a dumb lie! – God's dead!”’ The words are Cleg’s repudiation of the Sunday-school teacher’s remonstration of
his bad behaviour, that God sees all, punishes the bad and rewards the good. On this assumption, the Kailyard school of benevolent fiction, boy's own adventures or small-town homiletics, rested. But by 1906, even Crockett (a minister himself and paragon of the Kailyard) seems to have encountered Nietzsche.

_Cleg Kelly_ and _Wee MacGregor_ (1902) by another minister and journalist, J. J. Bell (1871–1934), are urban Kailyard creations, inhabitants of industrial Scotland, whose worlds are largely benign and comic, if sometimes (as with Muckle Alick) strongly flavoured with grand guignol. Indeed, the ending of _Cleg Kelly_ is one of the most bizarrely adult stories, in which a wronged lover takes macabre revenge while the young Kelly looks on. Such weird imagination as is found here did not extend to the popular Sunday _Post_ newspaper cartoon strips ‘Oor Wullie’ and ‘The Broons’, which ran through the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Here, urban, industrialised Scotland is the backdrop for the adventures of a young boy and a family, where the values endorsed clearly indicate a genealogy which links back through Bell and Crockett to the industrialised nineteenth-century Scotland and its imperial complicity.

The antidote to the sentimental school of Crockett, Bell and Ian Maclaren was to be found in the dark visions in the novels of George Douglas Brown (1869–1902) and John MacDougall Hay (1880–1919). In Douglas Brown’s novel _The House with the Green Shutters_ (1901), nascent capitalism in a village community leads to a Greek extremity of tragic devastation, absolute and horrifying. MacDougall Hay’s _Gillespie_ (1914) also charts the demise of a tyrannical patriarch of small-town Scotland, not in an agricultural community but in the fishing village of Tarbert, Loch Fyne. Both novels present the destruction of their main characters not only in terms of their own terrible hubris and tragic attempts at self-extension, but also in terms of societies changing as small-scale capitalism gives way before industrialised capitalism, fuelled by railways and city markets. The degree and ruthlessness of exploitation in the industrial cities is more closely addressed by Patrick MacGill, especially in _Children of the Dead End_ (1914) and _The Rat-Pit_ (1915), novels which suggest the work of James Kelman at the other end of the century. (Though to arrive there, the fiction of George Blake, Edward Gaitens, Archie Hind, George Friel, Robin Jenkins and the notorious _No Mean City_ would have to be tracked.)

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94), in his recognition of the lasting value of the work of his family of lighthouse-builders, leaves a permanent reminder of the austere beauty of industrial progress in ‘Skerryvore’:

_Eternal granite hewn from the living isle,_
And dowelled with brute iron, rears a tower
That, from its wet foundation to its crown
Of glittering glass, stands, in the sweep of winds,
Immovable, immortal, eminent.

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) depicts a London in many respects modelled on Edinburgh, a much more walkable city. Stevenson himself enjoyed them keenly, writing to Doyle from Samoa on 5 April 1893: ‘I hope you will allow me to offer you my compliments on your very ingenious and very interesting adventures of Sherlock Holmes. That is a class of literature that I like when I have the toothache.’ The full extent of Stevenson’s influence on Doyle has yet to be explored, but Prince Florizel in New _Arabian Nights_ (1878) surely prefigures a long line of independently licensed cosmopolitan heroes operating between the law and criminality, from Holmes through Richard Hannay to
The Saint and James Bond. Moreover, Stevenson’s dark London in *Jekyll and Hyde* (1885) foreshadows Doyle’s London in the Holmes stories both in its moral murk and its resemblance to Edinburgh. Doyle represents the evils of industrial, imperial society, repeatedly drawing upon the outposts of empire to provide villains and villainous motives (sometimes accompanied by snake, ape or mongoose) attacking that empire at its industrial heart.

Jules Verne (1828–1905) also deserves a note here for his one remarkable novel of Scottish industrialism, *The Underground City* (1887), also known as *The Child of the Cavern* or *The Black Indies*. Here, the social conditions and deprivations of coal-mining communities are described in the unlikely setting of vast, cathedral-like caves deep underneath Loch Lomond.

Scottish literature has had direct influence on popular cinema versions of the industrial city. If Scotland has traditionally been seen cinematically as an ‘imaginary space’ where fantasies, desires and anxieties have been projected, individual cities have offered very different aspects of this imaginary space. Edinburgh provided a deeply shadowed image of an ancient capital, a medieval city of body-snatchers, duplicitous lawyers, demonic doctors, needy students and necessary victims in an urban jungle of the well-to-do and desperately poor. In cinema, Edinburgh seems to by-pass industrialism, swerving from the pre-industrial world of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Reuben Mamoulian, 1932; Victor Fleming, 1941), via *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Ronald Neame, 1969) to the post-industrial *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), in which the job one of the characters is interviewed for is not in a warehouse or a factory but ‘the leisure industry’. The theme of the ambivalence of high principles and good intentions in the unrequitable human world of appetites, desires and vanities seems to have been Edinburgh’s prerogative. By contrast, Glasgow is familiar as a post-Victorian, modern industrial city, progressive with industry and social consensus, home of ship-building, heroic with the huge ambition of capitalist enterprise and the pathos of the socialist effort. Clydesidism is one of the great mythologies of the Scottish twentieth century.

One further aspect of the literature of industrialisation might be considered: Scottish literature’s depiction of the roles of theatre and church in the industrial city. Rich as Scotland’s theatrical history is, after *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, it is relatively weak in great plays: drama is the least developed of Scotland’s literary genres. The primary reason for this was James VI’s removal to London in 1603. There was no social basis for theatre until the eighteenth century. But there is another consideration: to risk a generalisation, the opposition to theatres enacted by church authorities involved a co-option of the function of theatre by the Church itself. For generations, the regular public meeting place for the dispersal of interpretation and opinion about social as well as religious matters was the Church. The pulpit presented a solo-performer, spot-lit by God, and congregations enjoined vigorous debate following the regular sermons. To suggest the theatricality of church conventions like this throws into hard light the development of two strands of secular theatre which, by the early twentieth century, stood distant from the Church and from each other: that of the commercial music hall and that of politically overt drama. In the nineteenth century especially, as Barbara Bell discusses in Chapter 25, these theatrical traditions were developing almost entirely independently. There is a vital overlap between them, but the three strands of moral force, racy entertainment and political commitment seemed cripplingly separated from each other until the 1970s, when the 7:84 Theatre Company reunited them in their touring production of *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*.

It is worth pausing on the separation of the elements that held sway in the nineteenth century. An excellent case-study would be the novel *Macleod of Dare* (1878) by William Black (1841–1898), where the last of Lady Macleod’s six sons, the titular hero, falls in love
with a London actress. The whole novel unfolds the weary saga of their relationship, a sequence of prevarications, nervousnesses and vanities on her part, and yearnings, beseechments and finally black resolution on his. In the melodramatic ending, Macleod kidnaps his beloved and takes her to sea in suicidal passion. The last of the Macleods of Dare takes the actress Gerty down with him and their incompatibilities are resolved only in death. The novel hints at possible sentimental happy endings and takes a flamboyant delight in crushing them. It would warrant close study for its representation of a nineteenth-century independent woman, a Highland laird, and their respective inadequacies. The central contrast between them sets metropolitan duplicity, the comforts of the city and theatricality, against the austerities of neo-feudal Mull. The rigid structures of family and social loyalty in Scotland are in conflict with the dangerous flexibilities and different priorities of London theatre-life.

Scottish critical writing has been slow to comprehend and discuss the relation between playfulness and social alienation, or, in the context of the industrial city, between theatre and church. This is one indication of the extent to which the literature of industrialisation remains under-researched and a rich area for further investigation.

Further reading

In 1834, Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle moved from Craigenputtoch in Dumfriesshire to 5 Cheyne Row, Chelsea, London, a move that has significant historical and geopolitical implications for the Victorian era. Coming between the passage of the Reform Bill (1832) and Victoria’s ascension to the throne in 1837, it marks the beginning of the era. Moreover, the Carlyles were moving from a farm on the moors of south-west Scotland to the urban metropolis, a centre of social transformation, political reform, urban growth and intellectual culture. While Scots had been going south for more than a century, the Carlyles’ emigration has frequently been depicted as the beginning of a major drain of talent from Scotland to England that accounts for a decline of Scottish intellectual culture and the absence of Scottish nationalism in the Victorian era. The Carlyles’ lives thus evoke much of what we have come to think of as Victorian and is at the heart of the narratives that the Victorians created to explain themselves: the ‘rise of the middle class’; the expansion of the Empire; the shift from an agricultural to an urban economy; and the relationship between the public and private spheres that was frequently understood in terms of gender and marriage.

The Victorian era was far too various to sum up as a particular set of beliefs or doctrines, but we can usefully characterise the Carlyles as representative of certain tendencies of their mid-nineteenth-century contemporaries and we can learn much about everyday Victorian life from their endlessly fascinating and astonishingly voluminous correspondence. Carlyle is frequently cited as the most influential writer of the period and his work was responsible for defining many aspects of what we know as Victorian culture. As George Eliot wrote in a review of Passages Selected from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle (1855):

there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle’s writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived.

While it would not be correct to say that the Victorians universally subscribed to a particular set of beliefs or doctrines, they did confront a common set of social, intellectual and religious problems and developed a shared vocabulary for thinking about them. The Parliamentary Reform Bill (1832) set the tone of the era because it called for change in response to what were perceived to be transformations of the economy and society: the growth of the industrial city and the rise of the middle class. The term ‘reform’, with its connotations of progress, renewal and improvement, became a hallmark of the era. At the same time, the spectre of the French Revolution haunted the era and the dislocations occasioned by the shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy spawned fear of revolution. Carlyle and his contemporaries therefore felt themselves to be in an era of transition
in which a new form of social organisation would displace the old, an attitude summed up in Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' (1855):

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.

Consequently, many Victorians experienced a heightened sense of living in history, which seemed to press so hard upon them that they felt they could see the clear contours of a social order only in the distance of the past and the future, not in the present.

Carlyle developed a mode of writing designed to respond to this sense of transition and crisis, a genre now referred to as 'prophetic' or 'sage' discourse. Employing a combination of biblical prophecy, neo-classical satire, Romantic sincerity and the sermon – in Carlyle's case the pulpit rhetoric of his native Scotland – the sage interprets the signs of contemporary society in order to argue the need for social reform. In *Past and Present* (1843), for example, Carlyle interprets the significance of a new form of advertising:

The Hatter in the Strand of London, instead of making better felt-hats than another, mounts a huge lath-and-plaster Hat seven-feet high upon wheels; sends a man to drive it through the streets; hoping to be saved thereby. He has not attempted to make better hats, as he was appointed by the Universe to do, and as with this ingenuity of his he could very probably have done; but his whole industry is turned to persuade us that he has made such!

This interpretation expands from the immediate charge of dishonesty outward to a critique of the 'cash nexus' and the dangers to a nation that cannot recognise its meaning. Elsewhere he attempts to startle the audience into awareness through the use of grotesques, such as the case of the parents who killed their children in order to collect insurance. In another characteristic move, he brings the values of his readers into question, asking, for example, if the liberty to sell one's labour in the marketplace is truly liberty, and concluding that 'Liberty when it becomes the "Liberty to die by starvation" is not so divine!' The challenges to his audience reached their height in works such as *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), where, for example, Carlyle sardonically suggests that since we honour those whose values reflect our own, the English should not erect a statue of Cromwell but rather of the greedy railroad baron, George Hudson. Through such provocations, Carlyle sought to jar his readers out of complacency and to force them to live up to the moral standards to which they paid lip service.

Sage writing is important for an understanding of the Victorian era not only because it responded to contemporary situations, but also because of its influence on Victorian aesthetics. Carlyle's style of social commentary was taken up by such writers as John Henry Newman, John Ruskin and Mathew Arnold. In 'Traffic' (1864), for example, Ruskin takes up Carlyle's commentary on Hudson's statue to suggest that English architecture reflects the worship of the 'Goddess of Getting-on'. The influence of sage writing also left its mark on the work of many poets and novelists, including Tennyson, the Brownings, Dickens and Gaskell, to name just a few, and Carlyle's insistence that literature must serve society became an orthodoxy that even aesthetes had to come to terms with. This view led many Victorians to feel that the literature of the first part of the century lacked moral seriousness, a view apparent, for example, in Carlyle's criticism in 'Sir Walter Scott' (1838) that
Scott’s novels ‘do not found themselves on deep interests, but on comparatively trivial ones, not on the perennial, perhaps not even on the lasting’. Although he had many friends who were novelists, he often expressed the anxiety that fiction is hardly more serious than a circus act. Dickens dedicated his depiction of industrial poverty, *Hard Times* (1854), to Carlyle, but then as if in response used a circus to represent the redemptive power of art and imagination. Contemporaries, from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Matthew Arnold, responded by attempting to show how art enabled, and created the grounds for, social critique, but the fact that they felt a need to justify their art demonstrates how urgent Carlyle’s claims were felt to be.

The fact that a writer so concerned with the present should have been one of the greatest historians of the century is not as paradoxical as it might first appear. Both his histories and his social criticism converge in a common set of concerns and endeavour to reveal his and his contemporaries place in the historical moment. Like his Scottish predecessors, David Hume and William Robertson, he regarded history as a record of human nature through which we can learn how to understand ourselves in the present. His *French Revolution* (1837) seeks to explain the event that he considered the key to understanding modern society; he intended *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1845) to provide a model for modern political leadership; and his monumental *Frederick the Great* (1858–65) accounts for the rise of the modern German nation. These works search the history of the past for an understanding of the processes of social change in the present. The historical section of *Past and Present* – portraying the election of an abbot in a medieval monastery – does not idealise the Middle Ages but rather seeks to discover the process through which the twelfth-century monks revived a monastery fallen into disharmony and disrepair as a way to understand the social disruptions of the nineteenth century.

Carlyle’s histories and sage writings possess a shared conception of nation and culture. He characterised the social problems that these writings sought to confront as a crisis of the nation, ‘the condition of England’ question. He often represented the English as a ‘people’ analogous with the Israelites of the Old Testament prophetic tradition, but he also conceived them in the terms developed by German historians and ethnographers (Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich von Schiller and so on), who argued that because each culture has its own coherence and validity the study of cultural productions enables us to understand its fundamental beliefs and values. From this conception follows the idea that one can read the moral condition of the nation in such social phenomena as the seven-foot hat. This concept of culture is also intricately linked to the development of the idea of the nation and the rise of nationalist movements.

Carlyle’s depiction of the nation overlaps with his conceptions of culture, people and race, and helps us to understand why he does not write as a Scotsman, even though he takes pride in his Scottish origins. His conception of culture enabled him to treat Mohammed as a ‘hero’, a legitimate prophet for his historical moment and cultural context, at a time when most Europeans regarded Islam as a theological absurdity and cultural abomination. But while the concept of culture enabled him to appreciate cultural difference, it also lent itself to a belief in cultural hierarchies that operate as racial binaries. However, his most fundamental distinction is not, as one might expect, between white and non-white, but between Teuton and Celt. Drawing on standard histories that depicted the Saxon invasions as the origin of modern England, he consistently describes it as a Teutonic nation, the indigenous Celtic population having been pushed to its margins.

Carlyle aligned himself with an emerging ethnography that, subsequent to the Union of Scotland and England in 1707, depicted Scotland as divided between the descendants of
these Teutonic invaders and the indigenous Celts. He had no interest in promoting a Scottish nationalism, for he did not regard it as a separate nation, racially divided from England, but rather as united to England by its Teutonic racial majority. In a letter of 1841, he describes a natural boundary dividing the ‘Scotland Scotch’ who are ‘all Danes’ from the ‘windy Celts of Galloway’. Angles, Saxons, Danes and Normans (‘Saxons who had learned to speak French’) were Teutonic peoples, while the Celts included not only the Gaels of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, but also, through an etymological sleight of hand, ‘Gallic’ France. In Frederick the Great, Carlyle attributes broad racial-cultural traits to these ‘races’: Frederick’s German-speaking father, Friedrich Wilhelm, is masculine, warlike, inclined to action rather than speech; until circumstances force him to change, the effeminate Frederick, educated in French, is enamoured of disputation and the fine arts.

Carlyle’s Scotland is not national but local, a Scotland of the artisan class, the nonconformity of Burgher Seceders, and the rural borderlands of his native Annandale. When he imagined returning to Scotland after the move to London, it was this Scotland, not cosmopolitan Edinburgh, that he longed for. It was also this form of Scottishness that inflected his own identity as an author who referred to himself as ‘English’ at a time when the idea of Britain as a nation had just recently become entrenched. Similarly, while he recognised the Scottishness of his most noted Scottish precursors, Burns and Scott, he nonetheless depicts them as English (he often uses the term to refer to what we would now call Britain), and seeks to claim a place for his fellow-Scotsmen (and himself) within the English tradition. In ‘Burns’ (1828), which was written before he left Scotland, he is willing to suggest that the poet’s works had produced a ‘remarkable increase of nationality’ (that is, an interest in Scottishness), but he also describes Burns as ‘a true British poet’. Ten years later, in ‘Sir Walter Scott’ (1838), he asserts that ‘No Scotchman of his time was more entirely Scotch than Walter Scott’ but also depicts him as the ‘sound[est] piece of British manhood [. . .] put together’ in the eighteenth century. In spite of his occasional nostalgia for Scotland and his admiration for such Scottish heroes as Knox and Watt, he did not, like Burns and Scott, make Scotland’s language and its history his subject. Instead, he wrote as an Englishman while speaking (as many contemporaries reported) with a broad Annandale accent. Rather than write in a self-consciously Scottish tradition, his prophetic discourse and unique style, littered with Scotticisms and neologisms, situated him as both an insider and outsider. His Teutonic origins legitimated his stake in English culture while his Scottishness, not a matter of race but of religion and moral value, made him capable of seeing its shortcomings. Just as he avoided party affiliation, he adopted a geopolitical identity that in falling outside simple correspondence with British/English/Scottish enabled him to assume the sage’s position above the fray.

Given the fact that in the nineteenth century many other Scots emigrated and, more importantly, wrote from a broader British, rather than a specifically Scottish perspective, it is difficult to discern Carlyle’s specific impact on Scottish culture of the era. To be certain, in Scotland, as throughout the English-speaking world, his works were universally read and widely admired. Even when they did identify him as Scottish, critics emphasised the ways that his writing differed from that of his countrymen. George Gilfillan, writing in the Third Gallery of Literary Portraits (1847) when Carlyle’s reputation was well established, suggested that Carlyle ‘has grafted on a strong original stock of Scottish earnestness, simplicity, and shrewdness and humour, much of the mysticism, exaggeration, and eccentricity’ of German literature. The earlier generation of Scottish intellectuals – those already prominent when Carlyle arrived on the scene – were more sceptical about this style, even though they quickly recognised his talent. No two writers could be more unlike than Francis Jeffrey,
editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, the leading Whig journal of the day, and John Wilson, co-editor of the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine*, yet their responses to Carlyle were in many ways similar. Both recognised Carlyle’s talent – describing him as a ‘man of genius’ – and both were suspicious of his German mysticism and mystified by his style (Jeffrey in a letter to Carlyle of 18 May 1837 and Wilson in ‘Noctes Ambrosianae’, 1832). But in this they did not differ from their contemporaries. Similarly, John Gibson Lockhart’s response to *Past and Present* accorded with that of most British reviewers: he praised its ‘pictures of the past’ in a letter to Carlyle of 27 April 1843, while reserving judgement about its political views. Nonetheless, while Carlyle was not regarded as contributing to the development of a distinctly Scottish culture – no surprise given the much-noted absence of Scottish nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century – the fact that his success was an object of local pride was nowhere more evident than in 1866 when the students of the University of Edinburgh elected him rector.

If in his writings Scotland is not a nation but a collection of ethnic and intellectual enclaves and a space of imaginary wholeness, then Teutonic England tends to expand to include not only Scotland, Wales and Ireland, but all places of English settlement, including those, like the United States, that have become independent. While Carlyle’s social criticism is addressed primarily to the British – it is concerned with the condition of England not with English speakers – his audience was, in fact, international, and ‘The English’ people he addresses, as in *Chartism* (1840), constitute an imagined community of all English-speakers, a supra-national entity that includes ‘New York, Calcutta, Sidney Cove’. Whereas his predecessors had depicted the Saxons as establishing a tradition of English liberty, Carlyle produced a myth of national migration in which a migrating (and colonising) race of Saxons successively conquers and displaces indigenous peoples. England itself is a colony established fourteen centuries earlier when Hengist and Horsa migrated from Germany to Britain, one of a series of migrations that include the British colonisation of North America, the West Indies, India, the Chinese port cities, Africa and Australia. The Saxon right to conquest is justified by the fact that they make wasteland productive. In ‘The Negro Question’, he argues that black inhabitants have no right to farm in Jamaica because the ‘European’ (or ‘Saxon’) settlers had performed the labour that made the land arable. The underlying racial distinction implies that Teutonic peoples work and thus obtain property while others (here blacks, but elsewhere Celts) refuse to work, unless they are compelled to do so. In *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, his imaginary prime minister commands an Irish mob:

Refuse to strike into it; shirk the heavy labour, disobey the rules, – I will admonish and endeavour to incite you; if in vain, I will flog you; if still in vain, I will at last shoot you, – and make God’s Earth, and the forlorn-hope in God’s Battle, free of you.

Here Carlyle’s captains of industry have become ‘drill-sergeants’ who create social order literally through the productivity of labour and symbolically through military discipline.

This conception of the drill-sergeant is a development from, but also a marked departure from, the conception of the ‘captain of industry’ in *Past and Present*. The earlier view developed from the critiques of emergent industrial capitalism by Coleridge, Robert Southey and others who claimed that England had abandoned a social system in which a benign and disinterested ruling class took responsibility for the welfare of the poor. They had argued that justice could only be achieved by restoring the aristocracy to its former position, for the aristocracy, which was already wealthy, could be disinterested whereas men of commerce seeking to achieve wealth were bound to exploit their workers. Carlyle adapted this idea by
imagining, in Past and Present, the transformation of men of commerce – the ‘middle class’ – into ‘captains of industry’, a new aristocracy that possesses the moral authority once enjoyed by the now moribund landed aristocracy. Like his predecessors, he assumes that a just society can only be achieved through the establishment of a ruling class committed to right government; the working class cannot find justice for itself – it can only articulate the desire to be governed justly. This insistence on the need for a hierarchical social structure coincides with the racial hierarchy of Teuton and Celt, Saxon and people of colour.

While the need for hierarchy is defined in terms of the need for justice, it is also motivated by a desire for order. A shift of emphasis, from justice to order, accounts for the shift in how Carlyle handled the condition of England question in the course of his career. In his earlier social criticism like Past and Present, Carlyle is concerned with justice to the poor, and blames the state of the working class on failed leadership – an aristocracy that refuses to work and an industrial middle class that is driven by greed. In the later writings like Latter-Day Pamphlets, he becomes more concerned with social disorder, blaming it on an unruly working class that must be disciplined by the ruling class. Throughout his writings, the relationship between justice and order is ambiguous. In Chartism, for example, he argues that right makes might, giving priority to justice over power, but his insistence that what is true and just will always prevail in the end leads him to the conclusion that wherever might has prevailed it must have been right. The fact that the English conquered and subdued Ireland means that English rule of Ireland was decreed by 'the laws of the universe'. Carlyle's rationalisation of Cromwell's Irish massacres has often been deplored, but it has not been sufficiently noted that he also justified similar treatment of his native Scotland by arguing that Cromwell was the ‘Doer of what this poor Scotch Nation really wished and willed, could it have known so much at sight of him.’

While his insistence on the need for order led to these troubling results, Carlyle's concern for justice enabled him to raise important questions about the form of democracy that was emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, a democracy that conflated political and economic freedom. The result was the 'cash nexus', a society based solely on economic contracts in which labour is exchanged for cash. This system, he argues in Past and Present, treats each individual as an atom unrelated to others:

We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the totalest separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due Laws-of-war, named 'fair-competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that it absolves and liquidates all engagements of man. ‘My starving workers?’ answers the rich Mill-owner: ‘Did not I hire them fairly in the market? Did I not pay them to the last sixpence the sum covenanted for? What have I to do with them more?’

In these circumstances, he concludes, the individual’s freedom, reduced to the freedom to sell his or her labour to the highest bidder, is not true freedom: ‘The liberty especially which has to purchase itself by social isolation, and each man standing separate from the other, having “no business with him” but a cash-account [. . .] This liberty turns out [. . .] to be, for the Working Millions a liberty to die by want of food’. He is at his most eloquent when describing the resulting state of social isolation:

Isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man. To be cut off, to be left solitary: to have a world alien, not your world; all a hostile camp for you; not a home at all, of hearts and faces
who are yours, whose you are! [. . .] To have neither superior, nor inferior, nor equal, united 
manlike to you. Without father, without child, without brother. Man knows no sadder destiny.

It was this deeply empathetic description of the plight of the modern worker that moved 
and inspired writers such as Dickens, Gaskell and Ruskin and which led Friedrich Engels 
to declare that Past and Present was the only book on the condition of England worth reading.

Carlyle was not unaware of the ways in which he himself was caught up in this set of 
social relations, and his sympathy for the worker undoubtedly owed in part to his own 
experiences in the literary marketplace. In his mid-twenties he decided to make a living as 
a writer, but it was not until well after his fortieth birthday that his income from literature 
became secure. Indeed in the late 1830s he was still supplementing the income from his 
writings by giving public lectures. Like many another author, he experienced a conflict 
between his authorial integrity and the demands of the marketplace, a division that he 
tended to express as the opposition between the urban market and the rural idyll. Soon 
after his marriage to Jane Welsh, they moved to Craigenputtoch, where, he claimed in a 
letter of 20 December 1824, he would not be ‘tempted to tell lies for money’. But when he 
could not find a publisher for Sartor Resartus and his friends criticised it for its refusal to 
accommodate itself to its audience, he blamed the rural isolation of Craigenputtoch. He 
concluded that he could be completely independent of commerce but find no readers, or 
he could accommodate himself to the marketplace and be heard. Not only the desire to be 
heard, but the basic need to earn a living finally prompted the move to London, the centre 
of the publishing industry. At the same time, he decided to write a history of the French 
Revolution, a subject that he chose from among a number of projects that appealed to him 
because he had been assured that there would be a market for it. The move to London was 
successful. The French Revolution established him as a major author, and he no longer had 
to depend on commissions from the literary reviews to eke out a living. ‘Thomas Carlyle’ 
had become a commodity, a name that sold books and earned a steady income.

Not coincidentally London was not only the centre of the publishing industry but also 
a centre of intellectual, literary and political activity. While both Thomas and Jane pro-
fessed to dislike large social gatherings and dinner parties, their letters show that they rel-
ished the lively company they found in London, and it was for this reason that they never 
seriously considered returning to Scotland. The breadth of their circle of friends and 
aquaintances has often been remarked upon. It included at various times Elizabeth Barrett 
and Robert Browning, Erasmus and Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and 
George Henry Lewes, Edward Fitzgerald, John Forster, James A. Froude, Leigh Hunt, 
Francis Jeffrey, Geraldine Jewsbury, Harriet Martineau, John Stuart and Harriet Taylor 
Mill, A. C. Swinburne, Alfred Tennyson, W. M. Thackeray, John Tyndall and scores of 
other slighter acquaintances and lesser literary figures. Many American visitors also made 
their way to the Carlyles’ door, among them Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and 
others of their New England circle, as did a range of European political exiles, including 
Godefroy Cavaignac and Giuseppe Mazzini. They came most frequently to see Thomas, 
but many became close to Jane, who played the expected role of the wife of literary genius 
but also developed in this milieu a reputation as a wit and satirist.

Jane Welsh Carlyle has developed a curious place in Victorian studies. She almost cer-
tainly would be undiscovered if she had not married Carlyle, for she would not otherwise 
have been known to the public; her reputation now rests on her letters – some three thou-
sand of which survive – and, to a lesser extent, on memoirs written by members of their
circle. Yet she developed a reputation as a Victorian woman who might have been a great novelist. Carlyle himself set loose this idea, concluding in his memoir of Welsh Carlyle in Reminiscences (1887):

Not all the Sands and Eliots and babbling cohue [mob] of ‘celebrated scribbling Women’ that have strutted over the world, in my time, could, it seems to me, if all boiled down and distilled to essence, make one such woman.

If we examine this statement carefully we can see that while it raises Welsh Carlyle above Sand and Eliot, it also sets up an opposition between ‘scribbling’ public novelist and private domestic letter-writer that reflects Welsh Carlyle’s own self-conception. She professed to disdain ‘scribbling’ women, even though she was an avid reader of novels, and she sought to excel in the private form of the letter rather than the public form of the novel. Moreover, she sought to make letter-writing a form of domestic labour, contrasting it in a letter of 16 June 1832 to the ornamental idleness of ‘fine ladies’. Her letters are filled with domestic details. Like countless Victorian women she was constantly on the lookout for capable servants and lamenting the shortcomings of those she employed. Each summer she supervised labourers who cleaned and refurbished the house. Most tellingly, perhaps, she persuaded neighbours to make less noise so that Carlyle could concentrate on his writing.

While in such letters Welsh Carlyle performed the role of the domestic woman, she also insinuated in them an ironic distance from this role. She excelled at producing domestic comedy in which the dutiful but long-suffering wife has to manage the household of an undomesticated ‘man of genius’. She constructed her letters so that they would present her as dutiful wife to a broader family audience while slipping more subversive messages through to her close friends. By turning her performance of the role of domestic woman into comedy, she both displays herself as dutiful wife and mocks these duties as trivial. In her Autobiography (1857), Margaret Oliphant saw in this talent for storytelling as well as her ‘dangerous facility of sarcasm and stinging speech which Sir Walter attributes to Queen Mary’, a tradition of Scottish feminine speech, one that enabled her, like Thomas, to maintain an ironic distance from English culture (reports also indicate that, like him, she retained her Scottish accent). In a comic narrative describing how she wrote a note persuading a neighbour to remove a noisy parrot from the back garden, she concludes a letter of 5 May 1839: ‘I think that my writings have not been in vain.’ In more personal letters, as Norma Clarke has pointed out, she ‘uttered some of the bitterest, most sardonic comments about marriage to be found in the whole of nineteenth-century literature’.

Many of Welsh Carlyle’s letters subtly mock the self-importance of the resolutely masculine Victorian sage. Male authorship was distinguished from female scribbling by linking it to the moral imperatives of the ultra-masculine sage, who speaks to the public but does not display himself before it. Carlyle’s heroes – those who have the ability to lead a people – are all male, and they succeed because they assume this role unselfconsciously, that is, without drawing attention to themselves. They are not men of words, but of action. Yet, as an author, Carlyle was aware that writing, even writing that earnestly seeks to move people to action, is more akin to talk than to action. The paradox was that writing tended to lead the writer to focus on his or her interior life, to self-absorption, which Carlyle often compared to gazing transfixedly at one’s own navel. He sought to turn himself into a purely public persona who speaks the just and ordered nation into being; he is the nation. The interior self displaced by this voice is projected outward as the other of the nation, the selfish individuals who refuse to work in order to produce it. By transforming himself into
the public sage, however, he made his insights into a public property that became part of
the national conscience, which in turn could be transformed in ways that reached beyond
his personal prejudices. The very ‘others’ that he used to imagine the nation in turn used
his critiques to their own ends, to imagine their own place in society.

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Gaelic Literature in the Nineteenth Century

Donald E. Meek

Of all phases of Gaelic literature, the nineteenth century is probably the least understood by literary critics. It is perceived generally as a period of poor-quality literature, standing in sharp contrast to the great achievements of the eighteenth century and earlier. This interpretation stems in large measure from the failure of critics to develop a theoretical approach that does justice to the entire spectrum of literary output within this period of immense social, political and cultural upheaval. A ‘Kailyard’ perspective has become dominant, largely because of academics’ deep antipathy to the romantic song of separation and exile common in the late nineteenth century. Much more robust verse from the previous seventy-five years is often overlooked or played down, and prose is largely neglected. The problem is compounded by the dominant historical interpretation of the nineteenth-century Highlands. In broad terms, this model portrays the Highland people as victims of commercial landlordism, which for most of the nineteenth century had been undermining their way of life, with similar consequences for their literary tradition. Resurgence and optimism returned only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when romantic song was at its height among displaced Gaels in the Lowland cities.

Such a model of decay and revival, with (allegedly) only occasional traces of high literary quality, places the possibility of literary renewal towards the end of the nineteenth century, with disappointing results. However, the overall evidence clearly shows that Highlanders were experimenting with new literary forms throughout the century. Nor was the end of the century devoid of strong output. Indeed, it could be argued that the massive upheavals of the century imparted some major benefits, since the Gaelic community in Scotland and beyond was compelled by circumstances to find new voices and to develop less vulnerable modes of existence and self-preservation. It had to discover, for instance, alternative means of maintaining, transmitting and cultivating its literary traditions.

The most notable of these means was the printing press, which flourished in the cities and larger towns where Gaels settled. Despite the exhortations of John Carswell, who produced the first Gaelic printed book in 1567, Gaelic scribes and literati had been slow to embrace the printing press, partly because presses were not readily available in the rural Highlands and Islands. In the seventeenth century only religious texts (notably psalters and catechisms) were printed in any numbers, while in the eighteenth century printed Gaelic output consisted largely of the works of prominent poets, some foundational verse anthologies, Ossianic volumes, Bible texts and manuals of Christian doctrine. A revolution in the availability of print then occurred in the context of the industrial century. In Britain generally after 1800 print became the means of transmitting popular material, in
the form of newspapers, chapbooks, broadsides and other ephemera. Through migration and emigration, the Gaelic people discovered this contemporary form of information technology and they adapted it to their own needs. An enterprising Islayman, Archibald Sinclair, set up in Glasgow in 1848 an influential printing press intended specifically to facilitate Gaelic publishing (which it did until the early twentieth century). The creation of a very sizeable printed Gaelic literature was therefore one of the blessings bestowed by the relocation of the Gaels in the nineteenth century, but this blessing was mixed. It meant that Gaelic literature was increasingly at the mercy of commercial supply and demand. Proximity to the printing press and a body of enthusiastic readers, often in urban environments, regulated output, certainly by the last quarter of the century.

Benefits such as print must be set against deficits. Far-reaching social changes undoubtedly weakened the Gaelic community, and diluted Gaelic culture through dispersal and fragmentation. Beginning in the late eighteenth century and generally summarised in the convenient (but misleading) catch-all phrase ‘the Highland Clearances’, population displacement compelled a substantial proportion of the Highland people to move from traditional townships, and to assume livelihoods very different from earlier patterns of subsistence, which were sustained chiefly by crofting. Migration and emigration were stimulated on a very large scale, with the result that colonies of Gaelic-speaking people were formed in the Scottish Lowlands, America, Canada and Australia. The most influential historians to write on this theme have emphasised the vulnerability of the Highland people, and their exposure to forces that seriously damaged their way of life. These adverse forces, they argue, were dominant until 1870 or thereabouts, when the Gaelic people began to fight back in the context of the Land Agitation. Rent strikes and resistance to estate policy resulted in the despatch of gunboats and soldiers to the more militant crofting areas of the Hebrides. In 1886 the Crofters’ Holdings (Scotland) Act was passed by Gladstone’s Third Ministry, and security of tenure was achieved. Even so, crofters and cotters continued to protest, and the Highland land question remained live in the twentieth century. Although it is correct to emphasise the vulnerability of the Highland people and to celebrate their brave stand in the 1870s and 1880s, it should be noted that strong crofting communities were maintained in the Highlands and Islands throughout the nineteenth century. The Gaelic people were not mere waifs who were hopelessly cast adrift on the ocean of economic change, until great men in political lifeboats rescued them after 1870. Many determined their own futures, and made decisions to go or stay according to their lights. At points of crisis throughout the nineteenth century, many Highlanders robustly and proudly joined the British army, serving in theatres as far apart as the Spanish Peninsula, the Crimea and Egypt. Others travelled the globe as seamen in wind-jammers and steamships.

The world was shrinking as influential communications networks came into existence, at home and abroad. Transport links with the Lowland south developed strongly during the nineteenth century, particularly with the arrival of the steamship. It had reached the southern edges of the Highland mainland by 1815, and it was puffing its misty way into the heart of the Highlands by 1819, when Henry Bell’s celebrated Comet reached Fort William. By 1820 the Hebrides were within the range of paddle-steamers such as the Highland Chieftain, whose very name breathed high romance, rather than stellar technical achievement. Vessels of this kind, sailing from the Clyde, offered new vistas for tourists with a yen for remote fastnesses and a desire to view the sublime on Ossianic grand tours to the farthest Hebrides, including St Kilda. They offered, in effect, a new way of seeing the Highlands – as an extension of the Lowlands. By the end of the century, the railways had spread their
iron tentacles outwards from the Lowland cities, and had reached western seaports such as Oban, the ‘Charing Cross of the Highlands’. By 1870 shipping services were supplied by Lowland-based companies, whose owners, like David MacBrayne, became legends in their own lifetimes. The transport infrastructure that we know today had emerged in firm outline by 1900.

Better transport facilities encouraged the penetration of the Highlands and Islands by external forces, especially in the realm of popular education. The chief motivation in this field was religious. By 1750 the thrust of educational bodies such as the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (established 1709) had been tempered towards a more constructive engagement with the Gaelic language. Key religious books had been produced, most notably the Gaelic New Testament, published in 1767. In 1801 the translation of the Old Testament was completed, and a revised text of the entire Gaelic Bible was available by 1807. This stimulated further educational initiatives, chiefly the Gaelic schools societies, active from 1811, which provided travelling schoolmasters, who taught the people in many Highland parishes to read the Gaelic Bible. This policy was intended to act as a bridge towards the acquisition of English, but initially it helped to reinforce Gaelic. The displacement of Gaels to Lowland Scotland and the ‘New World’ was complemented by the growth of a Gaelic readership, eager to engage with printed literature. Reading skills were not, however, widespread, and many people had to rely on existing authority figures, such as the local schoolmaster, to read the new journals aloud at the traditional ceilidh. Any hopes that Gaelic literacy might increase purposefully were dashed by the 1872 Education Act, which failed to mention the language.

The periodicals appearing from the late 1820s were intended to provide material for those who had become literate through the Gaelic schools, and who wanted more to read than tracts and homilies, produced in profusion. The didactic foundation was maintained strongly, and even extended to embrace politics and social issues, but new forms of literature emerged in the process. As Sheila Kidd has well demonstrated, periodicals played a fundamentally important part in the transition from oral, traditional models of tales and songs, to printed essays, dialogues and hortatory verse, specifically written for a literate readership. These pre-1850 volumes, compiled during the ‘darkest’ (to us) times of social change, provide further evidence that the pattern of nineteenth-century Gaelic literary development does not conform easily to the ‘displacement model’, with its implication of relentless loss for people and culture. Losses there certainly were, including losses of older cultural norms, but fresh channels were opened, as displaced Gaels accommodated themselves to new modes of expression and communication, especially in printed journals with some degree of scholarly and clerical control over their contents.

Nineteenth-century Gaelic literature therefore contains a deeply Protestant and evangelical dimension which influenced styles, forms and themes. Denominational interest in the new journals was strong, and the Protestant Churches – Established and Free – became important publishers of Gaelic religious texts. Roman Catholic texts, by contrast, are comparatively few. This has put another formidable roadblock in the way of modern literary critics of a sceptical cast, who have generally been disaffected towards the Highland Churches, which they perceive as the enemies of traditional Gaelic culture. Their view of evangelical Christianity, as a baleful and retrogressive influence, may have some validity at certain periods, but it is hard, if not impossible, to sustain across the totality of the nineteenth century.

Rather than dismiss or ignore large pieces of evidence, we need to recognise that, in the nineteenth century, the Gaelic world was changing markedly in response to various
pressures. Literary, religious and political ideologies were brought to bear on Gaelic tradition, with mixed results, many contradictions and not a few conundra.

Macpherson’s ‘Ossian’ and its influence

The contradictions and enigmas of the nineteenth century are nowhere more evident than in the contribution of ‘Ossian’ to the texture of the time. In the opening up of the Highlands to external influences, ‘Ossian’, conceived by James Macpherson in the early 1760s and recycled throughout the nineteenth century, was unquestionably significant. It stoked boilers, brought ‘noble savages’ out of the backwoods and into public gaze, and encouraged the growth of Highland tourism, by road, sea and rail. The quest for the sublime was, if anything, intensified by the choking smoke of ungainly steamships and the discordant noise of trundling trains.

‘Ossian’ also left important literary legacies, which, for better or worse, helped to inspire Gaelic authors and composers for much of the nineteenth century. The publication of the Gaelic text of Ossian in 1807 by the Highland Society of London was of great significance, since it reinstated this ambivalent corpus of material, seemingly without the taint of ‘forgery’ which had stained the English texts of 1760–3. The influence of ‘Ossian’ can be detected on Gaelic prose and verse in the nineteenth century, and there can be little doubt that it engendered its own ‘revivals’, which complemented and at times intermingled with religious ideals and imperial aspirations. The Romanticism that it engendered, like the steamships that it helped to propel, connected the region to literary concerns in other parts of Scotland. ‘Ossian’ was Scottish property, though ultimately it moved far beyond Scottish shores and was transplanted into other languages. Gaelic literature cannot be isolated from developments elsewhere in Scotland. For this reason it is important that the region should not be seen – as earlier critics have too often perceived it – as a self-contained unit, whose boundaries were assaulted detrimentally by the ‘bad habits’ of the Lowlands. The post-1870 wave of Gaelic literary and political activity, for example, requires to be viewed within the ‘Celtic Revival’ which influenced the Scottish Lowlands through such literary and artistic figures as Patrick Geddes and John Duncan. Gaelic writers, editors and musicians of this period, including Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), whose first two volumes of Gaelic charms, prayers and incantations with the curiously Latinate title Carmina Gadelica, were published in 1900 to critical acclaim, moved in Geddes’s circle and sometimes contributed to The Evergreen. Carmichael likewise associated closely with Donald MacKinnon (1839–1914), who became Scotland’s first Professor of Celtic in 1882, when he was appointed to the Chair at Edinburgh. Because of his unrivalled knowledge of Gaelic culture, MacKinnon became a member of the Napier Commission of 1883, which investigated crofters’ grievances. It published its massive report in 1884, with a chapter by Alexander Carmichael. Round all of these men of letters and their coteries in Edinburgh hovered the bearded, windswept figure of Professor John Stuart Blackie (1809–95), scholar of Greek, learner of Gaelic and promoter of all things Celtic and ‘Ossianic’. Nobody in Scotland more fully exemplified the hallmarks of ‘the Bard’ of the Ossianic world than did the irrepressible, rhetorical Blackie. His enthusiasm and commitment were key to the founding of the long-awaited Celtic Chair at Edinburgh, just as his political views helped to fuel the crofting resurgence of the period. Blackie hated trains, but lived happily with other less tangible contradictions of his romantic spirit. For him, as for many others, Romanticism and rebellion went closely together, as did Romanticism and the emergence of Celtic scholarship.
Collecting and editing

Romanticism, deriving from the aftermath of ‘Ossian’, laid the foundation of modern Celtic scholarship in Scotland by encouraging the gathering of the tales and folklore of the Highlands, with subsequent attempts at contextualising and analysis. Following the publication of ‘Ossian’ in 1760–3, Highland clergymen were active in collecting Gaelic heroic ballads about Fionn and his heroes. In the nineteenth century, ‘Ossian’ stimulated further collecting, sometimes by those who were totally opposed to the methodology of James Macpherson. None was more hostile to Macpherson than John Francis Campbell (1822–85) of Islay, who organised a team of collectors to gather tales in their respective localities, and to send them back to him for editing and (in some cases) publication in his famous *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860–2). Campbell’s collectors included Alexander Carmichael, who began his work in the early 1860s, and who earned Campbell’s ire for his failure to distinguish real Gaelic ballads from what Campbell regarded as the counterfeit imitations of ‘Ossian’. Carmichael and others were also interested in collecting proverbs, which were collated in a new edition of Donald Mackintosh’s *Gaelic Proverbs* in 1881.

Prose

Despite its importance to collectors like Campbell, there has been all too little scholarly engagement with the printed Gaelic prose of the nineteenth century, particularly that composed initially for publication in journals. Such writing unquestionably forms one of the most significant achievements of the period, and indeed of the Gaelic literary canon as a whole. The foundational journals, *Teachdaire Gae’lach* (‘Gaelic Messenger’, 1829–31) and *Cuairtear nan Gleann* (‘Traveller of the Glens’, 1840–3), were both edited by the Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod (1783–1862), a prominent minister of the Church of Scotland, whose family roots lay in Morvern, Argyllshire. Journals of this kind were set in double columns of small print, and carried few, if any, illustrations beyond a woodcut on their front cover. Their format was typical of the nineteenth century, and can be paralleled easily in Lowland organs such as *Blackwood’s Magazine*, on which they were obviously modelled. The first issue of *Teachdaire Gae’lach* (May 1829) opened with MacLeod’s vision of the apocalyptic ‘new day’ of spiritual and educational opportunity that had dawned for the Highlands and Islands:

Buidheachas do Dhia, is mòr, agus is sòlasach, an t-atharrachadh a thàinig nar latha’s nar linn fèin, air Gàidhealtachd agus air Eileana na h-Alba, a thaobh sochairean spioradail, agus meadhana eòlais. ‘S ann da-rìreadh air an dùthaich a dh’èirich an latha grianach. Ach ged a tha e againn a-nis, ann an tomhas mòr na àird a mheadhan-àl, chan fhad o na chochail iad, a chun-naic ùr-mhaduinn an là seo a’ bristeadh os cionn nam beann; latha ’n àigh, trid a bheil liomhoireachd nan eileana ait, agus luchd-àiteacha nan creag a’ seinn gu ceòlmhor.

(Thanks be to God, great and happy is the change that has come in our own day and generation upon the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, with regard to spiritual privileges and means of knowledge. The day of sunshine has truly dawned in our country. But although we have it now, to a large degree at the height of its noon, it is not long since there passed away those who saw the new morning of this day breaking above the mountains; the day of glory,
which causes the multitude of islands to rejoice, and the inhabitants of the rocks to sing
tunefully.)

The contents of these journals ranged widely, aiming broadly to provide edification,
enlightenment and entertainment. The sermon, sometimes accommodated within a wider
frame, such as an account of an outdoor communion service, was the chief vehicle for the
first of these desiderata, and the informative essay and the dialogue or conversation formed
the backbone of the second (the conversation commonly taking place between a well-informed
representative of the status quo and one or more ‘rustics’ in need of knowledge or
correction). Entertainment was offered through humorous accounts of incidents in the dia-
logues/conversations, often ‘scrapes’ of an innocent kind in cities, as the ‘rustic’ encountered
an alien way of life. Indeed, the greatest single factor motivating the journals and their
writers was the increasing mobility of the Gaelic community and the need to prepare the
Gaelic people for new experiences in the Scottish Lowlands or overseas. Emigration is a
recurrent theme, and it is quite evident that Norman MacLeod and others regarded emigra-
tion positively as a means of alleviating contemporary distress in the Highlands. It is no acci-
dent that these early journals crossed the oceans with emigrants, or that they regarded them
warmly as links with their homeland. They were intended first and foremost for Gaels who
aspired to ‘better’ lifestyles in an international, globalising context. This is more than appar-
etent in the choice of publisher (from at least No. 4 of Teachdaire Gae’lach), W. R. MacPhun,
Glasgow, who claimed to have ‘entered into the most extensive arrangements with
the various Proprietors of the London, Provincial, English, Irish, Scotch and Foreign
Newspapers’. Publication of Teachdaire Gae’lach was shared with W. Blackwood and
MacLachlan & Stewart, Edinburgh.

The arrival of a new, highly mobile era is evident in other ways. Alongside accounts of
volcanoes and hot springs, which reflected the spirit of contemporary exploration and dis-
covery, modern inventions are chronicled and explained. Teachdaire Gae’lach introduced
readers to the power of the steam engine, and as early as 1829 Norman MacLeod wrote a
splendid account of one of the first steamships to provide a regular service to the west
Highlands, the Maid of Morvern. The ugly, mechanical Maid is sketched through the eyes
of Fionnlagh Piobaire (‘Finlay the Piper’), MacLeod’s stock ‘rustic’ who travels on her to
Glasgow, and who describes his adventure in a letter home to his wife Màiri. The piece is
quite remarkable for its accomplishment in matters of technical detail, its clever depiction
of the ship’s crew (the Gaelic-speaking engineer perspires hotly, and becomes ‘an oily rag’)
and its vignettes of passengers, who include cultured gentlemen with telescopes menac-
ingly directed at Highland landmarks. Highland chiefs (who spare a word for the bashful
Fionnalagh) and refined ladies, with lapdogs and maids in bloomers, are also on deck.
Highland tourism, as we know it, had arrived. MacLeod’s broader discussion of the impli-
cations of the steamship and its transformational power is extremely clever, and retains its
relevance to the present day. The overall argument (which aims ultimately to reconcile the
‘industrial’ with the ‘natural’) is expressed in robust, idiomatic Gaelic, which is well able
to handle contemporary issues. Nothing could better represent the pulse of the nineteenth
century at virtually all levels. Participant observers like MacLeod knew that they were wit-
tnessing events and processes of world-changing significance, and they did their best to
prepare others for new experiences.

Similar themes are evident in Leabhar nan Cnoc (‘The Book of the Hills’), an anthology
of essays that MacLeod produced in 1834 with an eye to the Gaelic schools. MacLeod, who
encouraged J. F. Campbell to collect Gaelic folk tales, set out his agenda with unashamed
clarity, admitting his preference for traditional tales over most of the ‘òrain fhaoin amaid-each’ (‘vain and foolish songs’) then being published, but asserting the superiority of the new genre of literature for schools:

’S adhbhar-sòlais, da-rìreadh, gu bheil nithe nas feàrr aig na Gàidheil a-nis ran aithris agus ran èiseachd, na seann sgéalachdan nan làithean a dh’halbh: ach mheas sinn nach robh cron ann an cuid dhìuibe a chumail o dhol gu tur air diochumhnh’, mar chulaidh-annais do linntibh a thig nar dèidh.

(It is a cause of delight, indeed, that the Gaels now have better things to relate and to listen to than the old stories of days gone by; but we considered that there was no harm in keeping some of them from being forgotten completely, as a curiosity for generations to come.)

MacLeod was thus prepared to accommodate a judicious selection of old stories alongside his own freshly minted prose, and he includes a traditional tale, ‘Spiorad na h-Aoise’ (‘The Spirit of the Age’) in his book. The volume, however, is mainly his own work. It contains his well-known essay, ‘Long Mhòr nan Eilthireach’ (‘The Emigrant Ship’), in which he describes an imposing sailing-vessel that he sees in Tobermory Bay, in Mull. The ship embarks emigrants from the surrounding islands, and MacLeod describes poignantly the sentiments of these passengers, fearful of the long, impending voyage. Their emotions are heightened by the arrival of a local minister, who preaches to them on the deck of the ship and offers them the consolation of God’s presence on the sea and in their new environments and gives them Gaelic Bibles. The biblical message is complemented by powerful symbols derived from the poetry of ‘Ossian’, including the lonely, blind father who is about to return to his glen without his daughter and her family, and the sublime mountain on the horizon, representing (like the ship itself) the steadfast presence of God. MacLeod likewise produced some rather formal set-pieces in Ossianic mode, like his description of a sunset over the Hebrides, and he apparently tried his hand at short passages of original Gaelic verse in Ossianic style. Significantly, he and the other ministerial pioneers of printed Gaelic prose tended to be devotees of ‘Ossian’.

MacLeod's periodicals gave opportunities to other writers to try their talents. Among these was the Rev. Alexander MacGregor (1806–81), whose formative years were spent in Skye. Interestingly, MacGregor's earliest published material (in English) is found in Blackwood's *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture* in 1838. He contributed to MacLeod's *Cuairtear nan Gleann*, and also to a subsequent periodical, *Fear-Tathaich nam Beann* (1848–50), edited by the Rev. Archibald Clerk (1813–87), minister of Kilmallie. In the 1870s he contributed items to newspapers and bilingual journals. His topics included the natural world and astronomy, as well as matters germane to Highland politics and the crofter resurgence of the 1870s and 1880s. In taking the side of crofters against landlords, MacGregor represents very different perspectives from those pertaining before 1850.

By grappling with such a variety of subjects, and by attempting to bridge the gulf between sacred and secular, ministers like MacLeod, MacGregor and Clerk showed considerable versatility, as well as a willingness to create Gaelic prose of a kind quite unlike that of the contemporary religious mainstream. The latter was driven by a veritable torrent of translations from English, usually of doctrinal works (catechisms etc.) and Puritan classics. Among these classics were the chief prose works of John Bunyan, whose *Pilgrim’s Progress* established itself as a firm favourite in its Gaelic guise of *Turas a’ Chriosdaidh*, translated by Peter MacFarlane (1758–1832), a schoolmaster in Appin, who also translated the Rev. Hugh Blair's sermons
into Gaelic. MacFarlane had a skilful touch, and did not allow the original text to dictate his style. Other, less sensitive, translators of religious works often hugged their original texts to the point of exhaustion, and produced a ponderous style of profoundly theological Gaelic prose. Blessed with an unusually idiomatic Gaelic translator, Bunyan became a naturalised Highlander, and his words furnished an illustrative touchstone of orthodox religious experience, quoted with approval from Highland pulpits. Bunyan's allegories and allegorical figures found their way into Gaelic poetry, and (as happened in English) their resolute spirit contributed to the emergence of political radicalism. Larger religious texts were accompanied by a welter of ephemeral pamphlets, ranging from translated tracts, scattered throughout the land by itinerant preachers, to polemical leaflets, intended to champion one doctrine or ecclesiology over another. These leaflets were particularly prominent in the 1830s, and helped to prepare the ground for the Disruption of 1843. To that extent, religious debate stimulated Gaelic prose, but it tended to produce poor specimens, in which strident argument took precedence over elegant expression. The consequences of ecclesiastical disruption were largely unfavourable to the viability of multi-purpose journals (which seldom survived more than two or three years) and to the long-term good of broad-minded Gaelic prose. Gradually, however, the Churches began to produce their own Gaelic magazines and supplements, which had a beneficial effect. The Free Church of Scotland issued An Fhianais ('The Witness') from 1845 to 1850. In 1880 the Church of Scotland began its (still functioning) Gaelic Supplement to Life and Work, first edited by the Rev. Archibald Clerk, perhaps the last of the old-style Ossianic scholars.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when Gaelic song reached its romantic nadir as the ceilidh-house moved into print, a brand of prose confectionery was also manufactured, with its emphasis on humour rather than Romanticism, and offering couthy anecdotes and anthologies of 'readings' for the urban, rather than the rural, ceilidh-house. This form of writing is well represented in such books as The Celtic Garland and Leabhar na Cèilidh, both compiled by Henry Whyte ('Fionn') (1852–1913), whose oeuvre included much sentimental Gaelic verse. Whyte was also a writer of English prose, most notably in the 'Glasgow Letter' of the Oban Times, where he gave strong political support to the Highland Land Agitation. His brother John was another accomplished writer of English and Gaelic prose, who was employed as a journalist by several Highland newspapers. The two Whytes, of a gifted family which also produced ministers and artists, are interesting for several reasons, but most noticeably as 'popular', non-clerical writers who bestrode both the English and Gaelic literary worlds of their time. Another in a similar mould was John MacFadyen (1850–1935), a native of Mull who found employment as a railwayman in Glasgow, and whose prose and verse compilations were very popular.

This couthy approach, however, was complemented, and held in check, by much more profound experimentation. In the same twenty-five years as the book-based ceilidh emerged, serious scholars, thoughtful laymen and creative clergymen were hard at work extending the range of Gaelic prose writing into major themes and registers, thus continuing the foundational work of Norman MacLeod and Alexander MacGregor. None was more important in this respect than Professor Donald MacKinnon. MacKinnon was the first properly equipped literary critic who wrote in Gaelic about Gaelic literature. In Herderian mode, and with what would be regarded today as excessive deference to 'Ossian', he examined Gaelic poetry, and defined the hallmarks of the Gael, using Gaelic proverbs as a substantial quarry. His analyses appeared initially as a series of articles published in a magazine entitled An Gàidheal ('The Gael'). This magazine was established in Toronto in 1871, but crossed the Atlantic soon afterwards when its founder, Angus Nicolson, removed
to Glasgow – yet another significant indicator of the wider international context of nineteenth-century Gaelic literature.

The emergence of vigorous printed prose may have affected the status and uses of Gaelic verse. Prose appears to have become the vehicle for ‘important’ contemporary discussion, while popular song increasingly accommodated sentimental idylls about past joys and present miseries. This dichotomy is clearly demonstrated by the writings of Donald MacKechnie (1836–1908), a native of Jura resident latterly in Edinburgh, whose splendid Gaelic essays describe his earlier deer-keeping days in Jura, and tackle post-Darwinian dilemmas in philosophy. In MacKechnie’s mind, man and the animals share common faults and failings, and produce similar responses to the world around them. MacKechnie cocks a snook at the authority figures of the earlier nineteenth century. Instead of turning to the minister or schoolmaster for instruction and solace, he discusses deep philosophical issues with his dog, Yarrow. He and Yarrow are both equally ignorant about such matters as the afterlife. As he says to his dog:

Tha thu tur aineolach air na nithe sin; chan fhios duit cia às a thàinig thu, no càit a bheil thu dol, no ciod as croich àraid do dhùine no do bheathach. Ach na cuireadh seo mòr-chùram ort, oir nam bithinn-sa cho firinneach ‘s cho onarach riutsa, dh’aidichinn duit gu bheil mi fhèin anns a’ cheart suidheachadh, ’s tha amharas agam gu bheil mi fhèin ’s a’ mhòr-chuid dem choimhearsnaich air ar tearradh leis an aon phealll.

(You are completely ignorant of those things; you do not know where you have come from, or where you are going, or what is the chief end of man or beast. But don’t let that worry you greatly, for if I were as truthful and honest as you, I would confess to you that I myself am in the same situation, and I suspect that I and the majority of my neighbours are tarred with the same brush.)

As the reference to the ‘chief end of man’ (the first question in the Shorter Catechism) suggests, MacKechnie rebelled against what he evidently regarded as the stiff and debilitating constrictions imposed by the Church and by rigid interpretations of texts of any kind (including those Gaelic proverbs which had enchanted his learned friend, Professor Donald MacKinnon). The birth-pangs of twentieth-century scepticism and existentialism, apparent in contemporary English writers such as Thomas Hardy, are more than evident in MacKechnie’s disarmingly self-deprecating prose, which makes its point as much by its light (but richly idiomatic) style as by its content. By contrast, MacKechnie’s rather anaemic verse wallows in maudlin triviality and imperially nuanced Romanticism, perhaps unconsciously acting as a ‘comfort blanket’ round an increasingly bleak and empty worldview. Paradoxically for such an accomplished writer of prose, it represents much of what later critics regarded as ‘bad’ in nineteenth-century Gaelic verse.

Song and verse

Secular

The main concern of Gaelic literary critics to date has been with Gaelic verse, which, on the whole, they have viewed with little admiration. From the time of Professor William J. Watson, Donald MacKinnon’s successor in the Edinburgh Chair, critics have emphasised the ‘wail of the Gael’, when faced by social upheaval and unable to cope with the challenge of
new economic systems. According to the Watson paradigm (1918), the ‘wail’ is expressed in sad, soft, sentimental verse, and there is allegedly little that is robust or powerful in the surviving corpus. The entire nineteenth century, as assessed by this backwards-extending measuring rod, is a disappointing period in the history of Gaelic literature, when standards fell and poets failed to address the real issues of the time. The difficulty with this approach is that it is applicable to, and derives from, the evidence of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and only part of that evidence. It does not properly address the poetic output of the earlier three-quarters of the century, nor does it do justice to the variety of existing material. It is selective even in the types of verse that it seeks to expound from its formative post-1875 base. It is noteworthy that this phase of alleged poetic degeneration – typified by the sentimental songs of Neil MacLeod (1843–1913), a Skyeman resident in Edinburgh – occurred when Highland people became more settled and less threatened, and, at least in an urban context, when they could reflect romantically on ‘the land of lost content’ from which they had moved, whether by their own decision or under pressure from landlords.

The evidence for the entire century offers a much more complex picture, in which chronology can be misleading. Styles current in the eighteenth century did not stop suddenly in 1800, nor did ‘major’ poets vanish from the scene. Indeed, older panegyric and learned forms of verse, at their height in the eighteenth century, were maintained throughout the nineteenth, but they served purposes different from those of earlier days. This is exemplified in the verse of John MacLean (1787–1848), Poet to the Laird of Coll. MacLean, a shoemaker to trade who hailed from Tiree in the Inner Hebrides, emigrated to Barney’s River, Nova Scotia, in 1819, and as a consequence there are both Scottish and Nova Scotian dimensions to his verse. He crosses boundaries in other ways also. His verse in praise of the Laird of Coll follows panegyric models which flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and he keeps his eye on lesser lairds and well-to-do tacksmen who were part of the older social order that pre-dated crofting. Much of it may strike us today as strained and sycophantic, curiously detached from the grim contemporary reality that very few clan chiefs could understand a single word of Gaelic, far less a Gaelic poem composed in their honour. MacLean was also the poet of his local community of Caolas, Tiree, and he composed much more immediate verse on events affecting ordinary people, such as tragic drownings close to home, and unfortunate liaisons in the dark city of Glasgow. By emigrating to Nova Scotia, however, MacLean was forced to reconfigure his poetic persona. Initially, he was confronted by a towering and hostile ‘gloomy forest’, which compelled him to search his own soul, and to say honestly what he felt, without the props of conventional support. By stressing his own internal perceptions, he conforms to the contemporary romantic paradigm. The result, however, is a song depicting powerfully what we would now recognise as ‘culture shock’, and it can be transferred symbolically from its original setting to many other contexts. Eventually, the ‘gloomy wood’ was cut down, and MacLean enjoyed a considerable degree of prosperity, which, in turn, changed the tenor of his verse. Lacking an earthly patron in Nova Scotia, MacLean’s panegyric instinct turned to praise of God, and he produced a book of evangelical Gaelic hymns in 1835. In MacLean’s verse, therefore, we can hear several ‘voices’ addressing us at different stages, and in different ways, all of them reflecting responses, immediate or more considered and long term, to the vicissitudes of a rapidly changing world.

John MacLean can be described as a learned poet, but he was by no means a lone figure in the nineteenth century. Broadly similar perspectives, combining a long-standing panegyric tradition with a bold attempt to accommodate new developments, can be found in the verse of Allan MacDougall (c.1750–1828), who praised MacDonell of Glengarry, and condemned
the intrusion of shepherds on the Glengarry estates. In the sharpest possible contrast to his attitude to the shepherds, he welcomed the first paddle-steamers to Lochaber in 1820, and liberally bestowed his encomium on their crews and captains. His enthusiasm for these mechanical intruders faltered only when Glengarry himself was drowned in 1828 close to his own home in an accident involving a bàta dubh toite ('black boat of smoke'). Of a more academic cast than either MacLean or MacDougall was Ewen MacLachlan (1773–1822), Librarian of King's College, Old Aberdeen, and a Gaelic scholar of very considerable ability. MacLachlan translated classical epic into Gaelic, composed verse on the seasons reminiscent of that of the eighteenth century, and fashioned a fine Gaelic elegy in Augustan style for his close friend, Professor James Beattie (the younger, d. 1810).

Two very able poets spanned the middle and second half of the nineteenth century respectively, namely William Livingston (1808–70), from Islay, and John Smith (1848–81) of Iarsiadar, Lewis. Livingston was a self-taught, but highly erratic, genius who wrote acres of angry, flatulent prose in English, attacking Highland landlords and Scotland's subjection to English dominance. This attempt to furnish a Gaelic view of Scottish history is gathered in his sprawling and unkempt book, The Celtic Character (1850). Of a very different stamp is his Gaelic verse. It embraces a range of well-controlled specimens, from large, Ossian-type 'epics' re-creating key battles (such as that at Tràigh Ghruinneard in Islay in 1598) to concise lyrics on Islay's former links with Ireland and the achievement of Irish scholars such as Eugene O'Curry. Livingston lived for a time in Glasgow, and he eulogised several of the stalwarts of the Gaelic community in that city. Smith, who briefly studied medicine at Edinburgh, shared several of Livingston's concerns, including a dislike of contemporary landlordism, which he decried (from his experience in Lewis) in a moving song, ‘Spiorad a' Charthannais’ ('The Spirit of Kindliness'). Smith was more of a philosopher than Livingston, and more given to meditating on virtues and vices, which he personified in longish poems. Again, like Livingston, he could compose in a relaxed vein as required, more in the style of the township poet, who gained prestige as crofting communities were formed in the Highlands and Islands.

The later nineteenth century is, in fact, distinguished for the number of lesser poets who flourished in their local communities and composed in that context, whether in the Highlands and Islands or among migrants and emigrants in the Lowlands, Canada or Australia. Newspapers and books allowed their work to reach wider audiences than might otherwise have been the case, and print also helped to preserve their verse. Some, like Henry Whyte and John MacFadyen in the urban context, amused or evoked nostalgia from their hearers. Others, like John MacLean (1827–95), a township poet in Balemartin, Tiree, entertained his community, composed satires on contemporary foibles, and supported the general demand for land reform. It is worth noting that the land agitation of the 1870s and 1880s encouraged the re-emergence of older forms of verse (such as incitement to battle), and that these powerful challenges to the 'establishment' are quite different from the sugary-sweet sentiment of popular song, often regarded (wrongly) as typical of the nineteenth century. It is no less noteworthy that the strongest poetic voice in support of the land agitation was that of a woman, Mary MacPherson (1821–98) from Skye, whose tempestuous personal life charged her emotions, and drove her to sympathise with the needs of others. Màiri Mhòr ('Large Mary'), as she was called, was a big 'hit' on the concert-hall platforms of Glasgow, as well as in the open air. She attended mass meetings of crofters in Skye and elsewhere, and, emotionally buoyed aloft by powerful rhetoric, glimpsed another apocalyptic 'new day':

Chunnaic sinn briseadh na fàire
Is neòil na tràillealachd air chall,
These meetings were reminiscent of, and in some ways indebted to, the great assemblies which were characteristic of Highland communion services and religious revivals associated with them. Political and spiritual emancipation went together.

Religious

As a consequence of sustained missionary thrusts into the Highlands and Islands, the region became profoundly Protestant and evangelical, leaving only a comparatively small body of Roman Catholics in the north-east Highlands, the north-west mainland, and the islands of South Uist and Barra. Catholic devotion is expressed memorably in the verse output of the Rev. Father Allan MacDonald (1859–1905) of Eriskay. In many other parts, however, religious revivals took deep hold at different stages, but particularly in the late 1830s and early 1840s, as the Presbyterian evangelical movement began to realign itself under the banner of the emerging Free Church of Scotland. Smaller missionary bodies, notably Baptists and Congregationalists, produced a straggle of revival-driven churches on the eastern edges of the mainland Highlands and in the southern Hebrides.

The arrival of missionary organisations within the region is an indicator of significant exposure to external influences. Traffic in spiritual ideas was, however, two-way. Emigrants took the internalised Highland missionary impulse overseas, where it intermingled with ‘foreign’ missionary endeavours. In a further striking exchange of perspectives, global views of ‘foreign’ mission were then repackaged for the inspiration of Gaels in the home country, as the Gaelic hymn tradition clearly indicates. For example, the Rev. James MacGregor (1759–1830), a native of Portmore in St Fillans, Perthshire, reached Pictou, Nova Scotia, in 1786, where he became a formidable figure in the Antiburgher church. MacGregor’s Gaelic hymns, first published in a flimsy pamphlet in 1819, influenced later poets and prose-writers. His optimistic hymn on the progress of the Gospel rejoices in the civilising power of the Christian faith in the Scottish Highlands, the banishing of barbarism and ignorance, and the achievements of Bible translators and missionaries. It anticipates the dawning of yet another glorious, apocalyptic day, this time throughout the globe, from the old Hebrides to the New:

Thèid an Soisgeul le sholas mar gh rèin
A dh’ionnsaigh an iar mun cuairt
Ameireaga, ’s Innseanaich fhiat’,
Is Eileanaich cian’ a’ chuain [. . .]

(The Gospel with its light like the sun will move to the west and surround America and timid Indians, and the remote Islanders of the [south] sea [. . .])
The poem is quoted extensively in Norman MacLeod’s *Leabhar nan Cnoc*. It also influenced John MacLean (of Nova Scotia)’s verse, and the hymns of several other Highland-based composers.

It is highly likely that, in the nineteenth century, Gaelic religious verse far outstripped secular verse, certainly in quantity if not in quality. It formed what was virtually a world of its own, with its images and metaphors derived from the Bible, but complementing and mirroring the themes of secular verse. Just as secular poets, revelling in contemporary imperial conflicts, would often praise military heroes such as Sir Colin Campbell, who gained glory at the Crimea, so religious poets would praise the heroes of the faith. The spiritual verse of the Rev. John MacDonald (1779–1849) of Ferintosh, for example, consists largely of lengthy tributes to departed ministers, whose lives are held out as examples to others. Some of the largest and most impressive verse compositions of the nineteenth century are, in fact, on religious themes, or influenced by Christian ideas. This suggests that, as a result of successive evangelical movements in the Highlands, priorities within the broader creative realm had been reordered to a significant extent.

The pastors and ministers of the early nineteenth century were unashamedly missionary-minded, and they used Gaelic verse as a means of communicating their message and inspiring converts to continue in the faith. Their converts likewise embraced Gaelic verse as a means of articulating their spiritual joys and sorrows for the benefit of others. The output of the Rev. Peter Grant (1783–1867), minister of the Baptist church at Grantown on Spey, is noteworthy in this regard. Rejoicing in the spiritual reconfiguration of the Highlands, Grant’s verse lays much emphasis on the trials and tribulations of the individual believer, and anticipates the glory of the future life with Christ in heaven. Chiming with the tenor of contemporary hymnology in Britain, it is by no means distinctively Highland in its themes, although individual hymns are set to secular Gaelic song tunes. This clever alliance of sacred themes and secular music ensured the popularity of his verse to the present day. Grant’s ‘soft’ themes contrast to some extent with those of John Morrison (c. 1796–1852), the Harris blacksmith, who envisaged the Christian life as a wrestling-match between the Old Man and the New within the regenerate Christian.

Although evangelical composers, on the whole, tended to see the present world as a hostile place, not a few produced verse which weaves both sacred and secular strands, and breathes an earthly wistfulness which is intensely moving. Such a poet was the Rev. Duncan MacLean, Free Church minister of Glenorchy, whose verse (published 1868) is one of the forgotten jewels of the nineteenth century. It includes an elegy on Thomas Chalmers and another on his daughter and her child, as well as several hymns filled with well-sustained imagery of the natural world, like his poem on the rainbow:

A chuspair alainn, ghràsmhoir, òrbhuidh,
Urrais àird air slàint’ is còmhnaidh,
Biodh d’ fhiamh ghàire ort an còmhnaidh –
Seall an gràdh orm ri uchd dòrainn.

Nuair a reubas stoirm an t-adhar,
Cur nan dùil’ air mhire-chatha,
Luidheas oidhch’ air uchd an latha,
Faiceam soillse do ghnùis fhathail.

(Beautiful, gracious, golden object, lofty guarantee of salvation and help, may you always wear a happy smile – look upon me as I contend with sorrow.)
When the storm tears apart the sky, stirring the elements to battle-ardour, and when night falls on the day’s breast, may I see the radiance of your noble countenance.)

Such a deft and delicate vision, like the rainbow itself, bridges heaven and earth. MacLean’s controlled and colourful brush paints out the popular stereotype of the austere, world-renouncing minister of the nineteenth-century Highlands – one of many largely unsustainable stereotypes foisted on this much-misunderstood century.

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century Gaelic literature is far from being naive or parochial. It is complex and multi-faceted, accommodating local, national and international perspectives in a globalising age, when local communities came under threat and distant horizons beckoned. Indeed, a considerable proportion of the surviving corpus has been stimulated by the migration and emigration of Gaelic people from their original localities. Output is also in tune with the wider spirit of the age. To the extent that it is driven by forces which directed literary development elsewhere in Britain – a point demonstrated by the publication of journals in the first half of the century – nineteenth-century Gaelic literature reflects British, if not broader European, trends. The extensive utilisation of the ‘popular’ printing press radically changed the complexion of Gaelic literary activity, compared with that of the eighteenth century, when only the very greatest composers ‘made it’ into print. Writers and composers, poets and journalists, of many different skills and of varying competences, are represented in the nineteenth-century canon. Consequently, overall achievement is by no means uniformly excellent, for there are as many troughs as there are peaks, but it is significant and substantial. At the very least, it is such that the century deserves to be rescued from unwarranted disparagement and general misconception.

Further reading

Gillies, William (ed.) (1985), Ris a’ Bruthaich: Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean, Stornoway: Acair.
The eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, named only in 1900, has come so forcefully to dominate the intellectual landscape of Scotland that the story of nineteenth-century Scottish thought is almost inevitably presented as a narrative of decline – if not as a betrayal of the whole national tradition. This is explicitly the burden of George Davie’s *The Democratic Intellect* (1961), which charts how ‘the democratic intellectualism which had distinguished Scottish civilisation was being allowed to disappear’ because of ‘a failure of intellectual nerve among the Scots’, since they were no longer concerned to maintain ‘national pretensions to intellectual independence’.

Given the limited research on nineteenth-century Scottish intellectual life, the influence of Davie’s reading has been pervasive. Gordon Graham, for instance, in the concluding chapter of Alexander Broadie’s *Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (2003), declares that ‘the nineteenth century [. . .] saw the unravelling of the great philosophical project that had animated the eighteenth’. What defined the ‘great philosophical project’ in Scotland is ‘the almost unspoken assumption that the question of mind and world lies at the heart of philosophy’. This focus on purely epistemological issues – symptomatically, the word ‘epistemology’ was coined by J. F. Ferrier in his *Institutes of Metaphysic* (1856) – stands at odds with contemporary scholarship on the Scottish Enlightenment itself, which has increasingly broadened its scope to highlight the crucial role of science and scientists – Joseph Black in chemistry, James Hutton in geology, Robert Whytt in biology, for instance – in setting the Enlightenment’s intellectual agenda. Their works in turn informed projects for the dissemination of modern knowledge such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, edited in the 1760s by the self-taught polymath William Smellie. Such a broad conception of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment contrasts radically with the narrowness by which the Scottish tradition in the nineteenth century has been defined, a narrowness that has contributed substantially to the sense of terminal decline afflicting the successors of the Enlightenment.

There are several reasons for this narrowness of approach. The first lies in the identification of Scottish philosophy itself with the Common Sense tradition deriving from Thomas Reid (1710–96), which, as it was successfully transplanted both to France and to North America, came to be known internationally simply as the ‘Scotch Philosophy’. Reid’s philosophy was based on combating the scepticism of David Hume, which, for Reid, was the logical outcome of what he described as ‘the way of ideas’ – the assumption that what we perceive are simply copies of objects in the external world, and that our thinking processes consist in the deployment of copies of those copies. Against this ‘ideal theory',
which casts in doubt our knowledge of the external world, Reid insisted in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) that the evidence of the senses ‘is a kind of evidence against which we ought not to admit any reasoning’ since ‘to reason either for or against it is an insult to common sense [. . .] it is one thing to profess a doctrine of this kind, another seriously to believe it, and to be governed by it in the conduct of life’. Against Hume’s reduction of experience to relations between ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’, Reid insisted on the immediacy of our direct encounter with the external world in perception; and, against the undermining of faith to which Hume’s position led, Reid insisted that not only our knowledge of the world but of its divine origin was unmistakeable to anyone not seduced by the falsifications of philosophical ‘reason’.

For several generations of believers, Reid’s identification of the commonsense bases of belief offered a buttress against sceptics, materialists and agnostics, and this tradition, passed on through the work of Dugald Stewart and Sir William Hamilton, came to be identified with Scottish philosophy itself. It was an identification made explicit in James McCosh’s *The Scottish Philosophy* (1875), written in the United States by the Scottish head of Princeton College. For McCosh, ‘It has been the aim of the Scottish school as modified and developed by Reid, to throw back the scepticism of Hume.’ The paradox of this position is that it necessarily excludes not only Scotland’s greatest philosopher, David Hume, from being identified with the tradition of Scottish philosophy, but also all who later follow Hume’s line of argument.

The second reason follows directly from this, and it is the exclusion from the Scottish tradition of those whose philosophical work was produced in England. The most important figures here are James Mill and his son, John Stuart Mill. McCosh, for instance, notes that Mr J. S. Mill, in his ‘Examination of Hamilton’ has reproduced to a large extent the theory of Hume, but without so clearly seeing or candidly avowing the consequences. I rather think that Mr Mill himself is scarcely aware of the extent of the resemblance between his doctrines and those of the Scottish sceptic; as he seems to have wrought out his conclusion from data supplied to him by his own father, Mr James Mill, who, however, has evidently drawn much from Hume.

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The challenge to Sir William Hamilton, chief representative of the tradition of Reid, marks Mill as being outwith the pale of Scottish philosophy, and the acceptance of his arguments in England is proof that a sceptical philosophy is inherently anti-Scottish. If the Mills are to be excluded as participants in a Scottish tradition of thought, then the most powerful Scottish influence on nineteenth-century thought, the influence of Hume, is negated. For James Hutcheson Stirling, author of *The Secret of Hegel*, the work which first, in 1864, introduced Hegel to the British public, Hume’s influence on the mid-nineteenth-century was pervasive: ‘Hume is our Politics, Hume is our Trade, Hume is our Philosophy, Hume is our Religion – it wants little but Hume were even our Taste [. . .]’. To treat this influence as though it were not a significant part of the Scottish tradition, and to treat Hume’s intellectual descendant, John Stuart Mill, as an opponent of the Scottish tradition, despite the fact that his enormously influential *Logic* (1843) is firmly based on Humean principles, is wilfully to circumscribe the Scottish tradition to only one side of the debate which Hume’s work initiated.

Third, narrowness is maintained by insisting that any Scottish philosopher who engages seriously with German philosophy has contributed to the undermining of the native tradition. The history of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy thus becomes the account of its gradual ‘Germanising’, beginning with Sir William Hamilton’s attempt to combine the
positions of Reid and Kant, developing through J. F. Ferrier's attempted rejection of the pre-suppositions of Common Sense in favour of a Hegelian mode of philosophy and culminating in the neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism of the Scottish Idealists, led by Edward Caird. For Ferrier, for instance, the business of philosophy is 'for the sole purpose of correcting the natural inadvertancies of loose, ordinary thinking'; while the Common Sense tradition 'exists for the very purpose of ratifying, and, if possible, systematising these inadvertancies'. Despite this, Ferrier insisted in *Scottish Philosophy: The Old and the New* (1856) that his philosophy was 'Scottish to the very core; it is national in every fibre and articulation of its frame. It is a natural growth of Scotland's soil, and has drunk no nourishment from any other land.' Nonetheless, Ferrier's interest in Hegel was indicative of the fact that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Andrew Seth (later known as A. S. Pringle-Pattison) phrased it in *Scottish Philosophy: A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume* (1890), 'the philosophical production of the younger generation of our University men are more strongly impressed with a German than a native stamp'. Because of Caird's enormous influence in both Scotland and England, the Idealism that he propounded has been treated as a crucial betrayal of the Scottish tradition. Commitment to a Germanic style in philosophy is, for Davie, necessarily a refusal to acknowledge the relevance of the Common Sense tradition, a position with which Gordon Graham is broadly in agreement.

There is, however, an alternative way to look at Scottish thought's engagement with the German tradition, one put forward by Seth in *Scottish Philosophy*. For Seth, the engagement with German philosophy was necessary precisely because it was the most powerful response to Hume's thought. Seth read Kant's work not as a rebuttal of Hume, but as a more complex reinstatement precisely of the way of ideas as criticised by Reid. Only in the light of the recognition of the inadequacies of the Kantian response – and the inadequacies of the Hegelian completion of the Kantian project, outlined in Seth's own *Hegelianism and Personality* (1887) – was it possible to return to the Reidian tradition, as a way forward for future philosophy, a route which was, in fact, to be taken by G. E. Moore early in the new century. Or indeed, to return to Hume himself, as Norman Kemp Smith was to do in articles in *Mind* in 1905, arguing for a 'non-sceptical, realist teaching' as central to Hume's philosophy. The German engagement, in other words, is not a betrayal of the Scottish tradition, but the assertion of the continuing importance of Scotland's greatest philosopher, and of the need to acknowledge his centrality to modern and to Scottish thought.

Setting aside such deliberate restrictions as to what might be meant by 'Scottish philosophy', it is clear that the Scottish tradition continued to play a defining role in the culture of nineteenth-century Britain. The debate between Hume and Reid was continued in the debate between Mill and Hamilton, and Thomas Carlyle was the pathfinder for those who look to German solutions to the problems posed by Hume. For Edward Caird in *Essays on Literature and Philosophy* (1892), like Seth, Carlyle's Germanism was not a betrayal of Scottish traditions but, rather, the recovery through philosophy and history of the fundamental principles of the reformed tradition:

Yet this new ideal, when we came to look at it closely, was, after all, nothing new or strange. It was in new words, words suited to the new time, the expression of those religious and moral principles which all in this country – and especially we Scotsmen – had received into ourselves almost with our mother's milk. It was Puritanism idealised, made cosmopolitan, freed from the narrowness which clung to its first expression, or with which time had encrusted it [. . .] Carlyle seemed to change the old banner of the Covenant into a standard for the forward march of mankind towards a better ideal of human life.
By the mid-Victorian period these three confluences of Scottish tradition represented the core elements of British thought. If the ‘Introduction’ to T. H. Green and T. H. Grose’s massive edition of *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* (1874) asserted that Humean scepticism had finally been overthrown by neo-Kantian idealism, then Edward Caird’s *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant* (1877) marched under the banner of Carlyle’s ‘better ideal of human life’. Far from a collapse of the Scottish tradition in the second half of the nineteenth century, Scottish thought – thus broadly conceived – exerted a powerful presence in almost all aspects of Victorian intellectual life.

The significance of this can be seen in the debates about the truth of the Christian religion initiated by the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin’s work itself had significant Scottish roots (Darwin was a student at Edinburgh in the 1820s), but the Scottish tradition was to be crucial to the ways in which Darwin’s theories were interpreted and applied. It was T. H. Huxley, for instance, in an article in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1895, who invented the term ‘agnosticism’ to define the position of those who did not believe it was possible for human beings to have a justifiable belief in God. Huxley’s arguments drew heavily on both sides of the Scottish tradition, depending not only on Hume’s critique of metaphysics but on Hamilton’s most influential essay, the ‘Philosophy of the Unconditioned’ (1829), from which Huxley derived the agnostic position. On the other side of the debate, however, Hamilton was also invoked by H. L. Mansel in his *The Limits of Religious Thought* (1858), as justifying the fact that we could not know God by means of reason but only through revelation, and was also the source of the theory of the Unknowable in Herbert Spencer’s *A System of Philosophy* (1860). Hume, Hamilton and Carlyle represent, as it were, the boundary positions within which late Victorian thought struggled with the consequences of its new scientific knowledge.

The crisis of Scottish philosophy in the second half of the nineteenth century is not then a crisis of its continuing relevance or, indeed, of its *Scottishness*. If there is a crisis, then it is a crisis of philosophy itself, for, as David Masson argues, at the very moment when the ‘battle of empiricism and Transcendentalism might at last be fought out’, the world which philosophy was called on to understand was radically altered by developments in science, by what he describes in *Recent British Philosophy*, published 1867, as

> the notion of *Interplanetary*, or even *Interstellar, Reciprocity* [...] – a habit of consciously extending [our] regards to the other bodies of our solar systems, and feeling as if somehow they were not to go for nothing in the calculation of the Earth’s interests and fortunes.

The new vision of the universe offered by science was one dominated by ‘the tendency of all things to *Ultimate and Universal Collapse*’. This universal vision, however, was not the negation of the relevance of Scottish thought, for it was itself the product of Scottish thought in the work of William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, of Glasgow University, on whose extrapolations of the lifespan of the sun Masson’s account depends. If we include *natural* philosophy in our account of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy, we may be looking, with Masson, at a universe that can induce vertigo and despair but it is a universe envisaged from a specifically Scottish point of view. Kelvin’s work on the nature of energy – co-authored with P. G. Tait (of Edinburgh University) and published as *A Treatise on Natural Philosophy* in 1867 – was designed to replace ‘Newton’s *Principia* of force with a new *Principia* of energy’, exemplifying ‘the One Great Law of Physical Science, known as the *Conservation of Energy*’. It was, however, a specifically Scottish project, shaped by the engineering demands of the Glasgow industries to which Kelvin was firmly attached and
the democratic ideals of Scottish education. It was also designed to uphold a Christian view of creation.

Thomson and Tait’s new physics of energy was only, however, to be a prologue to another Treatise which would, in reality, rewrite Newtonian physics – James Clerk Maxwell’s Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism, published in 1873. Maxwell, Thomson and Tait (Tait had been Maxwell’s mentor from the time when he was still at school in Edinburgh) were in regular communication from the mid-1850s, and Maxwell’s work depended on Thomson and Tait’s radical refocusing of physics on ‘energy’ rather than ‘force’. Symptomatic of the mutual influence of Thomson’s and Maxwell’s thought is the fact that the notion for which Maxwell is now mostly widely known – Maxwell’s ‘demon’ – was so named by Thomson. For Maxwell, this hypothetical creature allowed him to prove that Newton’s second law of thermodynamics was merely a statistical probability, rather than causally inevitable; in attributing to it the title of ‘demon’ Thomson both acknowledged its dark potential to undermine his own theories of the ultimate nature of the universe and its enlightening possibility of justifying free will within an apparently deterministic physical system. With Maxwell’s Treatise, the understanding of the forces that Kelvin had harnessed in a practical fashion in carrying through the laying of the first successful transatlantic cable in 1866 were to provide the foundation on which would be based many of the crucial developments of twentieth-century science and technology – from electrical communications to Einstein’s conception of relativity.

Clerk Maxwell’s theories, however, like Kelvin’s, were the product of a specifically Scottish environment. At Edinburgh, Maxwell had attended Sir William Hamilton’s classes in Logic and in Metaphysics and James David Forbes’ lectures in Natural Philosophy. From the latter, Maxwell developed an interest in colour theory, which led to his demonstration, in 1861, of the world’s first colour photograph. From the former, came that humility about the possibilities of knowledge that was to characterise all of Maxwell’s thought; as in Hamilton’s account of the Unconditioned, Maxwell believed that, ‘We shall find that it is the peculiar function of physical science to lead us [. . .] to the confines of the incomprehensible’ (in The Scientific Letters and Papers of James Clerk Maxwell, 1990).

The importance of Maxwell’s work can hardly be overstated. P. G. Tait’s estimate in his review of Maxwell’s Treatise in 1873 that its author had the stature of Newton is a view that has been upheld by history. That natural philosophy in Scotland should have produced what, apart from Einstein, is the most important contribution to modern physics – and, in the work of Kelvin and Tait, some of the most significant developments in nineteenth-century science – is testimony not to a culture in terminal decline but to a culture which was dynamically engaged in the modern world. Indeed, if we take Clerk Maxwell, along with Darwin, to be the pre-eminent scientific minds of the nineteenth century, the Scottish culture of which he was a part might aptly be rated as the equal of the Scottish Enlightenment – perhaps, even, a Second Scottish Enlightenment.

At the heart of this nineteenth-century Enlightenment was one of the major intellectual enterprises of the century, the ninth – and the last fundamentally Scottish – edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1871–88), to which Clerk Maxwell contributed, and which was edited by the Scottish theologian William Robertson Smith. Smith’s earliest publications were in physics, but he was a precocious linguist – he had learned Hebrew from the age of five under the tutelage of his father, a Free Church minister in Aberdeenshire – and, having learned Arabic, turned his intellectual attention to understanding the evolution of religions. His introduction of a challenging new perspective in Scottish theology was marked by a series of lectures ‘On the Progress of Old Testament Studies’, delivered in 1875,
in which he argued against understanding the Bible primarily ‘from the supernatural point of view’, because

The only idea of moral and spiritual evolution possible to us, is that of evolution in accordance with psychological laws [...]. The teleology of revelation is divine; but the pragmatism of the revealing history must be human.

The challenge which faced contemporary biblical scholars was, for Smith, the effort to trace the process of the Old Testament religion completely from the side of psychology and human history [...]. For it is the postulate of all moral religion, that God communicates himself to man in such a way that his revelation is interwoven with history, without violence or breach of psychological laws.

This was too radical for the Free Church, which sponsored his professorship, and Smith was forced to resign after one of the most famous heresy cases in Scottish academic history. Expulsion from Aberdeen led him to Cambridge and to the editorship of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, where he encouraged the best minds of his time (like Clerk Maxwell) to develop and present at length their latest discoveries. In relation to the new – and deeply interconnected – disciplines of psychology and anthropology, Smith’s commissioning was to be of particular significance in the development of Scottish thought: the articles on psychology (by Smith’s Cambridge colleague James Ward), on sacrifice (by Smith himself) and on totemism (by Smith’s friend and colleague J. G. Frazer) did much not only to establish these new disciplines as areas of independent enquiry but to give them a particularly Scottish inflexion.

Scottish philosophy’s traditional focus on the observation of the mind, and on thought experiments to underpin its epistemological conclusions, led directly to the empirical investigation of the mind that became the discipline of psychology, and recent histories of psychology have acknowledged these Scottish origins. On the one hand, there is the associationalism of David Hume, in which the mind is nothing but the train of its associations as shaped by the principles of contiguity, resemblance and causality, and on the other the ‘faculty psychology’ of Reid, which sought to overcome the passivity of Hume’s account of the mind and its challenge to the notion of the self. Both traditions, however, were equally committed to the empirical investigation of the mind by introspection, and were fused in the work of Dugald Stewart, who defended Reid’s philosophy while adopting, at the same time, a broadly associationist conception of the mind. Indeed, Stewart’s closest friend, Archibald Alison, provided the most thoroughly associationist account of aesthetics in his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790). For Stewart, Reid’s insistence on the power of the will over the mind’s activity could be integrated with associationist principles by recognising that with practice, we can control the trains of association that the mind produces.

It was largely through the investigation of the processes of association, as developed in the work of Thomas Brown, Stewart’s successor at Edinburgh and a defender of Hume’s arguments on causality, and in the work of Brown’s most influential pupil, James Mill, that empirical investigation of the mind progressed. Brown’s and Mill’s associationism – as presented in the latter’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829) – was to provide the practical foundations of the new discipline of psychology, buttressed by John Stuart Mill’s *Logic*, which was designed to defend the associationist principles of his father’s
psychology. Mill’s close collaborator was Alexander Bain, Professor of Philosophy at Aberdeen, whose associationist analyses were to set the standard for the understanding of the human mind from the 1850s until the close of the nineteenth century.

The work of Mill and Bain made the Humean tradition central to Victorian reflection on the nature of the mind. The influential thinkers of the latter part of the nineteenth century, such as Huxley, Herbert Spencer and Leslie Stephen, would derive their psychology from this tradition and key texts that shaped the early stages of modernism, such as Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (1873), were deeply indebted to it. There is no more eloquent description of Hume’s conception of the mind as made up of impressions and ideas than Pater’s famous conclusion to *The Renaissance*, in which he describes the mind as ‘impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them’, and each mind ‘keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of the world’. If Pater’s philosophy repeats Hume’s sense of the evanescence of individual identity, its dissolution in the flow of impressions, James Ward proposed an alternative in his article on ‘Psychology’ for the ninth edition of *Britannica*. Ward was an English Calvinist and a close friend of Robertson Smith at Cambridge and he suggested a way in which the conflict between the traditions of British empiricism and of *a priori* transcendentalism might be resolved. For Ward, the governing forms of the modern mind were the outcome of associations laid down in the evolutionary development of human consciousness. The conception of the mind offered by the empiricists – in which all knowledge derives from the senses – was historicised to produce a conception of humanity as a whole forming an associational memory, one which was as unavoidable to the modern mind as the *a priori* categories of the Kantian tradition, and producing, like them, the framework within which the world is necessarily constructed:

> What was experienced in the past has become instinct in the present. The descendant has not consciousness of his ancestors’ failures when performing by ‘an untaught ability’ what they slowly and painfully found out. But if we are to attempt to follow the genesis of mind from its earliest dawn it is the primary experience rather than the eventual instinct that we have first of all to keep in view. To this end, then, it is proposed to assume that we are dealing with one individual which continuously advanced from the beginning of psychical life, and not with a series of individuals of which all save the first have inherited certain capacities from its progenitors. The life-history of such an imaginary individual, that is to say, would correspond with [...] all that could be called evolution or development, in a certain typical series of individuals each of whom advanced a certain stage in mental differentiation.

The modern mind thus becomes an archaeology of past associations and through them can be traced the psychological history not just of an individual but also of humanity as a whole.

This historicisation of the psyche both derived from and contributed to the development of social anthropology’s study of primitive peoples, because in the primitive could be found those psychological deposits from which the modern mind had evolved. Ward was introduced by Robertson Smith to another of his protégés at Cambridge, James George Frazer, and it was Ward who, in 1883, first encouraged Frazer to the study of the primitive mind by suggesting he read E. B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*. Frazer’s response was the vast compendium of primitive myth, *The Golden Bough*, which was first published in 1890 and grew from two to twelve volumes by 1915. *The Golden Bough* was probably the single most influential cultural force at the beginning of the twentieth century and it shaped the work of many of the most radical thinkers of the period, including Malinowski and Durkheim in
social anthropology, Bergson and Ryle in philosophy, Freud in psychology, Spengler and Toynbee in philosophical history. The basis of Frazer's argument lay with another remarkable contributor to nineteenth-century Scottish thought, John Ferguson McLennan (1827–81), to whose work Robertson Smith was equally indebted. In articles ‘On Totemism’ for Chambers’s Encyclopaedia in 1868 and ‘On the Worship of Animals and Plants’ in The Fortnightly Review in 1869, McLennan, an Edinburgh advocate with an interest in ancient culture, made the radical suggestion that primitive societies were matriarchal rather than patriarchal. The particular form of this matriarchy required the acquisition of the bride, if necessary by force, from an alien tribe, because marriage within the tribe was forbidden. The evidence for exogamous marriage (the term is McLennan’s invention) could be seen in the symbolic ritual of ‘bride capture’ still practised in various parts of the world, a practice confirming the deposit in the common mind of an ancient psychological association. McLennan related exogamy to what he identified as one of the key stages in human development: the stage of ‘totemism’, in which, as Robertson Smith describes it, individuals of a group believe that they are descended through the mother’s line from a given token or symbol. Since marriage within a totem group is ‘taboo’ (another word which McLennan made central to anthropological investigation, and which, through Frazer, would play a crucial role in Freud’s thinking), totemism and exogamy intertwine as explanations of the nature of primitive religion and primitive society. McLennan died in 1881, leaving his major work uncompleted, and it was Frazer whom Robertson Smith commissioned to write on totemism for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, a commission that led directly to the vast project of The Golden Bough.

The work of McLennan, Robertson Smith and Frazer represents an extension of the Enlightenment idea of universal or ‘conjectural history’ to the prehistory of human civilisations, on the assumption that the most backward of contemporary human beings are indicative of the earliest stages of the progress of humanity in general. Frazer’s work was to provide such a conjectural history of the psyche, and, because of the enormous influence that The Golden Bough exerted, was to make the ideas of his Scottish predecessors key components of the intellectual environment of the early twentieth century. Fundamental to Frazer’s analysis, however, was the Humean conception of association, as it had been developed by Brown, the Mills and Bain. For Frazer, magic and religion were simply mistaken forms of association, in which accidental conjunctions were taken to be, and were treated as, properly causal connections. Primitive magic was mistaken science, but since, on a Humean basis, causality was only constant conjunction, it was perfectly understandable that early humanity would assume some conjunctions which were not, in fact, constant to have the force of those which were. Early magic was, in effect, nothing but the (mis)application of Humean association, revealing at one and the same time how true was Hume’s account of the mind and how terrible its consequences when its principles were misunderstood.

In the work of Clerk Maxwell, Bain, Robertson Smith and Frazer, Scottish thinkers in the latter part of the nineteenth century laid the foundations of the next century’s thought just as influentially as their Enlightenment predecessors had done for their own. And like the major figures of the earlier Enlightenment, they were all deeply conscious of and, indeed, involved in each other’s work. The first edition of The Golden Bough opens with Frazer’s acknowledgement of Robertson Smith and ‘the debt which I owe to the vast stores of his knowledge, the abundance and fertility of his ideas’; and Clerk Maxwell was equally indebted, relying on Smith for Arabic names for new entities in his mathematical calculations. The ninth edition of the Britannica linked them together and expressed the driving spirit of this second Scottish Enlightenment in its commitment to understanding both the
evolutionary laws of human history and the evolution of the disciplines by which that history was understood and shaped. It is an Enlightenment based not on the search for certainty, but on the acknowledgement that the best we can achieve is a representation of reality sufficiently stable to allow us to ask intelligible questions of the world. Just as, in Hume’s philosophy, the effort to apply reason to the workings of the human mind revealed just how much of its workings were, in fact, irrational, so too Frazer in *The Golden Bough* found in primitive magic a mistaken application of the same logic that actually underlies modern science: magic, like science, assumes ‘a certain established order of nature on which [man] can surely count, and which he can manipulate to his own ends’. Science is, as it were, the recovery of the power of magic, but a recovery based on ‘real’ rather than imaginary causation; or, as Frazer sceptically predicts at the conclusion of the 1922 edition of *The Golden Bough*, science itself may be discovered to be simply another error, and an error which may be of benefit to us since the world that science offers us is a bleak and painful one compared to the riches of the magical world:

The dreams of magic may one day be the waking realities of science. But a dark shadow lies athwart the far end of this fair prospect. For however vast the increase in knowledge and of power which the future may have in store for man, he can scarcely hope to stay the sweep of those great forces which seem to be making silently but relentlessly for the destruction of all this starry universe in which our earth swims as a speck or mote [...] Yet the philosopher who trembles at the idea of such distant catastrophes may console himself by reflecting that these gloomy apprehensions, like the earth and sun themselves, are only parts of that unsubstantial world which thought has conjured up out of the void, and that the phantoms which the subtle enchantress has evoked to-day she may ban to-morrow. They too, like so much that to common eyes seems solid, may melt into air, into thin air.

The vast design of *The Golden Bough* itself may be, for Frazer, no more than the phantom outcome of the power of that subtle enchantress, the imagination, just as science, for Clerk Maxwell, may be simply the projection of – or the repression of – a ‘demon’ who creates order out of chaos, or chaos out of order.

The influence of Scottish thought, in science, in psychology and in anthropology reflect not a culture in decline but a culture absolutely central to the disciplines that we now take to have defined the modern world – whether it be in the physics of Einstein, the psychology of Freud, or the anthropology of Durkheim. Indeed, we can see in the work of Robert Louis Stevenson and J. M. Barrie, or the art of the Scottish ‘colourists’, or in the ecological theories of Patrick Geddes, strikingly successful offshoots of an Enlightenment that challenges the story of Scotland’s betrayal of its eighteenth-century heritage. Just as powerfully as its eighteenth-century predecessor, Scotland’s nineteenth-century Enlightenment succeeded in imprinting on the development of modern thought the outcomes of a specifically national tradition.

**Further reading**


Seth, Andrew (1890), Scottish Philosophy: A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume, Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons.
Travel Writing, 1707–1918

Catherine Jones

The history of Scottish travel writing from the Act of Union to the end of the First World War is closely connected to the commercial and colonial expansion in this period of the nation invented in 1707 as ‘Great Britain’ and the crucial role that was played by Scots in the forging of the ‘British Empire’. Although the decade preceding the Act of Union had seen the failure of Scotland’s own ambitious colonial project, the Darien expedition of 1698–9, the forcible integration of England and Scotland in 1707 allowed Scots equal access to the opportunities afforded by the formerly ‘English Empire’. Scots soon penetrated all areas of eighteenth-century British imperial activity, from commerce to administration, soldiering to medicine, colonial education to the expansion of emigrant settlements. Popular culture was transformed as books of voyages and travels, often written by those directly engaged in commercial and colonial projects, were consumed in huge numbers by readers who were fascinated by the unfamiliar and exotic worlds which they vicariously encountered; travel writing thus brought about an expansion in the Scottish and, more broadly, the European imagination. Ranging from the ‘Home’ to the ‘Grand’ Tour to the extra-European narratives of exploration and adventure, Scottish travel writing in the period 1707–1918 is a remarkably varied and heterogeneous corpus of work that freely and imaginatively traverses the modern academic disciplines of literature, history, geography and anthropology, pervading all genres, including biographies, personal narratives, topographical poems and novels, as well as explicit travelogues and documentaries.

Although the ‘borders’ of Scottish travel writing are not fixed or impermeable (the category ‘Scottish’ is itself an unstable one), the present chapter focuses on authors of Scottish birth, ancestry or domicile, and their published travelogues or private manuscripts. This limitation has the advantage of bringing into view the development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of a distinctively Scottish ‘rhetoric’ of travel writing.

While Scottish travel writing became increasingly associated with the interests and preoccupations of those in European societies who wished to influence, exploit or, in some cases, directly control the non-European world, there were also more possibilities for travel within the boundaries of Europe, often in connection with the phenomenon of ‘Grand Tourism’. James Boswell’s private journals of the 1760s, John Macdonald’s ‘below-stairs’ perspective on life in fashionable society, based on a ‘regular Journal’ that he wrote while serving a ‘great number of Noblemen and Gentlemen’ (mainly as a footman), Travels, in Various Parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa (1790), and Lord Byron’s four-canto travelogue poem Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (published in parts between 1811 and 1817) offer contrasting ‘Scottish’ responses to the ideology of the Grand Tour, the contested assumption that continental travel was indispensable to the education of the enlightened ‘citizen of the world’.
At the same time, a more locally focused form of travel, sometimes described as the ‘Home Tour’, became fashionable. The Highlands and Islands, which were not visited for pleasure or out of scientific curiosity in the first half of the eighteenth century, began to be opened up to view from the 1750s through the writing of English travellers, such as Edward Burt, Thomas Pennant and Samuel Johnson. Scots from more southern regions were also curious to observe these northern territories: journeys to the Highlands and Islands offered the prospect not only of travel in cartographic space, but also in historical time, to a society in an earlier stage of progression from ‘savagery’ to ‘civilisation’ and a landscape imbued with legendary associations. Robert Burns, for example, toured the Highlands in late August and September 1787, noting his observations in a journal, and finding through travel a ‘good stock’ of poetical ideas. Similarly, Walter Scott kept a diary of his 1814 ‘Lighthouse’ voyage to Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles that would later form a key source for one of his Waverley novels, The Pirate (1822). Seeking to contribute to the growing body of works celebrating the character and history of Scotland, Elizabeth Isabella Spence (1768–1832) composed her Letters from the North Highlands, During the Summer of 1816 (1817), which she dedicated to Jane Porter, author of the national tale, The Scottish Chiefs (1810). In this, she specifically describes the fascination of the region in terms of travel in historical time as well as cartographic space; Spence aligns herself with contemporary writers of fiction (such as Jane Porter and Scott) who, she argues, have largely succeeded in removing the ‘veil of prejudice’ that had previously obscured knowledge and understanding of the Scots.

England and the English also figure in Scottish ‘domestic’ travel writing of the period. Margaret Calderwood’s journal of her tour in 1756 through England, Holland and the Low Countries (first published in 1884), for example, which takes the form of a series of letters home, is full of sharp and often prejudiced comments on English manners and customs. On the journey south she memorably remarks that she admires the cattle more than the people: this is because the English ‘seem to have the least of what we call smartness of any folks [she] ever saw’. A more favourable view of English national character is offered by William MacRitchie in his Diary of a Tour through Great Britain in 1795 (1897), who notes, en route from Preston to Liverpool, the ‘good breeding’ of the people: ‘You never meet a country person here, young or old, but salutes you with a bow or a curtesy.’ The Home Tour was in vogue during the prolonged wars between Britain and revolutionary and Napoleonic France (c.1790–1815), which severely limited the possibilities of continental travel. MacRitchie’s comments on British commercial prosperity and agricultural improvement suggest a renewal of Anglo-Scottish patriotism in the light of the threat posed by France to the, at times, less-than-united British nation. As he visits the scene of the battle of Flodden, he celebrates the internal peace and security established by the 1707 Act of Union. ‘The plough’, he writes, ‘has obliterated the graves of the Scottish and English heroes; and rich grain now waves over the hills where formerly waved the banners of hostile nations, now, thank Heaven! hostile no more’.

Early eighteenth-century convention strictly limited autobiographical material in ‘non-fiction’ travel accounts: Joseph Addison’s publication Remarks on Several Parts of Italy (1705), for example, rarely foregrounds the experience and sentiments of the traveller. His book was, however, requisite reading for young gentlemen on the Grand Tour: ‘I had Addison’s Travels with me’, wrote Boswell in his journal of 28 November 1764, as he arrived at Soleure, noting in particular his sense of a ‘kind of classical pleasure when [he] thought The Spectator has been here’. Although Boswell proposed to compare the Italy he saw with the Italy Addison had seen and recorded some sixty years earlier, the
The letter to Johnstone delineates Boswell’s own character and that of his friend through the fast, brushstroke ‘painting’ of the passions and grants the traveller the status of object of peculiar interest. ‘A great traveller’, wrote David Hume in his Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40), ‘tho in the same chamber, will pass for a very extraordinary person; as a Greek medal, even in our cabinet, is always esteem’d a valuable curiosity’. Boswell’s letter to Johnstone establishes distance while it brings virtual presence. As Grand Tourist in a Swiss/Scots town, Boswell becomes to his own mind the ‘very extraordinary person’ of Hume’s treatise.

Like Boswell, Janet Schaw, a Scottish ‘Lady of Quality’, represents herself as a ‘valuable curiosity’ in her epistolary manuscript journal of her travels from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina and Portugal between 1774 and 1776 (published in 1921). She constructs her character as that of a ‘brown beauty’ (a non-English identity), untramelled by the codes of conduct that governed the behaviour of younger British women, but feisty where the Creole white women of the West Indies are indolent and spiritless. Schaw’s voyage was linked to British imperial activity: her brother Alexander Schaw had been appointed Customs Officer on St Kitts, and she planned a reunion with another brother, Robert Schaw, a plantation owner who lived with his American wife on a property just north of Wilmington, North Carolina. The journal is a remarkable description of the state of the colonies in the West Indies and North Carolina, at a time of escalating conflict between Britain and her American colonies. Schaw’s observations are embedded in Scottish Enlightenment thought; memorably, a travelling companion reads to her from Kames’s Elements of Criticism (1762) instead of the Bible during a particularly stormy moment in the transatlantic crossing. Yet the journal also exhibits tensions and contradictions in its ‘enlightened’ discourse, not least in its description of the African plantation slaves.

The trope of encounter of self and ‘other’ is central to her narrative. Early on the voyage from Scotland to the West Indies, Schaw is unexpectedly introduced on board deck to a group of emigrants from the islands of Orkney, who had been smuggled aboard at the request of the ship’s owner, and ordered to be confined under the hatches until they were out at sea. ‘For some time’, she writes,

I was unable to credit my senses, it appeared a scene raised by the power of Magic to bring such a crowd together in the middle of the Sea, when I believed there was not a soul aboard but the ship’s crew and our own family. Never did my eyes behold so wretched, so disgusting a sight. They looked like a Cargo of Dean Swift’s Yahoos newly caught.
Schaw’s initial disbelief in the evidence of her senses soon gives way to all too real disgust, as she invokes, in an epithet conflating class and racial otherness, the Yahoos of Jonathan Swift’s travel parody *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). These fellow-travellers are not recognised as fellow-Scots. Tobias Smollett had attained notoriety for his comparison, *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), of character and manners in Nice to the Yahoos. ‘I cannot open the scandalous chronicle of Nice’, he writes, ‘without hazard of contamination. With respect to delicacy and decorum, you must peruse dean Swift’s description of the Yahoos, and then you will have some idea of the porchería, that distinguishes the gallantry of Nice.’ In Schaw’s *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, however, the Yahoo-like emigrants are transformed into ‘a company of hapless exiles’, after the narrator observes them standing in ‘silent sorrow’ as the ship passes the coast of Orkney and connects with them in a moment of sympathetic feeling: ‘It was their native land, and how much is contained in that short Sentence, none but those who parted with their own can be judge of’. The ‘scene’ becomes one familiar to the reader of Adam Smith’s *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) or Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) – itself a riposte to ‘the learned SMELFUNGUS’ Smollett – as the experience of ‘otherness’ is negated through the operation of sympathy. A conversation with a female emigrant leads Schaw to ask rhetorically: ‘Where are now the Cargo of Yahoos? they [sic] are transformed into a Company of most respectable sufferers, whom it is both my duty and inclination to comfort.’ Schaw’s response is here informed by Scottish Enlightenment discourse of virtue, benevolence and the proper relationship of self to world.

There is, however, a decided limit to the operation of sympathy in Schaw’s *Journal*. While there is a persistent anti-slavery element in Scottish Enlightenment thought, Schaw’s narrative confers legitimacy on the institution of plantation slavery. In an ironically termed ‘chapter’ on ‘Negroes feelings’, composed at the plantation ‘Olovaze’ at Basseterre, St Kitts, she writes of the lashing of slaves by white Creole ‘drivers’:

> When one comes to be better acquainted with the nature of the Negroes, the horror [sic] of it must wear off. It is the suffering of the human mind that constitutes the greatest misery of punishment, but with them it is merely corporeal.

Africans, she implies, are not merely a different race; they are hardly human. Lord Monboddo’s much derided but persistent evolutionary speculations about the hierarchy of species haunt Schaw’s text.

John Stedman, a Scottish officer in the Scots Brigade of the Dutch army, who served in the Dutch colony of Surinam from 1772 to 1777, offers quite a different case. Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition, Against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam* (1796) is the history of a ‘man of feeling’ entangled in the ethical code of property and propriety in a brutal and corrupt plantation society. ‘Here’, he writes in the ‘Preface’, ‘in the different characters of a Commander – a Rebel Negro – a Planter, and a Slave – not only tyranny are [sic] exposed – but benevolence and humanity are unveiled to the naked eye.’ The text is illustrated with a number of engravings by William Blake made after drawings by the author, including several powerful representations of African slaves suffering under various kinds of torture. The impact of Stedman’s *Narrative* may be gauged from a letter from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Robert Southey of 30 September 1799 that quotes Stedman’s contrast between the eagles and vultures of Surinam. Stedman compares the two birds, after having witnessed the torture and execution of a free black for killing an overseer (illustrated in an unsigned plate by Blake ‘The Execution of Breaking
on the Rack’) and having seen a vulture feasting on the impaled head of the victim. Alluding to this episode, Coleridge wrote ironically:

There is indeed a sort of living Carrion, Sons of Corruption &c & eke some of the merciful Lady-Planters in Surinam, &c &c &c, on which the Vulture might, without departing from his utility as a Scavenger, exercise the Eagle attribute of first knocking on the head.

Yet Stedman’s Narrative, like Shaw’s Journal, has its internal contradictions. The fortitude of the tortured African slaves and the ‘commiseration’ of their slave executioners impresses him, leading him to conclude that the Europeans were the ‘greater barbarians’, but he repeats the myth that the same dignified people were ‘perfectly savage’ in Africa and would only be harmed by ‘sudden emancipation’. Although he is ‘stunned’ by the sound of the whip and the ‘dismal yells’ of the slaves, he is reassured by the consideration that the tortures were legal punishment and were not occurring in a British colony. And the narrative of his sentimental romance with the mulatto slave Joanna reinforces rather than challenges the existing complex of relations in the colony – the quintessentially colonial economic-sexual agreement of formal concubinage.

Rejecting the sentimental extravagances of writers such as Stedman, the Scottish explorer Mungo Park (sponsored by the London-based Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa) adopted an objective, empiricist style reminiscent (with unintentional irony) of the fictional experiments of Daniel Defoe at the beginning of the century. The ‘Preface’ to his highly successful Travels in the Interior District of Africa (1799) declared that the ‘Journal’ was based on ‘original’ papers that had been ‘preserved with great difficulty’ from his mission of 1795–7. ‘As a composition’, he wrote, ‘it has nothing to recommend it, but truth. It is a plain, unvarnished tale; without pretensions of any kind, except that it claims to enlarge, in some degree, the circle of African geography.’ Park’s narrative would signal the beginning of scientific interest in African exploration that would continue throughout the nineteenth century, notably in the work of the Scottish missionary-explorer David Livingstone, author of the popular Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa (1857). It also established a pattern or model in travel writing of the modern ‘heroic’ adventurer, whose tale is punctuated by dramatic encounters: Park, who defines himself as a traveller ‘for curiosity’, is also a curiosity to the Africans. In addition, however, Park’s Travels is remarkable for its precise rendition of the flux and re-flux of the narrator’s moods, including moments of epiphany when the ‘extraordinary beauty’ of the natural world leads him to affirm his faith in the ‘protecting eye of Providence’.

The nineteenth century saw the publication of a number of travel writings by Scottish authors of different class and status, but all of ‘heroic’ adventure: these include The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner (1822), ‘ghostwritten’ by the ‘polyartist’ John Howell, which tells of the remarkable travels across the world of a sailor inspired by the example of Defoe’s fictional character Robinson Crusoe. Thomas Hamilton’s semi-autobiographical narrative The Youth and Manhood of Cyril Thornton (1827) combines the structure and thematic concerns of the Bildungsroman with social and historical realism, particularly in its account of the city of Glasgow and the narrator’s experience of the campaigns of the Peninsular War. In a similar vein, Michael Scott wrote ‘Tom Cringle’s Log’ (1827–33), a series of sketches for Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, based on his Jamaican travels and residence, and the ‘Seedsman’ Grant Thorburn described his life as an emigrant in New York, Forty Years’ Residence in America (1834), which sought to illustrate ‘The Doctrine of a Particular
Providence’ and provide ‘essential points’ of information for the prospective transatlantic emigrant.

There were also an increasing number of publications of ‘heroic’ adventure by Scottish women, such as Anne Grant (1755–1838) of Laggan’s *Letters from the Mountains*, 1773–1803 (1806), Maria Graham’s (1785–1842) *Journal of a Residence in Chile, During the Year 1822; and a Voyage from Chile to Brazil*, in 1823 (1824), and Isabella Bird Bishop’s (1831–1904) *The Englishwoman in America* (1856), *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880) and *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1881).

In her *Letters from the Mountains*, Grant invokes as a model the heroic seafaring exploration of *The Odyssey* to describe her journey up Loch Lomond-side in a letter to her friend Harriet Reid of 28 April 1773: a stream reminds her of a ‘creek where Ulysses went on shore in Phaeacia’. Later, at breakfast, she dubs a ‘fretful and querulous’ newly arrived traveller at their inn ‘the ghost of Smelfungus, of whom Sterne gives such an amusing account’. These allusions speak of her creative awareness of literary tradition informing perception and writing. At the point at which Grant published her *Letters*, Highland tourism had become fashionable: travellers would follow in the footsteps of Johnson, specifically for the pleasure of challenging or endorsing his critical commentary *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775). Grant side-steps the furore occasioned by Johnson’s narrative, but adopts the role of interpreter of Highland manners to southerners, both Scottish and English: the Highlanders, she writes, ‘are a people never to be known unless you live among them, and learn their language’.

Grant represents the ‘virtues’ of primitive societies in her writings, having first-hand knowledge of the customs of American ‘Indians’, as well as Scottish Highlanders, from a period of residence in the 1760s near Albany, New York, which she describes in her *Memoirs of an American Lady with Sketches of Manners and Scenery in America as They Existed Previous to the Revolution* (1808). Writing from the newly independent Chile in the 1820s, Graham’s fascinating account of ‘Indian’ manners and customs focuses less on the virtues of primitive culture than on the complex and difficult relationship between the ‘First Nations’ and the European South Americans, specifically the Spanish Chilean inhabitants. At Santiago, for example, she notes the efforts being made by the ‘Director’ Don José Antonio de Cotapos to prevent the deaths of Indian women (and their families), when they follow into battle Indian men who seek to make ‘inroads’ on ‘reclaimed grounds’: ‘Should [the Indians] lose [the battle], it is not uncommon for the men to put to death their wives and children to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy.’ Quarter was, in fact, given on neither side, the Indians in the ‘Spanish ranks’ continuing their own war customs, despite their partial civilisation: ‘The Director now gives a reward for all persons, especially women and children, saved on these occasions.’ Although Graham observes the hopeful sign that the rescued Indian children are to be educated and employed as mediators between their nations and Chile, she does not conceal tensions arising from racial and cultural difference within the new Republic.

Later in the nineteenth century, Bird Bishop also explored the nature and difficulties of the relationship between ‘native’ and ‘settler’ populations in the Americas. Her sharp comments on the American ‘Indian problem’ in *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains*, made as she passes through an encampment of the Ute Indians, show, in Dorothy McMillan’s words in *The Scotswoman at Home and Abroad* (1999), the ‘wholly unsentimental’ nature of the ‘courage, determination and sympathy’ of this most famous of Victorian travellers and travel writers. ‘The Americans’, she asserts,
will never solve the Indian problem till the Indian is extinct. They have treated them after a fashion which has intensified their treachery and ‘devilry’ as enemies, and as friends reduces them to a degraded pauperism, devoid of the very first elements of civilisation.

Bird captures the distinctive nuances of ‘American-English’, dramatising through the imitation of a nation’s collective language the failures of the United States’ Indian policy, and – perhaps more damningly – the ways in which those failures are concealed or rationalised through the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny:

‘To get rid of the Injuns’ is the phrase used everywhere. Even their ‘reservations’ do not escape seizure practically; for if gold ‘breaks out’ on them they are ‘rushed’, and their possessors are either compelled to accept land farther west or are shot off and driven off.

Bird’s bald statement of the facts, as she sees it, of the United States’ violence towards Indians, is set against American exaggeration and complacency:

Americans specially love superlatives. [. . .] Unless the President is a strong man they will soon come to boast that their government is composed of the ‘biggest scoundrels’ in the world.

Although she hymns the speed of modern travel (like the ‘huge Pacific train’ she catches at Cheyenne, Wyoming, on 8 September 1873), she refuses to acquiesce in fashionable rhetoric of social and personal progress, anticipating rather the mood of disillusion that would follow in travel writing after the First World War.

Her American travel book is also a Victorian melodrama, incorporating a love story between Bird and a gentleman turned wild – the one-eyed alcoholic Rocky Mountain Jim. Like Schaw, whose narrative includes a mildly flirtatious encounter in Wilmington, North Carolina, with the American rebel leader Colonel Robert Howe, Bird takes pleasure in the fictionalising process. But she also recognises the importance of balancing the objective and the subjective in travel writing: ‘I have written that this scenery is not lovable, but I love it.’

A near-invalid at home, Bird was released into intrepidity by the rigours of the journey. ‘The spirit of travel’, as she describes in the first volume of her account of her journeys to the Far East and the Pacific in the 1890s, Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan (1891), alleviates ‘nervousness’. Leaving Baghdad, she writes: ‘I felt better at once in the pure, exhilarating desert air.’ Bird documents with acute psychological insight the effects of travel on travellers, drawing on her own experience and observations, and the reports of those she meets. She writes eloquently, for example, on the sufferings of women who come to the east as missionaries: the ‘wave of enthusiasm’ on which they leave their homes soon ‘spends its force’, giving way to the ‘fearful difficulties’ of language-learning, intense loneliness and self-questioning. Restricted to the ‘social resources’ of the small missionary group, she asks:

Is it wonderful that supposed slights, tiffs, criticisms which would be utterly brushed away if a good walk in the open or a good gallop were possible, should be brooded over till they attain a magnitude which embitters and depresses life?

In advocating the benefits of a ‘good walk’ and a ‘good gallop’, Bird writes from her own experience of illness and of travel.

The psychological and bodily effects of travel also preoccupied Robert Louis Stevenson. In his first published book, An Inland Voyage (1878), he describes the ‘great exploit’ of a
canoe tour in Belgium and France as the discovery of a ‘frame of mind’, which he defines as ‘ecstatic stupor’: ‘I take it [. . .] that I was about as near Nirvana as would be convenient in practical life’. Yet if the pleasures of travel are a persistent theme in Stevenson’s work, then so are the pains. In the opening chapter of Across the Plains (1892), subtitled ‘Leaves from the Notebook of an Emigrant between New York and San Francisco’, he writes of the narrowing of consciousness and imagination in the cold wait to board the river boat for Jersey City: ‘I believe I had neither a hope nor a fear, and all the activities of my nature had become tributary to one massive sensation of discomfort.’ Later on, changing cars from the Union Pacific to the Central Pacific railroad line, he focuses on the discomfort caused by rancid air. He writes:

I think we are only human in virtue of open windows. Without fresh air, you only require a bad heart, and a remarkable command of the Queen’s English, to become such another as Dean Swift; a kind of leering, human goat, leaping and wagging your scut on mountains of offence.

Although Stevenson rejects the satirical stance of Swift, he nevertheless recalls the Yahoos, as did Schaw before him, as he considers the ‘business’ of emigrant travel: ‘I do my best to keep my head the other way, and look for the human rather than the bestial in this Yahoo-like business of the emigrant train.’ The ‘human’ in the emigrant train stimulates his imagination. Rather than encountering the ‘other’ in the form of his fellow-passengers, Stevenson observes racial and national difference with feelings of ‘wonder’ and ‘respect’. Of the Chinese, for example, he writes:

They walk the earth with us, but it seems they must be of different clay. They hear the clock strike the same hour, yet surely of a different epoch. They travel by steam conveyance, yet with such a baggage of old Asiatic thoughts and superstitions as might check the locomotive in its course.

Although the rhetoric of Stevenson’s prose is that of ‘them’ and ‘us’, the presence of the Chinese enables him mentally to travel backwards in historical time to an ‘antique’ land, even though he is, ironically, a traveller in the ‘New World’.

For Stevenson, travel is crucially about disorientation, the loss and rediscovery of self and world. He describes this process in Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes (1879), comparing his own experience of feeling ‘pleasantly astray’ with that of Ulysses in The Odyssey, ‘left on Ithaca, and with a mind unsettled by the goddess’. He writes:

I have been after an adventure all my life, a pure dispassionate adventure, such as befell early and heroic voyagers: and thus to be found by morning in a random woodside nook in Gévaudan – not knowing north from south, as strange to my surroundings as the first man upon the earth, an inland castaway – was to find a fraction of my day-dreams realised.

The pose of heroic adventurer is, however, only one of many that are adopted by Stevenson in Travels with a Donkey: he is also the flâneur, the spiritual pilgrim and Everyman, for, as he writes in the prefatory letter to Sidney Colvin, ‘we are all travellers in what John Bunyan calls the wilderness of this world – all, too, travellers with a donkey’. Stevenson contains these contrasting and even contradictory perspectives through the composite genre of the travelogue, which allows the author to engage with varied and contradictory desires, needs and views without requiring their resolution in a unified or unifying perspective. It is
perhaps for this reason that the travelogue has proved so rich and popular a genre for
Scottish literary experimentation and development in the eighteenth and nineteenth cen-
turies from Boswell’s ‘Grand Tour’ journals to the artfully whimsical meanderings of
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‘Half a trade and half an art’: Adult and Juvenile Fiction in the Victorian Period

Colin Milton

By the middle of the nineteenth century, with the rapid spread of literacy, Scottish printer-publishers were taking the lead in identifying and developing new markets. Blackie, Nelson, Collins and Chambers, all family firms established in the early decades of the century, pioneered new technologies, new kinds of publications, and fresh approaches to marketing, distribution and sales, to satisfy the demands of a growing body of working- and lower-middle-class readers and the expanding juvenile and educational markets. The early personal experiences of John Blackie, William Collins, and of William and Robert Chambers encouraged sympathy with the educational aspirations of ordinary people; they, Thomas Nelson, and the writers discussed in this chapter, were also shaped by a religious and social ethos more democratic and inclusive than that of England.

All except the Chambers brothers were linked with radical Presbyterianism and, after 1843, supported the break-away Free Church; all (Robert and William Chambers included) regarded their activities as publishers as, broadly speaking, educational, and as part of a wider commitment to social improvement. This also found expression in their exemplary record as employers, and in such things as the elder William Collins’s work for the anti-slavery and temperance causes and William Chambers’s crusade to improve working-class housing in Edinburgh. Their influence as publishers was incalculable and overwhelmingly positive and progressive – giving the lie to the persistent notion that nineteenth-century Scots evangelicals were social and political reactionaries, intent on resisting progressive ideas and developments.

Apprenticed as weavers at a time when the power-loom was driving the hand-loom weaver out of business, both John Blackie (1782–1884) and William Collins (1789–1853) were sharply aware of the pace of technological and social change. They realised both the commercial potential of new technologies and the need for ordinary people to be informed and, therefore, able to respond intelligently to the rapidly changing world they found themselves in. All recognised that what is now called the ‘knowledge economy’ was beginning to develop. Several were aware that their own educational opportunities had been severely curtailed: John Blackie was wont to say that he had had very little education ‘beyond the age of six years’; Robert Chambers (1802–71) did enjoy an extended schooling, but could not continue his classical studies at Edinburgh University because his family could not afford the fees. By publishing cheap editions of ‘standard’ texts, and by producing primers, textbooks and works of reference, the Scots
printer-publishers gave those who lacked the opportunity or the means for schooling, the tools to instruct themselves.

Any discussion of some writers considered in this chapter – George MacDonald (1824–1905), Margaret Oliphant (1828–97), Andrew Lang (1844–1912) and Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) – in relation to the history of Scottish literature raises an obvious question. How can writers who spent most of their lives, and all of their writing lives, outside Scotland be considered part of the Scottish literary tradition? Catherine Sinclair (1800–64), a resident of Edinburgh, is the sole exception in what is essentially an expatriate group, for even R. M. Ballantyne (1825–94) spent only around half of his literary life in Scotland: he left Edinburgh in 1875 and lived thereafter in England and France. However, those who resided outside the country spent their earliest years in Scotland and were decisively shaped by its landscapes, its traditions and its religious inheritance. As a result, even Oliphant, who left Scotland before her teens and never lived there permanently again, was influenced in important ways by her Scottish background; like MacDonald, she always wrote about English society – in which most of her novels are set – as a partial outsider.

The case for inclusion in a native tradition is easily made for MacDonald and Oliphant: some of their best works are set wholly or partly in Scotland; their characters are often products of its distinctive history and traditions; each makes extensive use of Lowland Scots. Ballantyne and Conan Doyle present greater difficulties; though strongly drawn to the romance and adventure materials plentiful in Scottish history, Scotland, whether as a setting, or a source of distinctive character-types, is largely absent from their work. It is as if, for them, the country and its people have been absorbed into a British identity, and into the British imperial project, which both, in their different ways, promote and celebrate. In their case, it is more fruitful to consider how their Scottish background shaped their contribution to a British literary tradition, though in the case of Conan Doyle’s historical romances – which he valued more highly than the Holmes stories that made his name and fortune – it is a British tradition founded by a Scotsman. Scott was also, of course, a major influence on Ballantyne, whose father transcribed the manuscripts of the Great Unknown, and whose uncle printed them. Like Scott, Andrew Lang was brought up in the Borders, and early exposure to the region’s unusually rich traditions of lore and legend and the example of his great predecessor, led to a life-long fascination with folklore in general – and to the recognition that the fundamental structures, patterns and motifs of traditional tales are not peculiar to particular localities, but have a national, and even international, currency.

To appreciate the achievement of MacDonald and Oliphant fully they must be seen in a British as well as a Scottish context. Oliphant is a key figure in both. Her masterpiece *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) establishes her as the missing link between Austen and Eliot in the English tradition. In a Scottish context, her Scottish short stories and novels, like *Kirsteen* (1888), link the era of Scott and Galt with that of Stevenson and Douglas Brown, through her exploration of what it means to be Scots. As Q. D. Leavis observed, Oliphant’s contribution to the English tradition is one that only a Scot could have made. Her wittily ironic portrayal of small-town English is the product of ‘an acute and unsentimental intelligence’, which ‘in the Victorian Age only Scotland could have fostered’. MacDonald also belongs to two distinct traditions. He developed the literary use of Scots in novels which belong, broadly, to the dominant tradition of realism, but he was also an accomplished writer of fantasy, and thus an important contributor to the major counter-tradition of the time.

Scottish and British traditions were closely linked of course: from 1707, exploring what it meant to be Scottish inevitably involved exploring the relationship between Scotland
and England, and the nature of the Scottish contribution to Britain and empire. Furthermore, as Oliphant recognised, in ‘Scottish National Character’ in Blackwood’s (June 1860), the characteristics of the Scots themselves have been shaped as much by their southern neighbour as by the character of Scotland itself:

Few countries, perhaps, have been placed in a position so well adapted for the development of character [. . .] as this our kingdom of Scotland, ancient, hardy, pugnacious, and poor; – always dwelling next door to the rich brother, who vexed her soul with ostentatious display of his greater wealth [. . .]

Scots strength of character is illustrated in Miss Marjoribanks, which examines (in Leavis’s phrase) ‘the impact of Scottish capacity on English provincial life’. The impact of ‘Scottish capacity’ on English life generally, and the related issue of the Scottish contribution to a developing British identity concerned Scottish writers as much as developments in Scotland itself. Oliphant derives the traits which allow Lucilla Marjoribanks to revolutionise social life in Carlingford from her Scots ancestry, while in Kirsteen, the heroine’s ‘Scottish capacity’ – a compound of family pride, business acumen, artistic flair and a determination fostered by resistance to a tyrannical father – dramatically changes the relations between dressmaker and client in the London world of high fashion.

Writing about Scotland (and in Scots) had a double function for writers like MacDonald and Oliphant whose readership was mostly outside the country. A way of exploring what it meant to be Scots and of contributing to the tradition of vernacular writing, it was also a contribution to the creation of a British identity. By acquainting readers unfamiliar with Scotland with its landscapes, culture and speech, it helped spread understanding of the distinctive culture of one of the major partners in the composite entity which was Britain. Scots is an important medium for MacDonald and Oliphant, and the novels in which it is used present (largely for English readers) something of its social history. In Kirsteen, set in the first decade of the nineteenth century, it is used unselfconsciously by Kirsteen’s family, descendants of the great Douglases and very conscious of their ancestry. By the 1830s, when the early action of Alec Forbes (1865) occurs, the prejudice against Scots has spread to the rural middle class. Alec’s mother, widow of a gentleman farmer, reproves her son for using it: ‘Don’t talk so vulgarly to me [. . .] keep that for your ill-behaved companions [. . .].’ However, like many of her class, she has not completely lost touch with Scots and, when moved, tends to fall (in MacDonald’s ironic phrase) ‘into the slough of the vernacular’.

In a series of works beginning with David Elginbrod (1863), MacDonald used a literary Scots based on the speech of his native north-east rather than on the more ‘literary’ east central variety, using it for serious expressive purposes rather than humour or local colour. Contemporaries complained that his novels were difficult even for those used to literary Scots, and his use of it to communicate moral and religious truths also caused unease. Surveying ‘Recent Scotch Novels’ for the Edinburgh Review in 1876, Alexander Shand remarked disapprovingly that the use of dialect for these amounts to a ‘familiar handling of sacred subjects’ ‘border[ing . . .] on irreverence’. MacDonald’s practice, however, reflects a tradition in which theological and moral questions were the business of every believer. Scotland’s democratic religious culture allowed the spiritual capacities of ordinary people to develop, so that Scots itself became capable of expressing deep spiritual and moral insights, as in the magnificent prayer which begins David Elginbrod.

It is not, however, just national differences which MacDonald emphasises. Hewson, the well-read cotter in Robert Falconer (1868), is so firmly rooted in vernacular culture that he
gives his shrewd appreciation of Shakespeare’s _Tempest_ in broad Scots. His familiarity with it, though, shows that even a Scots speaker living in a remote part of rural Scotland belongs by now to a culture which is emphatically British.

Of course the major social and cultural changes of the time were British in their scope, with both countries confronting the same challenges: rapid urbanisation and industrialisation were undermining social structures, and developments in science and biblical scholarship were unsettling traditional beliefs. Oliphant’s family shared the experience of thousands, moving in rapid succession from hamlet to village to the great industrial cities of Glasgow and Liverpool, settling in the latter in 1838, during a decade in which the population increased by nearly half. Oliphant made her reputation with novels about middle-class life in the home counties, but she had grown up in the country, and the extreme contrasts of the great industrial cities made a profound impression, which surfaces in the infernal vision which opens the late tale ‘The Land of Darkness’ (1887):

I was in a street of what seemed a great and very populous place. There were shops on either side, full apparently of all sorts of costly wares [. . .] Some of the shops were most brilliantly lighted, attracting one’s eyes in the sombre light outside, which [. . .] had just enough of day in it to make these spots of illumination look sickly; most of the places thus distinguished were apparently bright with the electric or some other scientific light; and delicate machines of every description, brought to the greatest perfection, were in some windows.

Ostensibly a supernatural realm, this is, in fact, an imaginative realisation of what society would be like if certain powerful tendencies of the age were to develop unchecked. Science and technology have advanced, but human relationships have deteriorated and every encounter is marked by hostility, aggression or violence. Huntly-born MacDonald responded in a similar way to conditions in the poor areas of London, portraying them as an infernal region where people are possessed by the demons of drink, poverty and ignorance:

A few little provision shops, and a few inferior butcher’s stalls were still open. Their great jets of gas, which looked as if they must poison the meat, were flaming fierce and horizontal, roaring like fiery flags, and anon dying into a blue hiss. Discordant singing, more like the howling of wild beasts, came from the corner houses, which blazed like the gates of hell.

The squalor is compounded by the ‘utter wickedness’ of the railway companies. They have pulled down ‘every house that stood in their way’ to drive the network through the city, making no provision ‘for those [. . .] ejected’ – a grim illustration of the social cost of the new technologies in which the age took pride.

For Virginia Woolf in _Three Guineas_ (1938), Oliphant symbolises the woman writer who colluded with patriarchy and reaction in order to earn a living. Everything she had produced – novels, historical writings and the ‘innumerable faded articles, reviews, sketches of one kind or another’ – is dismissed; none of it had advanced ‘culture and intellectual liberty’ because Oliphant had sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that she might earn her living and educate her children.

The violence of Woolf’s language reveals the Modernist disdain for art that does not radically challenge prevailing moral and aesthetic standards. Yet, Oliphant’s affectionately
ironic portrayal of Lucilla Marjoribanks’s influence on Carlingford in Miss Marjoribanks has affinities with Woolf’s treatment of both Mrs Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway. Meanwhile, one of her ‘faded articles’, ‘The Grievances of Women’ in Fraser’s Magazine (May 1880), gives memorable expression to ‘the sense of injustice which exists more or less in every feminine bosom’, in a way which anticipates Woolf’s own writings on the subject:

In all these inequalities and injustices, however, the chief grievance to women is the perpetual contempt, the slur upon them in all respects, the injurious accusation, so entirely beyond all possibility of proof that denial means nothing [. . .] For the sentiment of men towards women is thoroughly ungenerous from beginning to end, from the highest to the lowest.

Oliphant emphasises the strength and competence of women in her fiction – often at the expense of her male characters. Her heroines are unconventional in appearance and character. The diminutive Nettie Underwood, for example, in The Doctor’s Family (1863) takes responsibility for her incapable sister and brother-in-law and their children. Kirsteen Douglas is not ‘the pale and elegant’ type of beauty ‘to which the palm was given’; rather, her abundant and unruly red hair symbolises the rebellious spirit which prompts her to leave her domineering father and make her way alone to London. Meantime, both novels attack the Victorian idealisation of the family, as well as gender stereotypes. The class basis of the ideal of women as passive and decorative is exposed: ironically, those of lower rank have more freedom to take responsibility and develop their capacities. Lucilla Marjoribanks recognises this in her sympathetic interest in a servant’s plan to set up in business – she ‘would have been very glad if she could have taken a little business too’. Kirsteen’s qualities of character link her not with her ‘superior’ parents, but with Mar’get, the housekeeper:

They were not unlike each other, both of them types of powerful and capable womanhood, the elder purely and strongly practical, the other touched with fancy and poetry and perhaps some of the instincts of gentle blood, though neither in father nor mother were there many graces to inherit.

Oliphant’s sense of the potentialities of women was shaped by an older generation of unmarried Scotwomen who

far from conceiving themselves set apart into such a mild twilight of retirement by their unwedded condition [. . .] behaved themselves with great energy and emphasis in the world.

Women also benefit from growing up in a society still in the making – the Australian Nettie scorns English gentility – ‘I am a colonial girl – I don’t know what people do in England. Where I was brought up we were used to be busy about whatever lay nearest to our hand.’ Things are changing, even in Britain. The elder Miss Wodehouse, who ‘had never been called upon to do anything in particular all her gentle life’, admires Nettie, and her younger sister helps with the new curate’s pastoral work, a role which was to become important for young women of good family.

Like Virginia Woolf, many critics have believed that, though Oliphant, and MacDonald, sometimes produced work of the highest quality, their need to earn a living forced them to devote most of their energies to a form fundamentally unsuited to their talents – the three-volume novel. For C. S. Lewis, MacDonald was ‘a mystic and natural
Symbolist [. . .] seduced into writing novels’ – and it is true that, though most of his output was fiction, MacDonald believed that poetry was the supreme literary medium. He began his literary career in 1855 with a widely praised dramatic poem, *Within and Without*, following it in 1858 with a distinctly ‘poetic’ prose work, *Phantastes*. He turned to the novel only in his late thirties, as a result of advice from the publisher George Murray Smith, who, rejecting a play, had said ‘if you would but write novels, you would find all the publishers saving up to buy them of you! Nothing but fiction pays!’ Oliphant, too, has been seen as a ‘novelist by default’, forced by her need to earn a living and the popularity of the form to adopt the novel in preference to other kinds of writing. Certainly, some of her finest work is in novella or short-story form, while the plots of some of her full length novels are overextended. Both writers sometimes felt a tension between the creative and the commercial, but in the main they believed that there was no necessary conflict between the novelist’s high duty and being paid to write – understandably, since they came from ‘respectable’ but relatively impoverished backgrounds, and supported their families by their work. To make a living and support increasing numbers of dependants, it made sense to turn to the form that paid best – but that was not the only or the main reason why they devoted their energies to the novel.

From the 1860s till the 1880s, both were prominent and popular writers with a broadly ‘middlebrow’ readership (the group from which the mainly adult purchasers of Ballantyne’s juvenile fiction were also drawn). All three were younger contemporaries of Trollope, and shared his mid-Victorian conception of the place and responsibilities of the novelist, which emphasised regular, disciplined and conscientious work against ‘inspiration’, but also stressed the power of the novel for the betterment of society, and the near-religious nature of the novelist’s vocation. MacDonald, Oliphant and Ballantyne all believed that the writer should contribute to the ‘great moral end’ of bettering society. As the form which reached the widest and most varied audience, the novel was the most powerful instrument for such betterment, provided the novelist wrote in a responsible and accessible way. Oliphant, in ‘Modern Novelists – Great and Small’ in *Blackwood’s* (May 1855), denounced ‘deluded’ writers ‘who aim at an intellectual audience and address themselves mainly to such’ (she had Hawthorne in mind). She added, significantly, ‘The novelist’s true audience is the common people – the people of ordinary comprehension and everyday sympathies, whatever their rank may be.’

The power of fiction could also contribute to the future health of society through its influence on juvenile readers, but writers for this market were reluctant at first to trust to the imagination, and abandon the admonitory and moralising manner generally used when addressing the young. Their conception of education, particularly for the young, encompassed not only practical and moral, but also imaginative development. Although they were always concerned that what they published should be religiously and morally ‘wholesome’ – which generally meant an overtly didactic element – they helped to create two of the genres of children’s writing which are still popular: the adventure story set in exotic locations; and the tale which centres on children’s ability to re-imagine and find adventure in familiar surroundings. Two of the first ‘star’ children’s authors, R. M. Ballantyne and G. A. Henty, were created by Nelson and Blackie respectively (it was at Thomas Nelson’s suggestion that Ballantyne began to write for children rather than for adults). Both exemplify the combination of imagination and instruction – in history, geography, technology, religion and morals, and much else – found in writing for children at the time. From an emphasis on publishing affordable reprints of culturally central works and didactic materials, whether religious or educational, by the later decades of the century, Nelson, Collins
and Blackie had built up important fiction lists for both juvenile and adult readers. (By the turn of the century, works by Catherine Sinclair, R. M. Ballantyne and George MacDonald had all appeared under the Blackie imprint and Andrew Lang was involved in compiling and editing the gift-books and annuals for which the firm was famous.) And much of Oliphant’s extensive corpus of non-fiction writing was educational in character and intended – like her History of Scotland for the Young (1896) – for the juvenile market.

The sense of writing for, as it were, inexperienced readers, adults as well as children, influenced both the techniques of contemporary fiction and critical attitudes to imaginative writing in general. It is one of the things which lies behind the didacticism, the insistence on telling as well as showing, which is characteristic of George MacDonald’s novels for instance, and which makes them hard going for the contemporary reader. It also lies behind some of the influential critical attitudes of the time, like those which prompted Margaret Oliphant to attack Hardy’s late novels. That attack is not simply reactionary or obscurantist: it gives expression to real anxieties about the effects of such powerful, but morally ‘subversive’, writing on young and impressionable readers who, at a time when only elementary schooling was available to most, perforce received some of their education from current fiction.

Two Scottish writers of the period, however, played an important part in the mid-century emancipation of children’s writing from religious and moral didacticism – R. M. Ballantyne and Catherine Sinclair (1800–64). J. H. Millar, not usually given to generous judgements, describes Sinclair’s Holiday House (1839) as ‘one of the very best children’s books ever written’, though marred by the author’s tendency to ‘moralise and preach’. Even more than Millar, the contemporary reader is likely to find the element of religious and moral didacticism in both writers obtrusive, but in neither is it any longer (in Harvey Darton’s succinct phrase) ‘the dominating, purposeful, obvious cause of the book’s existence’.

While Ballantyne is a pioneer of the kind of adventure story in which youthful characters engage with the challenges presented by extraordinary situations and exotic places, Holiday House stands near the beginning of another important line in children’s writing. This deals with what might be called ‘domestic adventures’ – misadventures, accidents, treats, celebrations, expeditions and the like. The main strength – and for its time, the novelty – of Holiday House lies in the realism with which its principal characters, young Harry and Laura, are portrayed. Sinclair gives her readers children as they are rather than as adults want them to be – impulsive, curious about the natural and social worlds, and with a natural need to experiment and to question adult authority (they tend, always, to take ‘the naughty side of the question’). They are, in other words, normal, lively, inquisitive children, who are not content to accept permissions and prohibitions, but intent on investigating why things are allowed or forbidden.

Sinclair stands at the beginning of the long tradition in children’s writing which creates space for (sometimes hazardous) juvenile explorations of the world by removing the parental presence: the mother dies before the younger children are really aware of such things and the father, suffering ‘excessive grief’, is bundled off to Italy on medical advice. As a result, the children are left under the cooler supervision of grandmother and uncle, though in the immediate charge of their nurse, Mrs Crabtree. Her approach to child-rearing is summed up in the nursery rhyme epigraph to the second chapter – ‘She gave them some tea, without any bread/She whipp’d them all soundly, and sent them to bed’. Her regime of prohibitions and punishments might seem to offer Harry and Laura even less freedom than parents would have afforded them, but Sinclair shows how ineffectual, and even counterproductive such methods are. Scolded incessantly, the children nevertheless
continue to be ‘heedless, frolicsome beings’, while ‘Laura soon became quite as mischevi-
ous as Harry, which is very surprising, as she was a whole year older, and had been twice as
often scolded by Mrs C’. Their tolerant uncle David’s more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger
reproaches have more real effect on their moral and emotional development than Mrs
Crabtree’s effort to (as Sinclair wryly reports) ‘make them good children, though she were
first to flay them alive’.

The fact that Laura and Harry seem ‘real’ rather than characters created to serve some
adult moral or religious purpose is rooted in the origins of the book – for the ‘series of tales’
as Holiday House is described on the title-page) originated not as something written, but as
tales told, spontaneous responses to the perennial child’s demand, ‘tell me a story’. In that
form, Sinclair records in her preface to Holiday House, ‘they were so short, that some friends
[. . .] took the trouble of copying them in manuscript for their own young friends’. Despite
this initial ‘publication’, the tales continued for some time to be oral performances,
[growing] and [expanding] during frequent verbal repetitions [. . .]’. It was only after this
process of evolution, in which audience response would have played a crucial part, that the
tales were finally committed to print. As a result of this market-testing, the stories are exception-
ally well adapted in length, idiom and interest to an audience with an age-range some-
where between the toddler and teen stages. Their popularity, with readers rather than with
parents or teachers, is indicated by the astonishing durability of Holiday House. It remained
in print in its original form till the end of the nineteenth century and was still available,
albeit in a heavily edited version with most of the religious (and religiose) elements removed,
after the Great War. The presence, originally, of a live audience of the most knowledgeable
(and candid) kind compelled Sinclair to portray accurately and unsentimentally how children
think, feel and speak. She has a sharp ear for the way children talk to each other and
to adults (and the way adults talk to children): the conversations are often very funny, and
are among the things which make Holiday House still worth reading.

Her youthful live audience energised Sinclair (she describes herself as ‘delighted in
seeing herself surrounded by a circle of joyous, eager faces’). The origins of Holiday House
in oral rather than written tradition is evident also in the way it constantly draws on the
largely oral culture of children themselves: nursery rhymes and tales, riddles, proverbs,
jokes and superstitions all feature, not as decoration, but as means of understanding and
interpreting experience. It is a tradition central to the tale-within-a-tale which constitutes
one of the longest chapters – uncle David’s ‘Wonderful Story’ of No-book, a boy who rejects
an offer from fairy Teach-all and instead chooses to live with fairy Do-Nothing in Castle
Needless, thus nearly becoming the victim of Giant Snap-em-up, a giant so tall that he is
‘obliged to climb up a ladder to comb his own hair’, who ‘walks round the world before
breakfast’, and whose favourite main course is ‘tiger smothered in onions’. Sinclair draws
on the Bunyanesque tradition of fusing folktale with allegory to create a powerful vehicle
for religious and moral teaching. The tale also, however, incorporates the unsettling and
morally ambiguous combination of the comic, the grotesque and the sadistic which char-
acterises many of the tales collected by the brothers Grimm. The giant’s favourite side dish
is ‘little boys fried in crumbs of bread with plenty of pepper and salt’ and, having captured
No-book, he hangs him from the hair by a larder hook, intending to whip him to death
(having heard that this will improve the flavour and texture of his flesh).

Uncle David’s tale stands in a long tradition of efforts to moralise and Christianise resis-
tant folk materials, delimiting and reducing their significance by treating them allegori-
cally. For an authority on folk- and fairy-tale like Andrew Lang (1844–1912), writing in
the introduction (clearly intended for the adult buyer rather than the juvenile reader) to
the *Blue Fairy Book* (1889), the results of such interventions are usually deplorable, marked by ‘garbled phrases and foolish pieces of moralising’. Lang produced a dozen volumes of tales between 1889 and 1912, the year of his death – though the introduction to the *Green Fairy Book* of 1892 (directed this time at ‘the friendly reader’) describes it as ‘the third, and probably the last, of the Fairy Books of many colours’. The series continued because the *Fairy Books* were deservedly popular, and have continued to be so in reprints, selections and redactions of various kinds virtually up to the present.

Like his younger contemporary J. G Frazer, Lang was – in the words of a recent editor of the *The Golden Bough* (which also appeared first in 1890) – ‘less interested in otherness than he was in sameness’. While the material gathered in the various *Fairy Books* seems extraordinarily diverse, including as it does – as well as the familiar tales from French and German tradition – tales from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Americas and Oceania, Lang’s constant emphasis is on the similarities between them, across both space and time. So evident are these that

> Even a child [. . .] must recognise, as he turns the pages [. . .] that the same adventures and something like the same plots meet him in stories translated from different languages.

Nor are the resemblances limited to tales from adjacent or related cultures: a Scots tale may remind readers of a Norse one, but scholars will recognise that the same tale has analogues, too, among the stories of the ‘Kaffirs and Bassutos’. Differences in ‘race’, in language and in culture obscure more fundamental resemblances between peoples. These are revealed in their creation and enjoyment of the same kinds of stories (having listed some of the countries of origin of the tales in the *Green Fairy Book*, Lang assures his young readers that ‘However much these nations differ about trifles, they all agree in liking fairy-tales’).

Lang’s editorial practice – and he invariably emphasised that he was editor and compiler and not the creator of the tales (which he engagingly says are ‘borrowed’ from the societies which produced them) – was rooted in his belief as an anthropologist and folklorist in the ‘comparative method’ as demonstrating the essential psychic unity of humankind. The fundamental idea is that all human societies pass through a succession of stages in a fixed order which reflects the level of psychic development reached by their members, so that similar intellectual structures appear regularly across space and time. The myths of older societies and the folktales of modern ones represent ‘similar intellectual structures’ of this kind. They deal, in their original forms, with generic figures, settings and situations, a characteristic which survives still in many of them. When a society reaches the next stage of development, the last stage is never entirely left behind. The notion of overall progress, though, is not thereby undermined, for unlike many of his contemporaries, Lang respected the ‘savage mind’, believing it capable of important moral – and even metaphysical – insights.

The earlier stages of human psychic evolution can be found not just in remote places and times, but among the young in civilised society – as their taste for fairytales shows. Lang tells his young readers that

> men were much like children in their minds long, long, long ago, and, before they took to writing newspapers, and sermons, and novels, and long poems, they told each other stories such as you read in the fairy books.

Since they reflect earlier stages in psychic development, traditional tales, though not necessarily at odds with present-day values, are not reliable ethical guides for the present
either. Lang agrees that early students of the folktale were probably right in claiming a ‘moral intention’ for many of them:

the boy who is kind to the beasts, and polite, and generous, and brave, always comes best through his trials, and no doubt these tales were meant to make their hearers kind, unselfish, courteous, and courageous.

He adds, however, ‘after all, we think more as we read them of the diversion than of the lesson’. And many seem to be amoral, for in them ‘mere adroitness is well recompensed’, while a tale like Aladdin seems to reflect only the ‘caprices of chance or love’.

In any event, Lang is sceptical about whether we can know how the savages among us really respond to fairytales; children represent a stage in human development which adults have lost direct and continuous contact with, so that ‘We do not know what passes in the minds of children when they hear fairy tales. Perhaps they side with the wolf [. . .].’ What we do know is that such tales affect them on a very deep level, so that ‘Children [. . .] like to hear a tale often, and always insist that it shall be told in the same way.’ Even if they cannot themselves explain why such tales are important, ‘if their open eyes and mouths tell the truth [. . .] they are happy and contented with these grave, prodigious histories’, and ‘Pretty certainly they do not take the moral.’

Religious anxieties about the effects of fiction on the young, which had led Sinclair, Ballantyne and MacDonald to retain a prominent didactic element in their work, were still present at the end of the century. The climate had changed, however, enough for Lang to appeal directly to the good sense of his young readers against foolish adult fears:

There are grown-up people now who say that the stories are not good for children because they are not true. But probably you who read the tales know very well how much is true, and how much is only make-believe [. . .] I am not afraid that you will be afraid of the magicians and dragons; besides, you see that a really brave boy or girl was always their master, even at the height of their power.

Lang draws, of course, on the strong native tradition of vernacular storytelling. In the Blue Fairy Book, the Scots tales are deliberately positioned in a way which makes a sardonic comment on English resistance to learning about the language and culture of the kingdom to the north:

The Scotch stories are placed at the end for Scotch children. If English people ‘hate dialect’ so much that they cannot read the Waverley novels and Burns, English children (if inordinately and not merely affectedly stupid) may be puzzled by ‘The Black Bull of Norroway’ and ‘The Red Etin of Ireland’.

The implication is that, in claiming to find dialect incomprehensible, the English (of any age) are being ‘affectedly stupid’, since with a little concentration and good will, the sister language, Scots, is comprehensible. Ironically, in Kathleen Lines’s otherwise excellent Nonesuch selection, Fifty Favourite Fairy Tales, published first in the culturally inclusive 1960s, some ‘fine Scottish folktales’ are left out ‘because the dialect is difficult to read’.

Ballantyne, who began to write for children in the 1850s, pioneered a new category of fiction, the boy’s adventure story with a modern setting, which became one of the main contemporary expressions of the romance tradition. His stories, which celebrate technology,
trade, exploration and missions – all seen as expressions of the world-historical destiny of the English-speaking peoples – are very much a product of the period and alien to the multicultural ethos of contemporary Britain. But Ballantyne was not an apologist for imperialism (which developed as an ideology only late in the century): his heroes are explorers, traders or missionaries rather than settlers, soldiers or administrators, and encounters with non-European races in his tales are generally peaceful and involve considerable reciprocity. In The Coral Island (1858), the European presence is involuntary; in The Gorilla Hunters (1861), the reunited castaways visit pre-colonial Africa as tourists, pursuing ‘sporting’ and scientific interests.

Ballantyne certainly saw it as the duty of Europeans to improve the material and moral circumstances of the ‘natives’, but through trade and missions rather than political intervention. Despite descriptions of human sacrifice and cannibalism in some of his tales, in The Young Fur Traders (1856) and Ungava (1858), he celebrated the courage and resourcefulness which allowed indigenous peoples like the Inuit to survive in unbelievably harsh conditions. The real villains of his tales are often Europeans: Portuguese slave traders, English pirates. Brought up as Christians, they have rejected Christian teachings and so are worse than savages. Conversely, his stories often involve the recognition of fundamental emotional and moral affinities behind apparent differences of colour, culture or language.

Despite this recognition, the emphasis in Ballantyne’s work is largely on cultural traffic in one direction – on what technologically advanced Christian Europe can do for native peoples. He was excited by the potential benefits of technology for all societies; while MacDonald saw the railway companies as ‘wicked’, Ballantyne celebrated their epic achievements, travelling on the footplate of the Edinburgh–London express, for instance, to gather material for The Iron Horse (1871). Above all, he emphasised the life-changing power of the Gospel to revolutionise native manners, and create peaceful, productive communities, capable of governing themselves.

The importance of the adventure story, that modern form of the romance, in the growing market for juvenile fiction from mid-century contributed to the sense in the period that the romance genre was not really an ‘adult’ form with the capacity to deal with the complexities of contemporary life (an idea encouraged by its importance in the early history of European literatures). Attitudes to romance were also affected by the increasing association of the adventure tale with imperialist ideas, for the notion of Britain’s imperial destiny was an intensely contested one among the intelligentsia. As a result, in those quarters most sympathetic to the radical new currents of artistic modernism, a taste for adventure and romance came to be seen as immature and ideologically unsound. When a new kind of literary figure, the artist-novelist, emerged in the last decades of the century, the work of writers of romance, including Scott and Stevenson, was increasingly ‘devolved’ to a juvenile (and Britain-wide) audience – for which, among other things, they offered an engaging introduction to Scottish history.

That audience grew in size and commercial importance from the mid-century as religious suspicion of the effects of fiction on the young diminished. It grew further from the 1870s, with the passing of the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act, which made school attendance compulsory for all children. In addition, the initially slow development of public libraries in Scotland after the Act of 1853, which permitted the raising of a rate to support them, was boosted by Carnegie money in the last decades of the century. The importance of the public libraries in creating an appetite for books and in shaping the tastes of young readers from decidedly non-literary backgrounds is widely acknowledged in the memoirs, biographies and fiction of the time.
MacDonald’s starting point in his children’s stories is quite different from Ballantyne’s: given the state of Britain itself, the British, in his view, lack the moral authority to govern others. Victorian Britain, complacently proud of material success but morally bankrupt, is symbolised by the city of Gwyntystorm in *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), where Curdie’s reception by the greedy and inhospitable inhabitants is a comic equivalent of the experience of Oliphant’s narrator in the land of darkness. Gwyntystorm has repudiated its own history (in it ‘the general theme of discourse [...] was, how much wiser they were than their fathers’). MacDonald’s use of traditional folk- and fairytale forms is a response to this cultural amnesia: he sets out to educate young readers through such stories, which typically centre on how the young learn how to relate to other beings, human and non-human, and to the natural world, and which embody communal and age-old values.

The most urgent mission field for MacDonald was Britain itself, particularly its cities, in which there was widespread ignorance of the Gospel message among the urban poor (and a widespread failure to practise what they heard preached among the prosperous). Both his novels and his fantasy writings contrast contemporary values with the Gospel ideals. In *Sir Gibbie* (1879), Gibbie’s effort to follow Christ’s example in everyday life upsets his guardian Mr Sclater, who ‘did what he could to show Sir Gilbert how mistaken he was in imagining he could fit his actions to the words of our Lord’. A decent man and a minister, social conventions nevertheless mean more to Sclater than the Gospel message. The case of old Mrs Falconer in *Robert Falconer*, whose Calvinism stifles her natural warmth, shows that the pious and fervent are not much closer to the Gospel ideal. MacDonald’s literary career was essentially a continuation in a different mode of the religious vocation which led him initially into the nonconformist ministry. Forced out by a conservative faction among his chapel congregation, MacDonald never sought another charge, but his ‘defeat’ was a blessing in disguise, freeing him from established religious structures, and compelling him to find alternative ways of spreading his ideas. Given the broad appeal of the novel, he was bound to find it attractive as a vehicle, while the exceptional flexibility of the three-volume format gave it added appeal. A ‘loose and baggy monster’ (in Henry James’s exasperated and affectionate comment), it could accommodate realism and romance, the juxtaposition of vivid Scots dialogue with discursive treatment of spiritual, moral and social issues, and the portrayal of a wide range of contrasting settings and social environments.

To the contemporary reader MacDonald seems, in his novels at least, even more of his time than Oliphant. It is not just their pervasive didacticism or looseness of structure: his concerns – the responsibility of each of us to think, guided by the Gospels, about the nature and scope of salvation and how we can follow Christ’s example – all seem increasingly remote in this post-Christian age. Even Victorian reviewers sometimes objected to MacDonald’s didacticism, though more often they praised the ‘fine moralising and noble religiousness’ which, for an anonymous reviewer in the *British Quarterly Review* in 1868, made *Robert Falconer* ‘something far greater than a novel’. As an essayist, MacDonald recognised the importance for the artist of ‘[seeking] to show excellence rather than talk[ing] about it, giving the thing itself [...] and not a eulogy of his own upon the thing [...]’; as a novelist, he disregarded this advice, insisting on telling as well as showing. Overt moralising is less prominent, however, in his two adult fantasies, *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), and his stories for children; these show him as a natural Symbolist, aligning him with one of the important avant-garde tendencies of the century’s end. The fact that these tales have no palpable design upon us has helped to preserve their appeal, and their oblique but powerful exploration of the erotic as a central force in human development makes them seem surprisingly modern.
If the novel could be a force for good, it could also be dangerous. In the changed cultural climate of the 1890s, Oliphant deplored recent developments in fiction, especially Hardy's *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Educated and mature readers were unlikely to suffer damage from such subversive works, but—she observes in ‘The Anti-Marriage League’ in *Blackwood’s* (1896)—since the novel has a ‘large share’ in the ‘training of the uneducated or half-educated classes’, there are ‘a very great number of people of whom this certainly cannot be felt’. To a rebellious new generation, this attack on Hardy and the ‘sex-question novel’, together with essays like ‘The Great Unrepresented’ (*Blackwood’s*, 1866)—a sceptical discussion of Mill’s proposal for a restricted franchise for women—made her seem the epitome of ‘Victorian values’. Her success as a circulating-library author was seen as further evidence that she had betrayed her talents, pandering to popular taste to succeed in the literary marketplace.

The joint English–Scottish creation *par excellence* was the Empire. Originating in the dynamic phase of trade and exploration that followed the Union, it was especially important to a poorer country like Scotland. It offered careers—military, mercantile and administrative—to real-life beneficiaries like Ballantyne, apprenticed in 1841 as a clerk in the Scots-dominated Hudson Bay Company when the family finances collapsed. His six years in Rupert’s Land and Canada provided the material for the adventure tales *The Young Fur Traders* (1856) and *Ungava* (1858), which started him on his career as a writer for boys. The Empire was even more important for young men of ‘good’ but impoverished backgrounds whose rank restricted their choice of career. In Oliphant’s *Kirsteen*, set in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the heroine’s brother Robbie and his friend Drummond set off

with commissions in the Company’s service for India, where half the long-legged youths, sons of little Highland lairds and Lowland gentlemen, with good blood and plenty of pride and no money [. . .] found an appropriate career [. . .] They had been bred for this destination from their cradles.

Empire-building is men’s work, and the capable and energetic Kirsteen resents being excluded from it: ‘I am not just a machine for darning stockings. I wish I was Robbie going out into the world.’ The career of Kirsteen’s father illustrates the sinister side of colonialism, however: son of a forfeited Jacobite, Drumcarro settles in Jamaica, prospering enough there to buy back in time ‘a corner of his old inheritance’. Returning to a society sensitised by abolitionist propaganda to the ‘cruelty and horrors’ of slavery, he is abused as the ‘auld slave-driver’. Oliphant uses him, nevertheless, to challenge contemporary pieties about freedom; when Aunt Eelen mentions ‘yon dreadful West Indies’, he snaps back,

‘You’re just a set of idiots with your prejudices [. . .] Slaves, quo she! There’s few of them would change places [. . .] with your crofters and such like that ye call free men.’

Drumcarro’s allusion to the plight of crofters is a reminder that both evictions and voluntary emigration were increasing at the time.

The decline of the small cultivator is also an issue in *Robert Falconer*. For MacDonald, cotter families like the Hewsons represent the best traditions of the country, but their numbers are dwindling as engrossing landlords, ‘laying land to land and house to house’ force them, often from the ‘heat of their burning dwellings’, into emigration. Characteristically, however, MacDonald sees God bringing ‘good to the whole’ out of
‘offence to the individual’: the meeting of cultures and peoples through emigration is part of a divine plan for a world civilisation; the cotters add their qualities to the emerging societies in which they settle. MacDonald rejects, however, one of the key ideas in Protestant and imperialist thinking – that God favours particular peoples: ‘He pets no nation, but trains it for the perfect globular life of all nations’; our duty is to ‘mingle, and love and correct and reform and develop each other, till the planet-world shall go singing through space one harmony to the God of the whole earth’. The emphasis is on mutuality, interaction and growth.

Conan Doyle began writing at the end of the century when the ideology of imperialism was fully developed. He was an enthusiast for empire, though he shared with Kipling the belief that imperial destiny belonged to the English-speaking peoples of the United States and the ‘white dominions’ as much as to the mother-country. That belief finds fulsome expression in Tiphaine’s ecstatic prophecy of the world-wide dominion of English-speakers in *The White Company* (1891). This, with its companion *Sir Nigel* (1906), charts the coming together in fourteenth-century England of the different groups and traditions, Celtic, Saxon and Norman, and different localisms, to form a nation which owes its dynamism to the interaction of different stocks and histories. These events foreshadow the coming together of England, Scotland and Ireland to create the even more dynamic entity, Britain. The membership of Challenger’s expedition in *The Lost World* (1912) reflects the idea that Britain is the most successful of imperial nations, because of the creative tensions and energies generated by its distinctively multi-ethnic composition and non-hierarchical class-relations. Each main character represents a core element of the composite identity which is ‘Britishness’: Challenger, the scientist is a middle-class Scot; Lord John Roxton, explorer, hunter and soldier, an English aristocrat, and the journalist narrator, Edward Malone, is Irish, with a Hibernian athleticism and a way with words. Their coming together to explore new territories emphasises how far the Empire was, precisely, a British enterprise.

Conan Doyle seems utterly conventional in his unionist and imperialist beliefs, yet there are things in his work which link it with the dark vision of ‘The Land of Darkness’ or Robert Falconer. For the great city is also the terrain traversed by Sherlock Holmes, like Challenger and his companions, an explorer and hunter, pursuing the most dangerous animal of all: man. Holmes’s London is as uncharted, mysterious and violent as the jungle; to find his way through it, the explorer needs acute senses, specialised knowledge, and native allies like the Baker Street Irregulars. The Holmes stories have endured because they remind us that the Other is an integral part of ‘civilisation’ – and, of course, of each of us – standing to the commonsensical self as Holmes does to Watson or the transgressive to the law-abiding elements in the psyche.

The reputations of MacDonald and Oliphant declined rapidly at the century’s end. Ballantyne’s popularity survived longer, but dwindled as the Empire disintegrated. Sinclair and Lang are remembered, but mostly as historical figures in the development of children’s literature. Conan Doyle’s situation was different from the outset; his popular success began in the 1890s, by which time neither his historical romances nor his most popular fiction, the Sherlock Holmes stories, qualified as ‘serious’ literature. At present none has canonical status in either a Scottish or British context (though MacDonald has a secure place in the tradition of children’s writing, and is recognised as one of the founders of the adult fantasy genre). On the other hand, none has quite been relegated to the category of the ‘merely’ commercial, their work inhabiting the ambiguous territory between fiction as art and as commodity, with the attendant difficulty of assessing its significance. Recent
critical developments may help them: the growth of cultural studies and of new historicism have restored the link between the ‘masterpiece’ and the generality of contemporary works. At the same time, established genre-hierarchies are being dismantled, and there is increasing interest in the relations between ‘individual’ creativity and the mechanisms by which works of art are produced and reproduced, marketed, distributed and responded to. In this period, as Dean Inge remarked in *The Victorian Age* (1992), it seemed that ‘Literature flourishes best when it is half a trade and half an art.’

**Further reading**

The history of nineteenth-century Scottish poetry is most often given as a history of decline. The trajectory of this narrative, though, has less to do with the intrinsic value of this poetry and more to do with the way that it has been judged. On the one hand, to be considered 'good', this poetry is required to further cultural nationalism by being composed in Scots diction. Indeed, no one praises French poetry simply for being written in French: to see Scots poetry as valuable primarily because written in Scots is to subtly demean it, subordinating it to English. On the other hand, any nineteenth-century poetry written by a Scottish writer not in Scots is typically considered highly artificial, revealing the writer's desire for success on any terms; they collude (so the story goes) with England's internal colonisation of Scotland. Minor dialect or artificial diction, resistance or assimilation: not much of a choice.

The dichotomy has deep disciplinary roots. Critics elevating canonical English writers need to believe that simple style is a matter of the great poet's interior nobility shining through rather than of the poet's hard work. This belief fosters a disparaging nostalgia for poetry written in Lallans, as if writing such poetry were a matter of reverting to the ga-ga's and goo-goo's of one's birth. Critics from Burns's time through to our own in general do not notice, or even hide, the amazingly rich educations received by 'mechanic', 'shepherd', and 'ploughman' poets such as the nineteenth-century 'weaver'-poet William Thom.

Born in 1798 and made partly lame when as a small boy he was run over by a nobleman's carriage, Thom (d. 1848) was educated at 'a dame's school' until apprenticing as a weaver in 1810. He turned to writing poetry and flute-playing during the great depression in the weaving trade of 1837, first publishing in an Aberdeen newspaper where his work was 'discovered' and later brought to London, where he published *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver* in 1844. In his 1843 poem about Queen Victoria's visit to Scotland, 'A Chieftain Unknown to the Queen', Thom crafts lines of extraordinarily simple diction as he describes the actions of an impoverished chieftain: "'Wha's he winna blink on our Queen, /Wi' his haffets sae lyart and lean?'" All the other chieftains, instructed by the Scottish government to keep poverty out of sight, do indeed blink on or deceive the Queen to make Scotland 'seem [. . .] the happiest land', but this chieftain with grey, withered, sunken cheeks will not. 'The Paisley weavers', Thom informs us, in a note written in his characteristically elegant English prose, 'formed a portion in the retinue of this sulky chief', an allegory of poverty.

That simple language is in fact an intellectual achievement is visible as well in a stanza from the narrative poem *Irene* (1833) by Lady Margaret Maclean Clephane Compton
Northampton (d. 1830), published posthumously. Descended from a Highland clan, the Macleans, and married to Charles Compton, Earl of Northampton, she has one foot in Scotland, one in England. When Clephane Compton ironically calls Samuel Johnson ‘our Pope infallible’ in *Irene*, she critiques a papist, hierarchical British literary culture, yet simultaneously asserts her participation in it, just as she formally claims an Anglican literary inheritance. In *Irene*, Clephane Compton beautifully manipulates the Spenserian stanza, so that the reader ultimately becomes unaware of it. For instance, in a stanza about how one does not feel the passage of time, Compton enjamb most of the lines in order to hide the secret ministry of metre and rhyme in natural speech rhythms:

How happy fled the hours! the slanting sun
Beyond the mountains set in floods of gold,
Ere the short course of day seem’d well begun.
Thus when light barks along the billows hold
Their course, and winds so soft their wings unfold
That scarce we feel their motion – the far shore
Seems flying from our sight – the outlines bold
Fade in the sky, and then are seen no more,
’Till the good port is hail’d, the unconscious voyage o’er.

In the line ‘That scarce we feel their motion’, the metre’s motion is reduced by long vowels and fricatives so that we scarcely know the line has been written in modified iambic pentameter. Educated artifice produces simple language, not its antithesis. Scott’s model for Flora in *Waverley*, Clephane Compton is as comfortable translating Jacobite songs from the Gaelic as translating odes by Goethe and Petrarch. It is facility with language that makes her achievement of simple English possible.

We find similar kinds of simple language in William Edmonstoune Aytoun’s long poem, *Bothwell* (1856). An academic critic and poet born in Edinburgh, where he ultimately became Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh as well as a staff writer for *Blackwood’s* (and John Wilson’s son-in-law), Aytoun (1813–65) saw himself as a purifier of poetry. Refusing ‘the words of praise or prayer’, Aytoun’s eponymous hero Bothwell tells us why he can’t use them:

Men drove me from them, as a wolf
From mountain-folds is driven,
And what I could not win on earth
How dare I seek from Heaven?

Bothwell is driven as far away from cant as is Aytoun from poetic elaboration. In the last two lines quoted here, Aytoun approaches such simplicity of diction that each word is only one syllable long: the only polysyllabic word in the whole four lines is ‘mountain’, the only poeticisms ‘as’ and ‘folds’. If Aytoun had not used a ballad stanza but rather iambic pentameter, the lines might read: ‘And since I could not win true love on earth/How dare I try to seek it up in Heav’n?’ The ballad metre lays heavy stress on ‘what’ (‘And what I could not win’) making any repetition of a subject unnecessary in the last line, leaving it stripped down to bare syntactic essentials. Aytoun achieves simplicity, not by hiding metrical stress under the accents of natural speech, but rather, as he had done so successfully in *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, by emphasising it.
Failing to notice that simple language is an artifice (in the positive sense of ‘made’) has led both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics, paradoxically, to devalue its opposite, poetry filled with poeticisms. ‘Moore and Campbell sweeten tea for us’, John Wilson intones in Blackwood’s (1829) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But ‘sweet tea’ poetry is not more artificial than the simple style produced by Thom (at moments), Clephane Compton and Aytoun. It is simply artificial in a different way. Moreover, its political affiliations are more complicated than they at first appear, as is visible in Thom's poems as well as in the work of Janet Little (1759–1813), ‘the Scottish milkmaid’. Like Clephane Compton, Little in ‘Given to a Lady Who Asked Me to Write a Poem’ subtly undermines Samuel Johnson’s authority while seeming to bow to it, and here, she does so for the sake of asserting the pleasure and power of popular poetry:

But Doctor Johnson, in a rage,
Unsto posterity did shew,
Their blunders great, their beauties few.
But now he’s dead, we weel may ken;
For ilka dunce maun hae a pen,
To write in uncouth rhymes;
An’ yet forsooth they please the times.

There is, of course, self-denigration here: Little calls herself just one of myriad dunces. But also she asserts herself to be capable of judging those who ‘write in uncouth rhymes’ and someone who has the authority to permit them to do so: ‘forsooth they please the times’. However, the line ‘But now he's dead’ is almost triumphantly gleeful.

The passage quoted above contains almost as many poeticisms (‘unto’, ‘forsooth’) as Scotticisms. Its mingled diction is reminiscent of the experiments of Robert Fergusson in the previous century. One might question whether the use of conventional poetic diction is, as some critics maintain, intrinsically restrictive. It is worth comparing Little’s poeti-
cised verse written at the beginning of the century to poems written mid-century in the vernacular by another impoverished autodidact, Janet Hamilton (1795–1873), in 'Rhymes for the Times’ addressing ‘the wurkin’ man’:

Ye hae nae time for e'en'in classes;
Ye've time tae drink, an' see the lasses,
[...]
O wad ye no be muckle better
Tae read a beuk, or write a letter?
Had ye the wull, wi' beuk an' pen,
Ye'd fin' the way tae mak' ye men.

Thom too could invoke self-blame as a reason for poverty, as in the epigraph to ‘Whisperings for the Unwashed’: ‘“Tyrants make not slaves – slaves make tyrants.”’ But this classical diction and rhetoric are no more guilty of forming the oppressive idea than Hamilton's 'Scotticisms' free her from it: ‘Ye’ve means, but want the wull tae use them' expresses pretty much the same idea.

If Hamilton claims the right to address her fellows by speaking their common language, Thom resorts to poetical diction in order to achieve ‘self-derived authority’, as he puts it in the preface to his Rhymes (1844). Thom opens a poem first published in an Inverurie
paper in 1844, ‘The Overgate Orphan’, with two lines of poetry that are distinctively in
the mode of the ‘poetess’ and the gift-books:

'Tis the lone wail of woman, a mother's last woe,
And tearless the eye when the soul weepeth so –
Nor fuel nor food in yon windowless lair,
The sleeping is watched by the dying one there.

The poeticisms in these lines ("'Tis", 'lone', 'weepeth', 'yon') do nothing to injure their
power. It is misguided to see the subject of the lines as artificial, given the poem’s headnote
which reprints the letter Thom wrote to the paper's editor:

Sir, – In your paper, the other week, I read of a woman [. . .] found dead – her child, a boy of
seven years, sleeping beside her.

One can only make sense of the last poetical line quoted above, ‘The sleeping is watched
by the dying one there’, given these abominable and particular circumstances. And Thom's
poetical voice is not, for him, a toning-down or sweetening of his outrage. The letter con-
tinues:

That the ‘Murder of Neglect’ is perpetrated in this land is one terrible fact, and it is as true,
though, alas! not so terrifying, that he who is ignorant of it, or knowing it, feels it only as an
incident per course, bestowing upon it a fashionless shrug, and a 'woe's me', – that man has blood
upon his head.

Adopting the artificial language of poetry gives Thom authorial power he needs to
remonstrate.

Of course, poeticism seems nowhere so liable to falsifying reality and to assimilationist
rhetoric of ‘North Britain’ as in the work of Thomas Campbell (1777–1844): his ‘Ye Mariners
of England’ is a nineteenth-century version of James Thomson's ‘Rule, Britannia!’ that had
appeared in Alfred (1740) sixty years earlier. And Campbell's relatively long narrative poem
Gertrude of Wyoming (1809) is embarrassing in its idealisations and demonisations of Native
Americans. Campbell’s poetry was enormously popular, printed and reprinted heavily from
1800 to 1860. Despite these characteristics of Campbell’s poetry (assimilation, idealisation,
hyper-popularity), the power of Gertrude is striking: it ends with a song by an Indian chief
that gives new currency to the proverbial phrase, once striking, now a cliché, ‘do or die’. And
the poem’s narrative compression, the economy with which it recounts Gertrude’s birth,
growth, love, marriage and death, bespeaks Campbell’s immersion in ballad form.

Given Little’s and Thom’s highly resistant use of poeticisms, Gertrude is well worth criti-
cal re-examination. Robert Crawford in Devolving English Literature (2000) has insisted that,
in privileging English over Scots, Scottish intellectuals of the eighteenth century did not
make ‘an anti-Scottish gesture, but a pro-British one’. Such is Campbell's use of the transat-
lantic lingua franca, the overwrought poetic diction typically found in ‘sweet tea’ poetry by
Felicia Hemans and Lydia Sigourney and on both sides of the Atlantic. His poeticisms
convey a transatlantic plot: a Scottish immigrant to the US marries an English immigrant to
the US, and they have a daughter, born in Wyoming, Pennsylvania. When we first encounter
this family, we are not told about an English mother, only that Gertrude’s father left ‘Green
Albin’, forced from the mountains of Scotland despite his love for it by ‘want’s stern edict'. 
We are also told that ‘The rose of England bloom’d on Gertrude’s cheek’, without any explanation of her mother’s heritage well into the second canto. There is something almost mili-
tant, or even counter-colonising, in the way that the rose of England is said to bloom because ‘her sire/A Briton’s independence taught to seek/Far western worlds’. As an independent
Briton (independent of Britain?) who emigrates across the Atlantic, Gertrude’s father (as an
agent of empire) carries the seed of England (his ‘Highland blood’ is sent by ‘England’ ‘to
plant fair Freedom’s tree’). ‘Caledonia’s mountaineer’ is by this convoluted syntax as much
sire of, as sired by, the ancient Briton, as much teacher of as taught by independence. In fact,
the phrase ‘Transatlantic Liberty’ as used in this poem means ‘rebellion’, and apparently such
‘independence’ fosters England’s finest bloom.

Focus on ‘true’ dialect versus artificial diction, Scotticism versus Anglican poeticism,
diverts attention from what is perhaps the most important achievement of nineteenth-
century poetry that is distinctively Scottish. In a letter to Walter Scott upon the anony-
mous publication of Waverley, Clephane Compton insists that she knows he wrote it: ‘The
turn of the phrases in many places is so peculiarly yours, that I fancy I hear your voice
repeating them; and there wants but verse to make all Waverley an enchanting poem’ (in
J. G. Lockhart’s Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott, 1838). In becoming a writer of novelistic his-
torical romance, Scott did not so much turn away from writing poetry as consummate it.

Clephane Compton’s Irene demonstrates the enchanting narrative pleasures of the nine-
teenth-century Scottish long poem, rendering in epic events an allegorical tale of love lost.
The characters in this poem are types: Irene represents virtue and Florio weak humanity,
deceived into sin primarily by foolish belief in his own immunity to such sin. But despite
all the tragedy that befalls her, one would much rather be an Irene than Florio. According
to the poem, the ambition, the ‘prizing’ of ‘empire more/And the heart’s empire less’ that
drives Florio to call his paradise ‘this detested cage, this den, this hole, this styel’ is feeble
compensation for the virtue it supplants. ‘Tis a sad inconvenience, waiting still on Virtue’
understates the poem’s case made much more intensely through narrative contrivance.

Had this poem been publicly published rather than printed privately, ‘for her friends’
after Clephane Compton’s death, Aytoun would certainly have praised it. Bothwell resem-
bles Irene insofar as feelings arise from events rather than from the ‘spasms’ of ‘eternal hys-
terics’ which Aytoun accused Scottish poet-critics Alexander Smith (1830–67) and
George Gilfillan (1813–78) of creating and extolling. In December 1856, the London Times
ventriloquised the gage made by Aytoun’s form: “I shall write a tale in soliloquy, and I shall
show you that it is possible to do so, and to fill it with action, without ever degenerating
into the Spasmodic.” Insofar as Aytoun’s first reviewers deplore the poem’s first-person
narrative voice, it seems likely that what jars is the use of ballad metres for introspection.
Bothwell thus gives us a key for appreciating George MacDonald (1824–1905).

An ardent admirer of what he takes to be MacDonald’s narrative (‘mythopoeic’) talent,
C. S. Lewis sees MacDonald as not caring nor needing to care about language – of not being
a good poet. Even allowing for the power of some poetisms, as discussed above in rela-
tion to Little, Thom and Campbell, MacDonald’s poetic lines can be atrocious: ‘The preacher says a Christian must/Do all the good he can:—/I must be noble, true, and
just,/Because I am a man!’ (‘The Disciple’, 1857). Such lines might be partly justifiable:
MacDonald is here attacking sing-song morality rather than endorsing it. But they stand
in stark contrast to the unsurpassable beauty of the best lines of ‘A Hidden Life’ (1867):

[O]n a warm autumnal afternoon, [. . .].
While the still church, like a said prayer, arose
White in the sunshine, silent as the graves,
Empty of souls, as is the tomb itself;
A little boy [. . .] watched a cow near by
Gather her milk from alms of clover-fields [. . .].

How can MacDonald's poetry be at once so good and so bad?
Both 'The Disciple' and MacDonald's other long poem, written and published much later, his Book of Strife in the Form of the Diary of an Old Soul (1880), are not enchanted stories as is 'A Hidden Life'. Rather, they are theological discourses. MacDonald's constant, life-long spiritual quest – visible in almost every stanza of Diary of an Old Soul – is to overcome the sense of self. Such a desire can make introspective poetry convoluted, to say the least. In his 'translations' of the 'Spiritual Songs' by Novalis, we find lines such as 'If I him but have', syntactically confusing to make a point about one's spiritual relationship to God: is he mine or am I his?

Such confusions of agency are better aesthetically if expressed in plot rather than syntax. Though focused on action, MacDonald's œuvre, both in poetry and prose, is not mythopoeic in the way that Andrew Lang (1844–1912) aspired. The long poem by this Oxford graduate, folklorist and Greek scholar, Lang's Helen of Troy (1882), attempts to bring Greek myth closer to the Christian as a way of insisting that mythologies share primal elements: Lang inserts in the story of Helen a moment when Menelaus offers her to the Greeks for stoning, but 'The sense of their own sin did men constrain, /[. . .]/And [they] one by one [their] gather’d flints let fall'. MacDonald's view differs: son of a tenant farmer in Huntly, MacDonald sees action (all of it, whether mythic or not) as the writing of God's poetry on the material earth. Finding 'hidden treasure' ('The Disciple') in narratives about Christ's life, MacDonald was at his best poetically in describing actions the meaning of which needs interpretation: in MacDonald's poetic drama Within and Without (1855), the tragic hero's daughter touches, rubs, puts her ear up against, and even licks the page of a book containing a poem he has read to her. Observing her distress, the tormented protagonist Julian cries out to God, 'Thy poetry is very hard to read.' For MacDonald, then, whatever happens to someone conveys the words of God's poetry, enchanting (even if tragic) because they do not have transparent meaning and so cannot be translated into rational thought.

While the poets discussed in this chapter differ in their relations to poetic diction and Lowland Scots, Clephane Compton, Aytoun, MacDonald, and Lang – as well as Little, Thom and Campbell – all make action the occasion or even the means for introspection, not vice versa. One can see at least one unstated motivation, then, behind the 'tale of decline' so pervasively told by poetry critics when narrating the history of nineteenth-century poetry. If the trend in canonical British poetry throughout the eighteenth century had been away from action towards the triumph in nineteenth-century poetry of the image, as Norman Maclean argues in 'From Action to Image' in Critics and Criticism (1952), then poetry that privileges action must assume a lower place. This chapter at least partly revises the narrative of decline, first by calling into question our prejudices about simple and poetical diction, and second by calling attention to formal features shared by poets whose style differs dramatically. Unlike the Scots ballad because it is written in various poetic styles, from simple English to transatlantic poeticism, nineteenth-century Scottish poetry nonetheless resembles balladry in its emphasis on plot. Perhaps we can now begin to appreciate and understand this enchanted poetry of action.
Further reading

The press, which forms the subject of this chapter, saw massive changes in respect of organisation, management, scale, as well as readership from its small-scale origins at the beginning of the eighteenth century to its position as a large-scale, highly capitalised industry at the start of the twentieth. At the beginning of our period and perhaps as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, newspapers were usually small-scale affairs, typically being an adjunct to a wider printing and bookselling business. Before the early nineteenth century, specialist editors were rare; before the mid-nineteenth century, the staff of a paper typically comprised an editor and sub-editor, as well as pressmen and compositors. From the central decades of the nineteenth century, this was a world, however, which quickly disappeared. Under the impact of the repeal of taxes on, respectively, newspapers, advertisements and paper, accelerating urbanisation, and the steadily declining costs of newsprint, newspapers gained, for the first time, a genuinely mass readership and appeal. In the later nineteenth century, there was a growing separation between the popular and respectable press – or, perhaps more accurately, a popular (but not necessarily populist) press became a more clearly distinguished element. In Scotland in this process of differentiation, as we will see further later, fiction played a very important role, a fact underlined by the spectacular rise to national prominence of the Dundee-based People’s Journal.

If the newspaper industry underwent, therefore, far-reaching changes in scale and nature during this period, this was also true of the size, form and layout of newspapers. Early newspapers lacked headlines or much in the way of a structured layout. Small in size, they focused on, first, news of international events and, a somewhat distant second, domestic political affairs. In this, they reflected very strongly their origins in the manuscript and printed newsletters of the previous century. Thereafter, overall and column size were governed partly by competitive pressures and cost, partly by fiscal regulations, and partly by the type and quantity of information available to printers and editors (and when it was available). For much of the period, profitability depended as much on advertising in the press as on circulation. Consequently, much space was devoted to advertisements. As late as 1878, the owners of the Aberdeen Weekly Journal acknowledged that the ‘mainstay of the business [. . .] is the advertising connection’. With regard to content and layout, the general impression is one of considerable conservatism and inertia, certainly before the final half of the nineteenth century.

Competitive pressures did cause sizes to increase, as papers strove to provide more comprehensive and fuller coverage of the news, as did the number of columns per page. At the same time, as a result of the high price dictated by taxation (this reached a peak of 4d on
every issue in 1815 and 3s 6d for every advertisement) the size of typefaces decreased, giving most newspapers a very dense, congested appearance from the 1820s and 1830s. From the 1850s, however, the decreasing costs of newsprint created greater scope for experiment and change, as well as causing the efflorescence of a cheap press. Papers appeared more frequently, as well as at reduced prices. Scotland's first penny weekly paper appeared in 1855, and the first daily penny paper in 1859. The first half-penny daily followed in the subsequent decade, while half-penny evening papers appeared from 1870. Prior to 1855, most Scottish papers were either weeklies or bi- and tri-weeklies. From 1855, the clear tendency was for cumulative reductions in price and increasing frequency of production across the press. This was even true of regional papers serving relatively remote areas – for example, the Inverness Courier or the John O' Groat's Journal – as well for city papers where the pattern was most marked. This pattern had considerable importance for the inclusion of literary journalism and fiction; it was the increasing variety of papers from the central decades of the nineteenth century, the much greater volume of space which needed to be filled, and the attempt to appeal to a broader readership, that made it much more likely that such material would find a regular place in the press.

The sheer number of newspapers and journals which appeared in this period poses a further challenge for this chapter. To take just one city, Dundee, between 1775 and 1891, around 210 different periodicals were published, albeit most of them were short-lived. In Glasgow, between 1845 and around 1890, seventy-two dailies and weeklies made their appearance, of which only seven survived at the latter date. Newspapers and journals came in an increasing variety of forms. From the beginning of our period, there was a marked overlap between newspapers and other types of periodical, much more so than south of the border. In the eighteenth century, local printers experimented with producing hybrid publications which were designed to evade payment of stamp duty. These contained the sorts of miscellaneous material familiar to readers of monthly magazines, most notably The Scots Magazine (1739–1817), together with summaries of current events. The best known and most successful of these was Walter Ruddiman's The Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement (1768–73). The first weekly magazine to appear in Scotland, several of Robert Fergusson's poems were first published in its pages. The most popular feature, however, appears to have been the summary of the week's events, especially once war broke out against the North American colonies in 1775. The initiative was eventually brought to a close by an unfavourable judgement in the Court of Exchequer in 1777, although Ruddiman continued to seek ways to evade liability for payment of stamp duty on his publications until 1784. The success of this magazine spawned quite a few imitators, although many of these were similarly affected by the 1777 legal ruling. In the final decades of the eighteenth century, such magazine-style publications continued to appear, often published fortnightly to avoid payment of stamp duty, and were quite frequently the pre-cursors of the establishment of newspapers. This was true, for example, in Dundee, where Thomas Colvill produced three magazine-style publications before the advent of the first successful newspaper proper, the Dundee Advertiser, established in 1801. Interestingly, the last of these publications, the Dundee Magazine or Journal of the Times (1799–1802), failed because of the paucity of the original contributions to the enterprise. Most eighteenth-century magazines and journals relied in large part on an ebullient parasitism for their existence, frequently comprising compilations of material extracted from other sources, together with a very modest amount of original material.

In the nineteenth century, the range of periodicals available expanded continuously, and again the overlap with newspapers could be significant. Some newspapers, particularly in
smaller burghs or serving rural communities, were first established as monthly publications. Literary journals and magazines of different sorts, commonly associated with specific, local literary circles from the 1820s, made fleeting, but regular, appearances. Often it was the same groups of writers – members of a provincial literary culture which grew from this period and flourished most obviously in the mid- to late nineteenth century – who lay behind successive journals and magazines. Before the advent of the popular, cheap weekly press, these, along with the poets' corners that featured in many newspapers, and the continuing publication of monthly and weekly miscellanies, provided the best opportunities for the literary efforts of aspirant provincial writers. What distinguishes these from the better-known literary periodicals is their frequency of publication – they were commonly (although not always) weeklies rather than monthlies; they also, however, had very strong local roots. They were also rarely profitable, often lasting only a few issues. Their counterparts were not the Edinburgh periodicals, but unpublished local literary journals, some of which were produced by skilled artisans during the Chartist years. Literary journals (as opposed to periodicals) were rarely profitable before the mid-nineteenth century, even where they drew on a wider pool of talent. In 1828, Henry Glassford Bell established the Edinburgh Literary Journal, which attracted contributions from, among others, James Hogg, Robert Chambers and even Shelley. Bell gave up his connection with the paper after two years and it folded shortly thereafter.

Other groups sponsored the publication of periodicals, especially religious denominations and temperance societies. These appear rarely to have contained literary matter, although one partial exception was the Witness, edited by Hugh Miller, where Miller’s My Schools and Schoolmasters: The Story of My Education (1854) first appeared in serial form. From the 1850s, as we will see further below, a new generation of miscellanies appeared, some of which were of singular importance in disseminating literature, in the form especially of serialised novels and short stories, to a readership of unprecedented size. The 1880s saw a proliferation of so-called ‘comic’ papers, such as The Chiel, An Illustrated National Social Musical & Dramatic Journal (published in Glasgow) and The Northern Figaro (published in Aberdeen). These papers contained a mixture of fiction, poems, cartoons, social gossip and theatrical criticism. This instability (or variety) of form and of definition needs constantly to be borne in mind when discussing the press; but it is also symptomatic of the movement of literary vitality into the press in Scotland in the later nineteenth century.

The newspaper proper also steadily achieved a sharper identity, especially from the early nineteenth century. The newspaper’s prime function was the regular provision of up-to-date news and information about international and national and, to a lesser, but growing extent, local affairs. It was this that dictated its mode of operation, the changing organisation of the industry, and the place of literary matter in most newspapers. The advent of the telegraph from the mid-1850s and growing size of reporting staff on many papers – the number of staff on the Glasgow Herald grew from six in 1859 to forty-nine in 1895, including fifteen reporters and six parliamentary reporters – only reinforced this pattern. In the 1880s, the amount of literary material published in some newspapers was, as a result of these developments, actually less than twenty years previously.

The press to 1855

Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century newspapers tended to publish relatively little literary material, although many papers printed occasional, topical verse on a regular basis.
Exceptions to this pattern were rare. In the 1760s and early 1770s, the Caledonian Mercury, one of the two most influential and enduring Edinburgh newspapers of the eighteenth century, began to develop an important role as a vehicle for discussion of cultural, moral, and social issues. This variety was unusual, however, and not sustained; from 1775, under the impact of the war against America – which became a European conflict as well from 1778 – the quantity of such material appearing in its pages diminished sharply. Another later eighteenth-century paper to devote space to specifically literary topics was James Sibbald’s The Edinburgh Herald, founded in 1790. A former bookseller and publisher of the Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Review, in announcing the establishment of his new paper, Sibbald declared the ‘Literary Intelligence of our own and of other countries’ to lie ‘within the proper Range of a News-paper’. In early issues, literary articles included lists of works produced by ‘Scotch Authors’; reviews of several novels published in London and works of literary and wider cultural interest and new dramas; an account of German theatre by Henry Mackenzie which had appeared in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; a puff for Alexander Wilson’s ‘Evening – an Ode’, as well as several other poems by Wilson; the first appearance of Burns’s ‘Tam o’ Shanter’; a review of Boswell’s Life of Johnson, which ran over two issues in June 1791; as well as items of literary gossip. This type, however, of material quickly disappeared from its pages as the French Revolution, the French Revolutionary Wars, and the rise of Jacobin dictatorship swept away interest in other matters. From 1792, The Herald was to gain a very different sort of notoriety as the foremost vehicle of pro-government loyalist opinion and views in the Scottish press, a role for which it received a financial subvention from the authorities.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw limited changes in the form and contents of newspapers, especially with respect to their literary contents. Verses continued to appear regularly in many papers, and the possibility of publication in them acted as a lure to many an aspirant poet, including, increasingly, working-class writers. The weaver-poet William Thom (1798–1848), whose Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver (1844) achieved for him a brief, unhappy literary celebrity in London in the 1840s, referred to the poetry section as the ‘poor man’s corner in the Journal’. Much verse was blandly imitative or essentially topical or, very frequently, reprinted from other sources. Literary journalism, meanwhile, generally continued to find a home in places other than newspapers, especially with the rise of quality periodicals from the early decades of the century and various literary journals of much lesser renown from the 1820s. As mentioned earlier, these journals tended to have strong local roots, and were often the product of small coteries of writers and poets. Several of the individuals included within these coteries were involved in Chartism, and the Chartist papers of the 1840s published very significant quantities of poetry. Following the decline of Chartism, and with the marked expansion of the press after 1855, significant numbers of these individuals found careers on Liberal, progressive newspapers of the 1850s and 1860s. The book review only became (as we will see further below) a standard feature of newspapers from the 1830s and 1840s. Scott’s Waverley novels, for example, were reviewed in most of the monthly periodicals, but only in one newspaper – The Scotsman. Extracts from the novels were also reprinted in the Edinburgh Weekly Journal, but this reflected Scott’s own association with that paper. By the 1830s, however, the same paper was regularly devoting between half and a full column to ‘Literature’, a section solely or very largely comprising reviews. The Aberdeen Journal only began to devote space to reviews in the 1840s, and there appears to have been a similar pattern with many other papers. The decision to pay attention to literary matters undoubtedly reflected the personality of editors, and some were keen to give their papers what one, Thomas Aird of the
Dumfries Courier, termed a ‘literary character’. Aird was himself a minor literary figure and part of Carlyle’s Annandale circle. It was Aird who provided the opportunity for the Dundee minister and literary patron the Rev. George Gilfillan to commence a literary career when he invited him to supply a series of biographical sketches for his paper.

Other papers of this period did publish occasional literary items, but only when space permitted, usually reprinted from other sources, and often of specific local interest. In 1820, the Edinburgh Star, a paper popular with the working classes, included extracts from the magazines, verse, including poems by Byron and Keats, notices of forthcoming works by Byron, and a review of Ivanhoe (1820) taken from the Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine. In 1820, the Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser published an extract from the ‘long expected’ Glenfergus (1820). This was the much-anticipated novel – in Dundee at least – of Robert Mudie, who, before leaving for Edinburgh and then London, had been a teacher at Dundee Grammar School, as well as a journalist on the Dundee Advertiser. In London he published books on an astonishing array of topics as well as working on several newspapers before his death in 1842.

The press from 1855 to 1918

The central decades of the nineteenth century were a watershed in the development of the press and in the place of literary journalism and fiction in its pages. There were several different aspects to this, but in part it reflected how the growing size of the newspaper industry and in particular of the numbers of staff provided increasing opportunities for individuals with literary aspirations. The social composition of the new cadre of journalists and editors defies simple generalisation, but quite a few were, like Mudie, products of self-education and a culture of mutual improvement. They were also part of a growing affinity between journalism and writing, of various kinds, in the second half of the nineteenth century. A great deal of historical and antiquarian writing was, for example, the product of journalists. Between 1873 and 1881, Robert Scott Fittis wrote a twice weekly antiquarian column for the Perthshire Constitutional, published in Perth. At the end of the year, these columns were published in book form. Fittis, a formidably industrious man, and ardent bibliophile, also supplied serial novels to several newspapers from the 1850s. For many others, as for Fittis, the press represented a world of expanding opportunities for seeing their work in print, or for those with an aspiration to being popular instructors, or indeed both. For still others, it was through the press that they encountered fiction. A burgeoning press after 1855 served, in short, an expanding empire of literature of a size and indeed diversity unimagined before that date.

With respect to literary content, a fairly clear distinction needs to be made between the popular weeklies, which developed from the 1850s, and those newspapers which continued to see the provision of news as their main purpose. With respect to the latter, literary content continued to vary quite significantly according to the interests of the editor. In general, however, there was relatively little original material printed in the pages of such newspapers, apart from verse, book reviews and, less commonly, literary sketches of various kinds. One impediment to the provision of serial fiction may well have been snobbery, or the perception that it was of a type which appealed only to the lower classes; the key audience for such papers was advertisers from the respectable classes. Once a paper became daily, which was usually in the 1860s and the following decade, the typical pattern was for a literary column to appear on one day a week.
The system for reviewing books may have become more organised in the late nineteenth century, with the increasing use of specialist reviewers who received payment for their reviews. Newspaper reviews were anonymous, and we know relatively little about who wrote them, although ministers and schoolmasters appear to have been commonly called upon in this context. In the case of the Dundee Advertiser, we know that the Rev. George Gilfillan, referred to above, was a frequent reviewer, but it is perhaps significant that, while he talks at great length in his letters and journals about his reviews for various quality periodicals, he says nothing about those he wrote for the Advertiser.

Fiction was most commonly to be found in popular weeklies, although it did appear in many other papers. The 1850s appear to have been a key moment in this context, although the Perth Saturday Journal had carried serial novels in its pages as early as the 1840s. One of the first popular papers to publish serial fiction was the Edinburgh-based North Briton, which was established as a bi-weekly in 1854 and became a weekly in 1873. Papers which initially omitted fiction from their pages, but were soon forced to change their posture included the Glasgow Weekly Herald and the Weekly Scotsman, the latter succumbing at the end of 1888. The success of the People’s Journal was secured when John Leng, the publisher, reached an agreement with David Pae in 1863 about publishing his stories first in the Journal. A journalist and writer of millenarian religious tracts as well as stories, Pae’s agreement with Leng did not prevent him selling his stories to other Scottish and English provincial newspapers. Before the rise of the fiction syndicates as a major source of fiction published in the press, which occurred in the 1870s, Pae’s dominance in this sphere in Scotland was remarkable.

Short stories and other literary matter appeared alongside the serials. By the later 1860s, the main attractions of the People’s Journal were serial fiction and the dialogues of the paper’s editor, W. D. Latto, who wrote in Scots dialect under the pseudonym ‘Tammas Bodlin’. The Journal also encouraged regular correspondence from its readers, and literary submissions which received critical response in a column headed ‘To the Correspondents’. It also ran regular prize competitions for poetry, tales and songs. Its practice of offering cash prizes for fiction was taken up more widely in the press by the 1880s. In 1869 the People’s Friend, which was edited by Pae, was established as a supplement to the Journal. Unlike the Journal, there was no news carried in the People’s Friend, which featured ‘bought in’ serials and cultivated a decidedly improving ethos with sketches and essays on scientific as well as literary and historical topics. It also sought to appeal very directly to the female reader through items on issues of domestic management. In the 1860s, the rising challenge from the new cheap weeklies, such as the People’s Journal, forced the Glasgow Citizen to rely much more heavily on short stories as well as reprinted extracts from novels and journals.

The significance of these developments was far reaching, not least because of the remarkable success of the popular weeklies. By the early 1890s, the People’s Journal had a circulation of around a quarter of a million; the Glasgow Weekly Mail and the People’s Friend were probably of a similar scale. In a pioneering study, William Donaldson has argued that study of the press of this period contradicts several common assumptions about Scottish writing in the nineteenth century; namely, that Scottish writers tended to turn away from the urban society which increasingly defined and, in some eyes, disfigured national life in favour of less disturbing and potentially destabilising themes and settings. The press was, he also argues, at least between the 1860s and 1890s, a major vehicle for a vernacular revival.

The popular weeklies, at least in their early years, were distinctively Scottish in tone and content, and often radical in political affiliation. It was a set of factors which promoted...
some notable and distinctive writing, including long-standing and very successful columns in vernacular Scots, among which Latto’s in the People’s Journal was the most long lasting and successful. They also offered unexampled opportunities for publication by local writers who remained isolated from metropolitan literary circles, individuals such as James Easson, the Dundee housepainter, poet and contributor of essays as well as serial novels and stories to the Journal. Yet, while the press undoubtedly did serve as a very powerful focus for national and, perhaps even more importantly, local and regional patriotisms in the later nineteenth century, the keynotes in this context should perhaps be ones of diversity and ambiguity. Newspapers were part of a world of print that transcended national boundaries at many points. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (and indeed beyond), London exerted massive influence in this world, as, albeit to a lesser extent, did links with North America. Some of the main rivals to the popular weeklies in the later nineteenth century were popular journals published in London, but widely advertised and circulated in Scotland.

By the later nineteenth century, connections to the industrial north of England, where vernacular and regional literature was equally vibrant, may also have been as important as the links to London. John Leng, founder of the People’s Journal, learnt his trade as a sub-editor on a Hull paper. His brother, William, who, between 1859 and 1863, spent time in Dundee working on the staff of the Dundee Advertiser, edited and ran the Sheffield Daily Telegraph, and established the second of the main fiction syndicates operating in the north of England from the 1870s. Popular newspaper fiction in the later nineteenth century was regularly shared between England and Scotland, partly because of syndication, but also because authors sold works to newspapers in both countries. Several northern English and Scottish newspapers also appear to have reached informal arrangements for sharing serial fiction. The sense this helped to create of a cultural identity which transcended national boundaries and which linked industrial Scotland and the industrial north of England is evident too from the career of David Pae. Perhaps his best-known novel, Lucy, the Factory Girl; or, The Secrets of the Tontine Close (1860) appeared first in the North Briton, then in the Glasgow Times, the People’s Journal, and then in five different northern English newspapers. Pae’s style lent itself to such dissemination in that his narrative voice was in literary English. In Lucy, the Factory Girl only one character spoke in Scots dialect, despite the fact the story was set in Glasgow, and even more strikingly the criminal gang which infested the city’s Tontine Close spoke in a version of Cockney slang. The novel could, in reality, have been set almost anywhere. Tontine Close was an architectural synecdoche for human depravity in much the same way as the Rookeries of London were for Dickens; and his essential themes were common to the popular literature of the period throughout Britain. Although it has been argued by William Donaldson that the novel was an ‘unrelenting attack’ on a materialist outlook and ethos associated with Victorian capitalism, it can be read in less transgressive (but not necessarily less radical) ways, as not so much a commentary on capitalism but an affirmation of the ‘democracy of the heart’. His heroes and heroines were dignified by their endurance, their loyalty and their abiding sense of conscience and of virtue. It was a world in which the moral predominated and which proclaimed the unlimited nature of the Atonement. If readers missed this improving message, Pae helped them by including a postscript in some of his novels pointing it out. As he declared at the end of one of his tales: ‘Our whole and only aim, dear reader, has not been to amuse you. We had a much higher object in view [. . .].’ Interestingly, Graham Law has recently suggested that Leng’s arrangement with Pae may have served to create a division between the political and
literary aspects of his enterprise, and to have diluted the Journal’s strength as a vehicle of radical thought.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, there was also a kind of national organisation in the newspaper world linking the press throughout Britain, and it was common for newspapermen to move many times in a career and across the national boundary. This reality was, of course, reflected throughout the world of print in this period, and created dilemmas for many Scottish writers, as well as tendency for later commentators to represent the influence of London and the English market as a force for trivialisation and cultural dilution. Whatever the truth of this, it was not a one-way relationship, and Scots made significant contributions to the development of the London and English provincial press. The literary agent A. P. Watt, who played a very large role in negotiations between authors and papers and newspaper syndicates in the 1870s and 1880s, was born in Glasgow and brought up in Edinburgh, before moving to London in the 1860s to work for his brother-in-law, the evangelical publisher Alexander Strahan, who himself had moved from Edinburgh in 1862. Watt’s early clients included George MacDonald, William Black, Robert Buchanan and Edward Jenkins, all Scottish writers who re-located to London. There was, in fact, always a dynamic tension between the local, the national, the British and the international in the pages of the press. Many works of local interest – histories, sketches, topographical works – were first published in serial form in newspapers in the nineteenth century, a fact which reflected the local roots of much of the press. The Inverness Courier of the 1870s and 1880s contained an item entitled ‘Nether Lochaber’, a compound of comment on weather, folklore and literary discussion described by the columnist as ‘a simple sandwich’. Through this sort of activity, and through encouragement and publication of local poetry, often written in dialect, as well as in other ways, the press served as an important vehicle for forging a stronger sense of local or provincial identity in the nineteenth century. A sharpened sense of provincialism or provincial identity was itself, however, a process directly stimulated by greater national integration, and by a perception that local cultures were being transformed by the growing pace and volume of ‘circulation’ in society, of which newspapers, together with the railways which served to convey them in ever greater quantities and ever more quickly to readers, were very visible symptoms. By at least the 1880s and 1890s, the balance between the regional and the metropolitan and imperial was also showing signs of shifting in favour of the latter, partly stimulated by the power of the fiction syndicates, the growing capital requirements, scale and national integration of the newspaper industry under the impact of further technological change, and the intensifying erosion of local and regional distinctiveness in pursuit of ever wider and greater readerships that ran beyond the classes of lesser tradesmen, shopkeepers and artisans and their families who had dominated readership of the popular weeklies between approximately 1870 and 1890. The result was a loss of local control, the replacement of much original writing with mass stereotyped copy, and, in the eyes of many, a trivialisation of press content. It was a process which occurred throughout the British Isles, and which was to accelerate markedly in the years leading up to the Great War. The effects which it had on local, regional and national literary cultures as partly reflected in the press is a subject on which existing scholarship sheds limited light. We might just note, however, that in some papers, such as the Glasgow Citizen, the preponderance of literary material from the 1870s was reprinted from American and metropolitan (that is, London) literary journals; while in 1875, of the four novels serialised in the People’s Friend, three of these were metropolitan stories by, respectively, Florence Marryat, Blanchard Jerrold and Mary Elizabeth Braddon.
Further reading

The Kailyard: Problem or Illusion?

Andrew Nash

It may be that some apology is due by anyone who refers to the Kailyard. Most readers must be weary of the outworn word itself, as they are of the class of writing for which it stands. But the word has become part of the language, and will probably survive the books which it connotes.

So began an article published in the Glasgow Evening Times on 6 January 1897 by a writer signing himself ‘Rix’. His words could hardly have been more prophetic: 101 years later, Donald Dewar, then Secretary of State for Scotland, participated in a debate about the likely cultural effects of devolution and spoke of his fears that a devolved structure for Scottish radio and television might lead to the production of ‘Kailyard’ broadcasting. Reporting on the debate for The Scotsman on 1 March 1998, Magnus Linklater summed up the import of Dewar’s use of the word:

Kailyard. The dread word floated in the BBC air like a bad smell [. . .] An audible hiss of indrawn breath ran round Broadcasting House. The K-word had been uttered; and by the Scottish Secretary at that. Of course, he had retrieved it at once. But just saying it was bad enough.

The mention of the K-word by a modern politician, and the extremity of response that it apparently provoked in an audience of the press, proves that ‘Rix’ was right to suppose that the word would remain part of the language and survive the books which, in 1897, it served to connote. For over a century, Kailyard has been a key term in Scottish literary and cultural debate. Though originating in literary criticism it has come to be used in various ways across a whole range of academic and popular discourse. The sheer range of cultural reference indicates the essential point about Kailyard: although it is commonly understood as a movement in Scottish literary history, it is in fact a critical term that has been used pejoratively to help structure discussion of Scottish literature and culture.

Kailyard was first applied to Scottish literature by J. H. Millar in an article in the New Review in 1895. Millar identified J. M. Barrie, ‘for all his genius’, as the founder of a special and notable department in the “parochial” school of fiction and the ‘pars magna, if not pars maxima, of the Great Kailyard Movement’. Millar’s concession to Barrie’s ‘genius’ is not the only qualification he serves on placing this author within his new critical context and the mock-heroic tone seems tongue-in-cheek, but his half-joking label set out a future critical agenda as the term soon became an institution of letters. The immediate consequence of his article was to fix in place a canon of authors. Of the many writers whom he saw as following Barrie and contributing to the ‘Great Kailyard Movement’, he drew attention only to S. R. Crockett (1859–1914) and Ian Maclaren (1850–1907). The effect was
to make Kailyard synonymous with the work of these three writers. Ever since Millar’s article, Kailyard has come to be seen as an event in Scottish literary history, and Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren as forming a ‘school’ of writers, pursuing similar ends and employing comparable literary techniques (Thomas Knowles’s study of Kailyard develops this particular understanding of the term).

One of the inevitable effects of this critical construction of a ‘movement’ or ‘school’ has been to impose a constraint upon discussion of these three writers that is only gradually being lifted; the publication in this volume of a separate chapter on Barrie (see Chapter 36), discussing his work outside the Kailyard context, is an unusual, but welcome, departure from most other histories of Scottish literature. Few contemporary commentators put Barrie’s work in the same category as Kailyard. The two books of his that are most closely associated with the term were written several years before it was applied to Scottish literature. *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888) was a humorous collection of sketches focusing on the experiences of the Auld Lichts, a fiercely Puritanical congregation that had seceded from the Established Kirk in 1733 but which had almost completely died out at the time of Barrie’s writing. Based on the childhood memories of his mother, the sketches were set in a rural Scotland of the mid-nineteenth century and told of life in ‘Thrums’ – Barrie’s fictional name for his native town of Kirriemuir. The book was well received in Scotland as well as in England and was followed by *A Window in Thrums* (1889), which had a more unified plot and a more sentimental tone, and the full-length novel *The Little Minister* (1891), also set in Thrums, which elevated its author alongside Hardy and Kipling as among the foremost writers of the day.

It was not until the publication of numerous similar works in the mid-1890s that criticism of the genre of Kailyard fiction arose. Undoubtedly the two most successful and notorious writers were S. R. Crockett and Ian Maclaren (the pseudonym of the Rev. John Watson). Both men were ministers of the Free Church (though Crockett later retired to become a full-time writer) and, like Barrie, both set their work in identifiable regions of Scotland: Crockett drew on his native Galloway for *The Stickit Minister* (1893) and *The Lilac Sunbonnet* (1894), whilst Maclaren’s *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894) and *The Days of Auld Langsyne* (1895) drew on his ministerial experiences in rural Perthshire. Appealing to the contemporary vogue for regionalism, their books sold in hundreds of thousands and were even more successful in America. Both writers acquired celebrity status, befitting the cult of personality that was characteristic of the late-Victorian best-selling author. They preached sermons and gave readings from their work, had samples of their fan mail published, gave interviews and had photographs of their homes printed in periodicals, and, in the case of Maclaren, travelled to America to promote their work.

When the fame of Crockett and Maclaren was at its height, Barrie was exploring different avenues. In his later, longer, more ambitious novels, *Sentimental Tommy* (1896), *Tommy and Grizel* (1900) and *The Little White Bird* (1902), he turned his attention towards a more reflexive concern with art, creativity and fantasy – themes that would find their fullest and most original expression in *Peter Pan* (1904) and his other major plays. At the very moment when J. H. Millar was inventing the Kailyard context, Barrie was thus moving away from the narrow range of themes and values suggested by the term. Crockett, too, went on to write fiction in a range of different styles and settings. Two of his best books, *The Raiders* (1894) and *The Men of the Moss Hags* (1895), are historical novels set in Galloway, whilst *Cleg Kelly* (1896) is a tale of the Edinburgh slums. The fate of all three writers, however, was to become trapped in the critical Kailyard, and Barrie’s fiction in particular has been much neglected because of it. What could not have been predicted in 1895 was just how much currency the term would itself come to acquire in the twentieth century.
The cultural impact of the fiction of Crockett and Maclaren was extraordinary. As The Times remarked on 19 January 1895: ‘few things are more remarkable in the recent history of our literature, than the rise of a new school of Scottish fiction, drawing its inspiration from locality and national character’. It was not long, however, before Scottish critics began to speak out in protest at the extent to which Scottish literature was becoming dominated by such fiction. The criticisms were directed at the predominance of rural settings, the parochial outlook, the nostalgic tone, the exaggerated pathos, the excessive emphasis on religion, the cosmetic use of dialect and the obvious concession to audience demand. The most significant charge, however, was that the Kailyard writers betrayed Scotland by presenting ‘national character’ in a way that was idealised, distorting and unrepresentative of contemporary life. Whether the writers intended it or not, their fiction was taken by outside readers as a documentary account of life in Scotland. It did not matter that the stories were set in the past, or that they were constructed in an artistic mode of idyllism; the fact that they were eagerly devoured outside Scotland meant that a partial, unrepresentative view of Scottish life was being marketed to an international audience. As J. H. Millar complained in the article already cited:

to the curious superstitions which the Southron breast has long nourished with regard to Scotland must now be added a new group of equally well-grounded beliefs; as, for example, that the Auld Lichts formed a large majority of the people of Scotland, and that the absorbing interest, if not the main occupation, of nine true-born Scotsmen out of ten is chatter about church officers, parleyings about precentors, babble about beadles, and maunderings about manses.

Other critics levelled the same charge. R. B. Cunninghame Graham wrote in the Saturday Review in May 1896 that ‘to-day a Scotchman stands confessed a sentimental fool’, and J. H. Findlater complained in an article of 1899 that ‘To many Englishman there is but one Scotsman – the fictitious Scot – the Scot of fiction’. The concern among contemporary critics was that the diversity of Scottish life was not being given cultural voice. Graham did not want to ‘have Englishmen believe that the entire Scotch nation is composed of ministers, elders, and mauldin whiskified physicians’, but the success of Kailyard fiction created this assumption. It was this concern that led George Douglas Brown to pen his famous anti-Kailyard novel, The House with the Green Shutters (1901), which took a darker, more pessimistic view of Scottish village life, but one which its author nevertheless felt was ‘more complimentary to Scotland’ than ‘the sentimental slop’ of Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren. With its sophisticated formal and generic patterning, its treatment of social change and its representation of the disintegration of community values, Brown’s novel has come to be seen as more forward-looking than the apparent simplicities of Kailyard fiction.

Understanding of the importance of Kailyard to Scottish literature and culture extends beyond an understanding of Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren, however. Whilst these writers have remained indelibly associated with the term, Kailyard quickly transcended the context within which it was originally applied and came to be used in wider senses. One of the earliest indications of this can be found in J. H. Millar’s later Literary History of Scotland (1903), where he describes John Wilson’s Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life (1822) as ‘pure “Kailyard”’. Here the term is being used not as a noun to refer to an event in literary history but as an adjective to make a qualitative judgement on a work from much earlier in the century. As a result of this transformation of meaning, Kailyard came to refer to the whole Victorian period in Scottish literature. There was a reason for this. Writers and critics of the early twentieth century considered Victorian Scottish literature to be not
only undistinguished in quality but evasive in form and, in marked contrast to the English novel, unrepresentative of industrial life in the nineteenth century. The fiction that Millar had labelled Kailyard seemed to encapsulate these negative qualities only to an excessive extent. It appeared the culmination of a whole tradition of Scottish writing that had been characterised by a provincial outlook, a predilection for romance over realism, an excessive focus on rural as opposed to urban settings, and a tendency to evade social and industrial issues. These critical concerns have become embedded in the Kailyard term and are always implicit whenever it is used in cultural criticism. The most influential book in this context is George Blake’s *Barrie and the Kailyard School* (1951). Although his title suggests a close focus on the 1890s, and on Barrie’s work in particular, Blake’s book is really a lament for Scotland’s failure to respond imaginatively to industrial life in the nineteenth century:

> The bulk of the Scottish people were thus condemned to a purely urban, sophisticated, and mainly ugly sort of life during the nineteenth century. A really dramatic, often beastly revolution was taking place. And what had the Scottish novelists to say about it? The answer is—nothing, or as nearly nothing as makes no matter. They might as well have been living in Illyria, as in the agonized country of their birth.

Kailyard became the word to sum up this imaginative failure, and as a result the work of Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren came to be placed as central to, and emblematic of, the whole Victorian period, in spite of the fact that their careers were confined to the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The legacy of Blake’s book can be found in any number of studies in Scottish literature that either refer to the Victorian period as Kailyard or use the term as the defining context within which to discuss literature of that period. William Donaldson, for example, uses ‘Kailyard’ as the context for his discussion of *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland* (1986), a book that discusses mid-century fiction serialised in Scottish newspapers.

Blake’s understanding of Kailyard originates from the writings of Hugh MacDiarmid, who took the word to the centre of his critical and creative programme for a Scottish literary renaissance. It was MacDiarmid who first used Kailyard to refer to a poetic tradition. In *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (1926), he railed against modern Scottish poetry, attacking the ‘traditional and deepening rut of post-Burnsian Kailyairdism’ and deploring the marginalising ‘of Scottish poets wholly outwith the kailyaird tradition such as Robert Buchanan and John Davidson’. As a result, the term ‘Kailyard poetry’ has since come to be used to refer to a good deal of minor nineteenth-century Scottish verse. Much of MacDiarmid’s critical writing was devoted to correcting what he took to be misrepresentations of Scotland and the Scottish literary tradition. The central section of his poem *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) is entitled ‘Frae Anither Window in Thrums’, an allusion to the painting by William McCance, which itself takes issue with the implicit (if never intended) claim of Barrie’s text to stand for Scotland. The use of that title by both artist and poet indicates the extent to which Barrie and the Kailyard had come to represent Scotland. In *Scottish Scene* (1934), MacDiarmid asserted that the ‘New Movement’ in Scottish literature was a ‘long-overdue protest’ to ‘the old Kailyaird guff which has no correspondence to Scottish realities’, and in an essay on R. B. Cunninghame Graham in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* he complained: ‘It is lamentable to find Scotland still so largely preoccupied with what is conventionally regarded as Scottish literature, the mindless vulgarities of parochial poetasters and the cold-haggis-and-gingerbeer atrocities of prose Kailyardism.’
MacDiarmid’s attack on Kailyard was in part an attack on popular literature, and in the
twentieth century Kailyard came to be associated with various forms of popular culture that
were seen to have derived from the fiction of Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren. These
included the work of such diverse writers as Annie S. Swan (whose numerous books of
women’s romance led to Kailyard acquiring something of a feminine equation), Neil
Munro, J. J. Bell and Compton Mackenzie, as well as popular entertainers such as Harry
Lauder, strip cartoons like ‘Oor Wullie’ and ‘The Broons’ and television series such as
Dr Finlay’s Casebook. What all these forms of popular culture had in common was a ten-
dency (implicitly or otherwise) to construct Scottishness in an escapist paradigm that had
little to do with the reality of contemporary Scotland. And because they were widely dis-
seminated to a largely lowbrow or middlebrow audience, intellectuals in Scotland viewed
them as potentially damaging to the maintenance of a credible Scottish identity. In this
context, Kailyard became part of a larger, political, argument about the relationship
between Scottish and British culture. Once again, the roots of this argument come from
MacDiarmid, who saw ‘Kailyairdism’ as part of the misunderstanding of Scotland’s ‘inde-
pendent literary traditions’. The differences between English and Scottish poets, he wrote
in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*,

derive in unbroken descent from the Old Makars and constitute and perpetuate the indepen-
dent literary traditions of Scotland which, on close analysis, have always been discernible even
when Scottish letters have seemed most submerged in English – better preserved there, indeed,
than in the Kailyairdism which ostensibly exemplifies them.

Kailyairdism ‘ostensibly exemplifies’ the Scottish tradition, but is, in fact, a distortion. In
his poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), MacDiarmid laments the way Dunbar
has been ‘owre the Kailyaird wa’ flung’. The real ‘independent literary traditions of
Scotland’ that derive from Dunbar have become obscured by a Kailyard tradition that is
not just a negation of Scottish identity but a parading of a false national identity.

MacDiarmid’s creative and critical writing consolidated the way in which Kailyard came
to be used as a critical concept to help structure cultural debate. Studies of twentieth-century
Scottish literature invariably begin by using Kailyard as a defining context, seeing it as a tra-
dition against which modern writers are reacting. George Douglas Brown’s *The House with
the Green Shutters* has come to be seen as a landmark event and the beginnings of a new direc-
tion in Scottish literature. This is exactly the context from which Ian Campbell begins his
book *Kailyard* (1981), which is the study that best exemplifies the way the term has come to
be used in recent decades as an adjective to make qualitative judgements on various aspects
of Scottish literature. Campbell’s study is not an account of the fiction of Barrie, Crockett
and Maclaren, but an examination of attitudes towards Scotland conveyed in a range of texts
from the late eighteenth century onwards. The Kailyard faults are exposed as

a gelling of attitude and myth, a freezing of the possibilities of change or redefinition, a tacit
acceptance of a narrow range of character and activity within which to present ‘real’ Scotland;
above all, a total weakness in any attempt to challenge the reader into startling or threaten-
ing identification or redefinition.

‘Kailyard’ has come to be used in this way throughout literary criticism to encapsulate what
critics take to be wrong ways of writing about Scotland, whether this be at the level of style,
content or outlook on Scottish life.
The writings of MacDiarmid and Blake have also had a major influence on those critics who have employed Kailyard in wider discussions of Scottish culture. In one of the most influential books published in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Tom Nairn used the term to help structure his analysis of Scottish politics, figured in what he projected as *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977). Attempting to account for the failure of Scottish nationalism, Nairn diagnosed the problem of what he called ‘cultural sub-nationalism’ – a neurosis at the heart of Scottish identity. One of the two most prominent strands in this neurosis – the other being ‘tartanry’ – was what Nairn called the ‘Scots “Kailyard” tradition’, which he dates from the 1820s onwards – the time when Scotland should have been orchestrating for itself a place on ‘the great and varied stage of European nationalism’. To Nairn, Kailyard fills the ‘rootless vacuum, the great “absence” ’ that is all that Scotland had in place of nationalist fervour. From having first been associated with a group of writers active in the 1890s, the term has here leapt to defining a tradition – and not just a literary tradition – originating some seventy years before. Although he draws the term from literary history, Nairn identifies Kailyard as representing something more abstract, and it is the co-existence of specific and abstract meanings that is the key to understanding Kailyard’s continued significance in debates over Scottish culture. It helps explain why the fiction of Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren can be seen both, in George Blake’s terms, as Scotland’s woeful alternative to Dickens and Gaskell (who were respectively eighteen and twenty-three years dead by the time *Auld Licht Idylls* was published), and, in Tom Nairn’s terms, as the only thing Scotland could produce during the climate of European nationalist revolt.

As a result of Nairn’s book, Kailyard came to signify a particular diagnosis of Scottish culture that spread across academic disciplines in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Responding in particular to the consequences of the Devolution Referendum of 1979, political and cultural commentators set out to expose the way Scotland had conspired to represent itself through distorting myths. Kailyard became a convenient label to sum up this distorting impulse. In *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (1980), Marinell Ash referred to the state of historiography in Victorian Scotland as ‘a succession of historical kailyards’ and in *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Classes* (1979), the Marxist historian James Young linked the term to the failure of the Scottish labour movement:

The ‘kailyarders’ inspired the continuity of propagandist images of a Scottish society as a rural idyll remote from strife or class conflict [. . .] the dominance of these images in Kailyard novels, together with the systematic indoctrination of working people in church and school, made it exceptionally difficult for the labour movement to popularise their quite moderate critique of the capitalist system.

In an earlier essay published in the *Edinburgh Review* in November 1978, Young had deplored ‘the whole Kailyard myth’ of the past, from which modern Scots were ‘struggling to rescue the country’. The synonymity of Kailyard and myth meant that the term formed part of the Scotch Myths debate that dominated Scottish culture in the 1980s. Within this debate, Kailyard came to be used interchangeably with tartanry to indicate a false historical and cultural consciousness that blighted the nation and impeded meaningful self-definition. One of the most prominent areas in which the term was used was in discussion of Scottish film, notably in the pioneering collection of essays *Scotch Reels* (1982). This book, which had a considerable influence on the critical and cultural analysis of Scottish cinema, used ‘Tartanry and Kailyard’ as the defining contexts within which to initiate
a debate that set out to analyse the way cinematic representations of Scotland evaded and distorted the realities of modern urban life.

At the back of this debate about the distortion of Scottish reality lies the much larger debate about the relationship between Scottish culture and Scotland's political and historical status as a stateless nation. The phrase 'stateless nation' forms part of the sub-title of David McCrone's sociological analysis *Understanding Scotland* (1992), and it is no surprise to find that Kailyard is a focal context in that analysis. Because of its centrality to discussions of Scottish culture in the twentieth century, the term has become a key part of the modern critical lexicon. It has even acquired adjectives of its own, such as 'urban' Kailyard, 'designer' Kailyard, 'satanic' Kailyard and 'electronic' Kailyard. Clearly the term still performs a useful function for critics and creative writers wishing to explore certain aspects and characteristics of Scottish culture. From political comments like that of Donald Dewar referred to at the beginning of this chapter, to creative works like Don Paterson's radio drama, *Kailyard Blues* (1998), the term seems destined to remain part of the language, in spite of the many uses and abuses to which it has been put.

In recent years, however, the usefulness of the term in all its forms has been questioned. Because Kailyard has snowballed in its meaning to such an extent, and acquired so many extra connotations along the way, it is no longer a meaningful context for understanding the fiction of Barrie, Crockett and Maclaren, let alone the whole of Victorian Scottish literature. Recent criticism on Barrie has placed his work in more appropriate contexts and accounts of Victorian Scottish culture are beginning to recognise that period as one of cultural achievement rather than failure and decline. The usefulness of the term in structuring approaches to twentieth-century culture has also come under attack. A renewed, and less condemnatory, interest has been shown in forms of popular culture that would once have been summarily dismissed as Kailyard. Most significantly of all, the whole Kailyard diagnosis of Scottish culture that was established by studies like *The Break-Up of Britain* has been challenged by critics and historians like Cairns Craig and Tom Devine who have argued against the assessments of evasion and distortion and offered an alternative set of approaches to reading the historical trajectory of Scottish culture. If Kailyard began as a critical response to a problem and matured into a term that set out to expose and correct an illusion, it is now being exposed as an illusion itself. Recognising it for what it is – a critical concept – is only the beginning of the discovery of a whole range of Scottish literature and culture that has been obscured and neglected by its constraining parameters.

**Further reading**

Robert Louis Stevenson

Penny Fielding

The Dynamiter (1885), R. L. Stevenson’s (1850–94) collaboration with his wife, Fanny van der Graaf Stevenson (1840–1914), opens with three young men meeting each other in London, ‘the city of encounters’. Bored, aimless and unemployed, they agree to throw themselves into a world which ‘teems and bubbles with adventure’ by pursuing a newspaper advertisement seeking information about a mysterious stranger. By this means they will throw themselves into the spirit of adventure, opening themselves up to anything that might thereby happen to them. During the course of The Dynamiter they individually fall for the tall tales of an attractive young woman who turns out to be mixed up in a Fenian bombing campaign. These events are reminiscent of Stevenson’s work in general. He himself marks the site of encounters of different kinds. He lived in Scotland, England, Switzerland, the United States and Samoa and travelled constantly. He was friendly with many of the influential writers and artists of his day, was painted twice by John Singer Sargent, and conducted a seven-year correspondence with Henry James. He produced a body of work, which, while resisting any stable or consistent development in terms of genre, anticipates many of the preoccupations of early modernist fiction.

When he wrote about his own work, Stevenson often characterised it as ‘romance’ or ‘adventure’. Although literature could not directly imitate life, romance, a different category, does not strive for mimesis. Rather than describing pre-existent conceptualisations of life, the romance-writer gives the adventure story the form of sensations, dreams and desires: ‘The artist writes with more gusto of those things which he has only wished to do, than of those which he has done.’ In this sense, romance is not imitative of life but an experience like life, defined as something ‘monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt, and poignant’ into which the reader, like The Dynamiter characters, could plunge.

Stevenson saw this as a break with a tradition of nineteenth-century fiction too much concerned with delivering up pre-arranged themes packaged by the novel form (a tendency against which Virginia Woolf also explicitly argued). In ‘A Humble Remonstrance’ (1884), his contribution to a debate with Henry James about the nature of realism, Stevenson expressed his dissatisfaction with novels that seems to be written around a central theme: the so-called ‘well-written’ novel, he argues, ‘echoes and re-echoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute’. In some ways this enabled Stevenson to construct a theory of literature marking a radical departure from the model that proposed the novel as a form of social observation or scientific study. Dickens, Eliot and Trollope in different ways conduct their readers through social networks, affording them a detached position from which to view the operations of society itself as an object of study. Even the adventure story before Stevenson had taken this stance. R. M. Ballantyne’s The Coral Island (1858) has its shipwrecked boy heroes learn
from monitoring a tidal pool how to manage the natural culture of their island – a scientific metaphor both for the social organisation they will impose on the cannibal natives, and for the observing reader who is thereby instructed in the ‘natural’ order of European social values.

Stevenson differs from this in important respects. First, he moves away from the positivism of social and scientific observation. We might compare the rock pool experiment of the Coral Island boys with a poem from A Child’s Garden of Verses (1885) in which the child digs holes on the beach. The brief poem ends:

My holes were empty like a cup,
In every hole the sea came up,
Till it could come no more.

There is no accounting for this phenomenon; observation does not produce explanation or cause, but remains at the level of image and impression. Also, Stevenson moves the focus from the authorial position of Victorian realism to that of the reader. Instead of following one step behind the narrator’s gradual revelations about a public, social whole, Stevenson’s readers are expected to immerse themselves in a text as an act of individual, immediate experience. Reading, he argues in ‘A Gossip on Romance’ (1882), ‘should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our minds filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images’. There are correspondences here with the Impressionist movement in art, with its exploration of naturalism, transient effects, and its stress on what the viewer sees rather than anything the painting might represent before it is experienced. Stevenson’s theory of reading is also part of a turn towards a kind of psychological interiority that Sigmund Freud would shortly theorise as the unconscious, and the quotation from ‘A Gossip on Romance’ reminds us of its darker manifestations in a later story. Dr Henry Jekyll describes the life uncovered by his medical experiments: ‘a current of disordered sensual images running like a mill-race in my fancy’.

Stevenson’s foregrounding of the image as the most important feature of language can also be traced in his poetry. He was often dismissive of his own poems, and, with the exception of A Child’s Garden of Verses, they are little read today. As Stevenson was composing verse, poets were beginning to form themselves into schools (notably the French Symbolists), usually to resist the kind of safe, generalised, descriptive poetry popular in the later nineteenth century and to promote verse that expressed difficult ideas with precision. Stevenson was not part of a single school; but if some of his poetry could be a little misty, his very eclecticism demonstrates an intense interest in the craft of writing, its rhythms, internal rhymes and diction. Stevenson’s careful choice of exact words shows his experimental engagement with the development of poetry in the nineteenth century. A line in ‘To Mrs Will H. Low’ (the French wife of an American painter) evokes an modern urban imagism that we tend to associate with the early twentieth century: ‘above/The hum of city cabs that sought the Bois, /Suburban ashes shivered into song’. This kind of imagist concentration of meaning into a small number of telling words is often carried by Stevenson’s verbs. In ‘Skerryvore: The Parallel’ he compares his house in Bournemouth, with the lighthouse after which it was named, surveyed by his father, Robert, and built by his uncle, Alan Stevenson: the soft ‘kneaded brick’ of the suburban home contrasts starkly with the lighthouse that is ‘dowelled with brute iron’. Stevenson’s recurrent nervousness that he had let down his tough, engineering family to ‘play at home with paper like a child’ (‘Say not of
me that weakly I declined’) is here distilled into a few words. The unusual opening to ‘To My Father’ is suggestive of the same ambivalence: ‘Peace and her huge invasion to these shores/Puts daily home’. The near oxymoron of peace as an invading force is unsettling, and the vastness and sense of intimidation of the ‘huge invasion’ contracts incongruously into the quotidian normality of boats putting daily into harbour, as if the great achievements of the lighthouse-building Stevensons were also a source of anxiety that could not quite be contained.

The model for the ideal reader is, according to Stevenson himself, the child. ‘[F]iction’, he writes, ‘is to the grown man what play is to the child.’ He is still perhaps best known as a writer for and about children, but it might be better to say that he was a theorist of childhood. Stevenson’s work follows a very significant shift in the position of the child in Victorian culture. If we look among the novels of Dickens, the Brontës, or George Eliot, we see how often children are the focus of social problems: illegitimacy, poverty, exploitation and infanticide. Yet by the end of the century, the child had emerged as the confident builder of empires. This new child, unlike the vulnerable orphans of the earlier part of the century, is typically masculine (Henry James asserted in an 1888 article in the Century Magazine that Stevenson saw women characters as ‘so many superfluous girls in a boys' game’). The boy re-creates the child not as victim but as victor – a trend that would become inscribed in Robert Baden-Powell’s Scouting movement at the start of the next century. To be an orphan (as a great many protagonists of Victorian novels are) was no longer a problem, but an opportunity to make oneself in an ever-expanding world of empire. Stevenson’s youthful heroes like Jim Hawkins and David Balfour are similarly tough and independent, but even from the start there was something darker in Stevenson’s studies of childhood. A Child’s Garden of Verses is shot through with images of sickness and loneliness. In Treasure Island (1883), Jim experiences ‘abominable fancies’ in his dreams, and the very graphic violence in which he participates is not given the socio-moral context of earlier didactic adventure-writers like Ballantyne. By the time of Stevenson’s last, unfinished novel, the image of the adventuring youth had turned in upon itself. Archie, the nominal hero of Weir of Hermiston (1896), is so hyper-sensitive and highly strung that his tormented interior life – described in considerable detail in the first part of the novel – forms the narrative as much as any action he undertakes. Throughout Stevenson’s later stories, the treasure-hunting and sea-going romance of boys’ popular fiction recurs in sinister form. In ‘The Merry Men’ the quest for treasure lost at sea turns into murder and insanity. In The Master of Ballantrae (1889), human beings, as well as money, are buried and unearthed at the cost of their lives. In The Ebb-Tide (1894) the lure of pearls sows fatal division among a group of adventurers rather than marking the accomplishment of the individual fortune-hunter. The Beach of Falesá (1893) replaces the island of Stevenson’s first novel, a site free of troublesome borders or geographical specificity, with one with a specific shoreline: a point of crossings, colonial encounters and corrupt trading practices.

In other ways, Stevenson is like his own Dynamiter character, the Fenian Clara Luxmore, spinning adventurous yarns that disguise their contemporaneity and political specificity. Despite his claims to the contrary, Stevenson’s writing does engage with cultural politics and the ways in which the subject is determined by differences in time and space. To start with, Stevenson’s position as a Scottish writer is a complex one. For him, home is a place that can only be imagined by virtue of not being there. ‘Other little children/Shall bring my boats ashore’ observes the child narrator of A Child’s Garden of Verses. It is somewhere to which one can never return, a place that must be defined from elsewhere, so the familiar can only be grasped through the strange. One can only be, in the title of an early essay,
‘The Foreigner at Home’ (1882). Freud would call this feeling *unheimlich*, or uncanny, but it is an effect of history as well as of psychology. Stevenson was writing throughout a period of emigration from Scotland to the New World, and Scots, whose system of education was more directed towards professional and clerical employment than that of the English, were much in demand for the task of colonial administration. In *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* (1879) Stevenson describes the experience of being Scottish not only as one of emigration but also of dispossession – the sense of an absent or unavailable home:

> And all over the world, in London, in Canada, in New Zealand, fancy what a multitude of people could exclaim with truth: ‘The house that I was born in fell last night!’

Many of Stevenson’s poems, particularly those written in the South Pacific islands, return to the idea of global dislocation – a sense that although home can never be singular, neither can one live in two places at the same time. In ‘The tropics vanish’ (a good example of his control of metre, syntax, assonance and internal rhyme), Stevenson, now in Apemama in the Gilbert Islands, imagines himself overlooking Edinburgh, where he contemplates his dead ancestors. The act of spatial imagination seems at first a liberating one:

> Continents
> And continental oceans intervene;
> A sea uncharted, on a lampless isle,
> Environ and confines their wandering child
> In vain.

Stevenson dreams of an impossible space that cannot ‘environ’ or ‘confine’ the individual because it is ‘uncharted’ – it resists accountable, physical measurement. But the imaginary Edinburgh is the home that can never be lived in. At the end of the poem, Stevenson acknowledges that to return would be to join his ancestors ‘In that denoted city of the dead’ – home cannot be imagined and experienced at the same time.

The act of dwelling on the idea of the lost home is not principally a matter of nostalgia – Stevenson generally avoids the kind of sentimental celebration of the Scottish home that was popular in the ‘Kailyard’ novels of the 1880s and 1890s. Some of his earlier work like *Treasure Island* (1883) or *Kidnapped* (1886) depict the act of leaving home as something quite matter-of-fact – an exciting and necessary part of making one’s financial way in the world. In his later novels this takes a darker turn as Stevenson acknowledges the increasing globalisation of experience in the second half of the nineteenth century – a seemingly universal condition of which to be Scottish was a particularly acute case. This is a world where trade and colonisation have erased the markers of social or national identity. *The Ebb-Tide* begins with a depressing vision of the South Pacific islands, the scene of scrapping among the colonial powers, which had been ruinous to the natives (and which Stevenson had described in his politically angry ‘A Footnote to History’, 1892). The opening sentence describes a once closely integrated set of societies disrupted by western expansion: ‘Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease.’ Amid such dislocation, home can only be imagined as in the surreal and pathetic fantasy of the beachcombers’ magic-carpet ride back to London.

In his preface to *The Master of Ballantrae* Stevenson describes the sensations of the traveller who visits ‘his own city’: ‘Elsewhere he is content to be his present self; there he is...
smitten with an equal regret for what he once was and for what he once hoped to be.’ Thoughts of home result in a strange temporal fragmentation: Stevenson imagines himself existing in a complicated space lying somewhere between the past, and another past constructed out of memories of hopes for the future. The novel also works like this: its narrator, the servant Ephraim Mackellar, is obsessed with preserving the memory of the House of Durisdeer and seals up his memoir of the family, sure that the ‘full truth’ will be appreciated in the cool light of 1889 (also the novel’s publication date). Yet, of course, the future cannot be predicted, and the space between past and present cannot necessarily be seen as one of smooth progress or cause and effect. Time is no longer the given of the great nineteenth-century narratives of history or evolution, but something shifting and multiple; the past does not produce the present but interacts with it in moments of subjective experience. MacKellar’s account of the 1745 Jacobite rising and its aftermath is also a novel read in 1889 and the journeys of the characters to India and the United States play on late Victorian fears of colonial aliens, of miscegenation, and of the failure of empire to preserve the distinctive qualities of the European coloniser.

Stevenson lived between 1850 and 1894. In the year after he was born the Great Exhibition was held in the purpose-built Crystal Palace – a confident display of imperial wealth and progress whose centre was London (‘the Baghdad of the West’ as Stevenson calls it in The Dynamiter, imagining the city as the meeting-point of global trade routes). The year before he died in Samoa saw neighbouring New Zealand become the first country to grant women the vote and, back in Britain, the founding of Keir Hardie’s Independent Labour Party. Stevenson was not radical in his politics – novels from Treasure Island to The Ebb-Tide look with unease at a perceived breakdown in class distinctions – but he was much more interested in the contemporary than his use of the forms of adventure fiction might suggest. Stevenson’s South Seas fiction in particular is a focus for theories about social organisation. The islands of the South Pacific had become a favourite site for identifying the so-called ‘primitive’ tribes who provided material for anthropologists such as Stevenson’s friend Andrew Lang. Unlike the anthropologists, Stevenson does not look for the key that will unlock the way societies organise themselves. J. F. McLennan could call a work Primitive Marriage (1865) because he wanted to explain the rules governing selection of partners and inheritance within groups that would reveal how society works as a principle rather than in its individual manifestations. These were rules that could be applicable to Victorian families as well as to Australian aboriginal tribes. The works of Stevenson, however, are conspicuously short on coherent societies to which any such rules could be applied. The plot of The Beach of Falesá turns on the South Pacific practice of ‘taboo’ (a word borrowed by English from Polynesian languages), which was seen by many anthropologists as a key to the way societies classified themselves along principles of group identification and exclusion, expressed in rules of marriage. But in Stevenson’s novels knowledge is not an open system that binds a society together. In Falesá the knowledge of taboo is a secretive affair controlled by Case to threaten the marriage of Wiltshire and Uma, and to manipulate trading relations between the Europeans and the local population.

Stevenson’s South Seas stories also turn an ironic eye upon economic theory, particularly ideas new in the later nineteenth century that an economy was driven by the desire for consumption. Works such as W. Stanley Jevons’s Theory of Political Economy (1871) argued that the value of products could be gauged by their status as commodities rather than by the conditions of their manufacture. Stevenson’s Pacific stories take an edgy, ironic and often sardonic view of these circumstances. In The Ebb-Tide, the three anti-heroes steal
a shipload of champagne only to discover that most of the bottles contain water as part of an insurance scam. The precarious notion of value based on the consumption of luxury goods is exploded as a confidence trick. 'The Bottle Imp' (1893) tells the story of a magic bottle that will grant wishes, but must be sold for a sum lower than that paid for it or the owner will go to hell. The utility of the bottle, in financial terms, becomes less and less, following along the lines of Jevons's theory of diminishing marginal utility, which stated that utility decreased as consumption increased. Human desire for pleasure, far from regulating and stabilising a society through its economy, is, in Stevenson’s stories, unpredictable and destructive.

Of all Stevenson’s socially resonant texts, the one which has received the most critical attention is The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1889). Like many stories of the end of the nineteenth century, most famously Stoker’s Dracula (1897), Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde can be read as a response to the ways in which white, middle-class males defined themselves against a host of seemingly threatening and invasive forces which dominated the cultural politics of the fin de siècle. The text can seem a repository for social phobias, with Hyde representing unrestrained libido, homosexuality, sexually transmitted disease and the degenerate reversal of Darwinian evolution. Stevenson was writing at a time in which newspapers were full of sensational reports of goings-on in ‘Darkest London’: terrorism, prostitution, murder. The later decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed a fascination with the idea of ‘deviance’ to explain criminal and sexual activities with the suggestion that, like Mr Hyde, criminality can reside within the body. But Stevenson’s full title reminds us that the story is a ‘case’: not a narrative encapsulation of a social problem but a provisional and hypothetical assembling of evidence, as in a police or medical case. A case is a conjectural proposition (as in the phrase ‘if that is the case’) and Stevenson’s novel is a compilation of such provisional narratives. The chapter titles draw attention to this, reminding the reader that the novel is composed of a disparate series of premises and assumptions: ‘The Story of the Door’, ‘The Carew Murder Case’, ‘Dr Lanyon’s Narrative’. ‘Case’ is also the name of the duplicitous trader in The Beach of Falesá, a character who manipulates the action by means of his literary skills (‘it was Case that kept the books’), writing other people’s wills, mistranslating, keeping fraudulent records. The Master of Ballantrae, too, continually draws attention to the instability of the multiple documents of which it is composed and the attempts of characters, narrators and ‘editor’ to suppress or manipulate material. Weir of Hermiston, part psychological novel, part ballad narrative, repeatedly returns to the difficulty of expression within competing discourses. Writing interferes with the smooth process of what ‘A Gossip in Romance’ calls the ‘sympathetic pleasure’ of reading and makes it a more problematical and provocative activity than Stevenson sometimes admits to in his non-fictional works. For all his insistence on the experience of reading as sensation, Stevenson’s work demands attention to its writing as something complex and knotty, which cannot be exhausted in a moment-by-moment encounter. It is this stress on the difficulty of language that most marks Stevenson’s part (seen clearly in his considerable influence on Joseph Conrad) in the development of the novel as it becomes modern.

Further reading

Barrie (1860–1937) is a critical conundrum. The development of Scottish literature as a discipline may have raised the profile of most Scottish authors. Yet he remains a major exception to that rule. Many literary histories continue to accept George Blake’s view of him in *Barrie and the Kailyard School* (1951) as artistically immature, politically irrelevant and patriotically suspect. This is in spite of a growing chorus of protest, which argues a counter-case for complexity and mature self-knowledge. Why this lack of critical esteem? No other Scottish dramatist dominated British popular theatre for so long. In his own day, his status among writers was illustrated by his succeeding Hardy as President of the Society of Authors, while most critics held his genius to be self-evident. National and academic accolades were also showered upon him – the Order of Merit, the first literary baronetcy to be awarded; honorary degrees from British universities, the chancellorship at Edinburgh, the rectorship at St Andrews. Does this suggest a superficial muse?

When his early biography and writings are considered, the situation becomes yet more curious. The ninth child of David Barrie, a hand-loom weaver in Kirriemuir, he profited from the democratic Scottish University entrance system, graduating MA from Edinburgh in 1882. He then spent the next two years as leader writer for the *Nottingham Journal*. That paper’s readers became accustomed to his patriotic praise of Scottish education as well as his mastery of contemporary issues from the Irish question to Darwinism. Blake’s claims, therefore, spring from unpromising roots. Elsewhere the present author has argued that the non-literary criteria designed to give Scottish literature a clearly non-English identity help to explain this paradox. Certainly, if one’s canonical criteria are biased, like Blake’s, towards serious, left-wing political realism, a London-based, comic allegorist and fantasist whose right-wing views derive from Darwin and Nietzsche is unlikely to be addressed sympathetically. Other sociological trends in literary theory from Freudianism through Marxism to Cultural Materialism have strengthened that bias. Barrie’s work does contain important psychological and political strands but, as a self-proclaimed Aristotelian who believed that philosophy and metaphysics are also important parts of an author’s quest, he cannot be contained within the archetype of ‘Oedipal Kailyarder’ which still dominates non-specialist criticism. This chapter will question the narrow, often unexamined premises used to sustain the Barrie myth. This should not be seen as a negative activity. The alternative perspectives suggested allow new questions, based on new research, to be posed across a wider canonical range. This allows a more accurate picture of his place in literary history to emerge. The illustrations given below are by no means exhaustive but they will suggest some ways forward.

The first sign of narrowness relates to the canon. Today, students are usually introduced to Barrie via *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896), the various texts dealing with Peter Pan and those
texts which happen to have a Scottish setting. As the first of these celebrates his mother, the second deals with ‘the little boy who would not grow up’ and the third extricates ‘Scottish’ topics, it is clear that only the texts which most plausibly support Blake’s position are offered. As they constitute about 20 per cent of Barrie’s total output and lay undue emphasis on his apprentice prose works, an accurate overall assessment is unlikely to emerge from so selective a survey.

Further, those who rely on a surface reading of Barrie’s texts do so at their peril. One of his few dramas with a distinctively Scottish setting is *Mary Rose* (1920). As such it does figure in introductory Scottish Literature courses. Barrie’s working methods, however, allow researchers to trace the evolution of his work from conceptual notebooks through manuscripts and first drafts. Use this method and one discovers that the play was originally set among the Norwegian fjords. This was done to honour Ibsen and to signal the play’s concern with the ultimate questions of creation, time and death treated in that dramatist’s plays. The Scottish setting was not, therefore, integral to the play’s major theme. Mary may later have passed into the mists of faery in Kilmeny fashion. In the original manuscript, ‘as little mother who made time stand still’, the play appropriately concluded with her joining Peter Pan in the Never Never Land.

Generative research of this kind shows how over-concern with Barrie’s political position may blind readers to the philosophical and metaphysical concerns with which he was also vitally concerned. His own theoretical position will be assessed in this chapter – prospectively via his early academic articles on Thomas Nash and John Skelton (1883–4) and retrospectively through his own ‘literary biography’ *The Greenwood Hat* (1930). And new biographical evidence dealing with his academic education is significant. This is not to argue that the critical ‘myths’ have no truth. In a Freudian context, Barrie was impotent; his marriage to Mary Ansell being annulled on grounds of non-consummation. The powerful influence of his mother on him is undeniable. *Margaret Ogilvy* does open by recounting childhood memories of her rejecting his advances during an older brother’s funeral. In a Kailyard context, Barrie himself admits that his early prose is self-centred. Thus, while this chapter unequivocally argues that he should return to the high canonical position he once enjoyed, the case rests overwhelmingly on his plays. The innovative variety and imaginative quality of his prose may have been underestimated, but there is no sense in which he can claim to be one of Scotland’s leading novelists.

How, then do the ‘Oedipal’ and ‘Cabbage Patch’ tags stand up to scrutiny? In psychological, biographical and literary terms a simple Freudian equation identifying Barrie with Pan is no longer as appealing as once it was. The view that a mother-obsession lay behind the playwright’s impotence gained popularity when Freud’s psychodynamic hypotheses were widely accepted. Now, theories of this sort with their emphasis on childhood and the subconscious have given way to more empirically based evidence. The biographical and literary grounds for the assumption are not strong. Barrie’s early life does not suggest an unnatural dependence on his mother; he spent most of his education away from home in Glasgow, Dumfries and Edinburgh. Nor is *Margaret Ogilvy* the obvious place to look for evidence of the author’s psychological problems. Hurriedly written after his mother’s death, it contains the only reference in the vast Barrie canon to the supposed trauma of his brother’s death. Barrie’s ‘Artist as Young Man’ concerns are reserved for the book he was writing at the time *Sentimental Tommy* (1896) and its sequel *Tommy and Grizel* (1900). The alternative accounts which are provided there with disconcerting clarity have not been given much critical attention. But their accordance with current psychiatric thinking suggests a sophisticated analysis on Barrie’s part.
Tommy has all the traits of anxiety disorders. In addition, he sees himself as a victim of what is now called Actors’ or Histrionic Syndrome, whose major symptoms are multiple role-playing and a consequent loss of personal identity. Sufferers may also share with Tommy that lack of spontaneity which he records at the end of Sentimental Tommy. Tommy and Grizel then presents a sustained description of what modern psychiatry describes as Performance Demand Neurosis. If one ‘could love by trying’, Tommy says, he would be a fine lover but, because his instincts remain trapped within conscious role-playing, the sex act remains beyond him.

While the Oedipal case rests on one incident within one definitively sentimental novel, problems with spontaneity and personal identity form a leitmotiv in Barrie's autobiographical works. Biographically, Tommy’s self-conscious role-playing problems stretch back to his creator’s first memories of acting in the wash-house at Kirriemuir. This is also the earliest memory recorded by the seventy-year-old Barrie in the Greenwood Hat and is there used to explain why his divided psyche demanded a variety of authorial names: Anon, The Imp, JMB, McConnachie. Educationally, another ignored piece of evidence falls into place. Barrie attended Campbell Fraser's university classes in Logic and Psychology. There, Berkeley’s belief that external reality exists only as perceptions in the mind of individuals was consistently advanced. That this account of a fractured mind distanced from mimetic realism harmonised with Barrie’s own experience is confirmed by the many personal side-comments he added to his lecture notes.

Generative analysis does not help the Oedipal case either, proving as it does that Barrie neither identified himself with Peter Pan nor confined himself to personal concerns in the tales and dramas he composed about him. The ‘Fairy Notes’ show Pan emerging from an interest in the creative process generally. His early novel When A Man's Single (1888) is similarly focused, showing a male hero losing to the heroine on actual and imaginative levels. She has the real baby and writes the successful book while the hero invents one and fails at the other. In the ‘Fairy Notes’, Pan originates as a darkly ambiguous God-figure, suited to the doubts of a later Darwinian age. In The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island (1901), the picture book which recorded his games with the Llewelyn Davies boys, Barrie plays Hook’s predecessor, Swarthy, rather than Pan. His later ‘Dedication’ to Peter Pan makes Wendy the creative catalyst for action within a Darwinian battle of the sexes. Alternatively, lost boys, stage crew, actors and audience may be regarded as the true playwrights with only Barrie’s own ‘inky’ contribution remaining in doubt. This reluctance to claim authorship was also mirrored in the programme produced for the opening run. This called Ela Q. May, the young actress who played Liza, ‘The author of the play’.

The overarching theme of creation and origins is clearly mirrored in the first three acts of the dramatic version of Peter Pan (1904). There the ultimate problems of birth, copulation and death are childishly, but seriously, imagined. In Act one, the children play at being born, in Act Two Wendy emerges from her birth-house after falling to Slightly’s arrow and in Act Three Peter plays at death on the lagoon. In character terms a Darwinian battle for power also emerges. The battle scenes in Acts Four and Five resolve this with Wendy defeating Pan and both triumphing over Hook. The pirate king’s death reveals this clearly. Hook commits suicide, throwing himself to the crocodile, because he only exists in Pan’s mind: withdrawal of attention implies withdrawal of existence. A solely psychological analysis of the work cannot account for these features.

The reluctance of most literary historians to forsake Freudian ground remains puzzling as all of the more recent studies – those of Birkin (1979), Rose (1984), Ormond (1987) Jack (1991) and Chaney (2005) – confirm Barrie’s complexity as man and writer. Indeed,
this very complexity has even provided an incentive for an acclaimed film like *Finding Neverland* (2004). The failure to forsake generalisations extends beyond ‘Freudian’ ones to include ‘Kailyard’ ones as well. As Andrew Nash has argued in Chapter 34, George Blake’s advocacy of that position (*Barrie and the Kailyard School*, 1951) retains undue influence on Barrie’s reputation, despite its critical sophistry in blaming a writer for doing badly what he never intended to do in the first place. Assessed as a serious political realist, Barrie the comic fantasist is obviously a disaster. But the literature of other European countries makes it clear that non-realist fantasy modes may be successful alternatives to direct realism in addressing issues of the Industrial Revolution and other contemporary concerns.

Once more, biographical, theoretical and generative evidence combine to make the counter-case. In his final university year Barrie attended David Masson’s classes in Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. The man and the course, he tells us, ‘sen[r]t his life off at a new angle’. Masson’s literary values, as his monographs and Barrie’s lecture notes confirm, were crucial. As a follower of Aristotle and Bacon, the professor valued imagination, idealism and poetry above reason, realism and prose. In *Essays Biographical and Critical* (1856) he argued that the rousing of sentiment (Aristotelian catharsis) was a defining poetic quality and, moreover, one possessed by Scotland’s most patriotic writers including Burns and Scott. In *British Novelists and their Style* (1859), citing Goethe as his authority, Masson denied the existence of naturalism as such and instead placed artificial (usually comic) artists such as Dickens and Cervantes at the top of his evaluative hierarchy. For Masson the best artists work allegorically and so can speak to all without sacrificing that deeper meaning which is the determining goal of artistic genius. His lecture course focused on the English Renaissance. Within it, Shakespeare became the archetype of dramatic genius because he is at once realist and idealist. In *British Novelists*, he distinguished the two approaches clearly. The realist asks ‘How would this actually be in nature?’ while the idealist asks ‘With what human conclusions, ends, and aspirations can it be imaginatively interwoven?’ On these grounds, in *Shakespeare Personally* (1914) (the book based on the lectures which Barrie attended), Shakespeare’s romances become the supreme model for dramatic popularity and high seriousness. This is because they unite an ‘intensely real world’ which even the groundlings will warm to ‘with an interpretation of the mysterious’ designed to attract the intellectuals among his audience. The romance mode is, on this definition, not fanciful or escapist. Indeed, its imaginative rural and retrospective traits are all designed to address serious current problems. It is with that end in mind, that ‘Shakespeare throws back with ease and delight to any point of past time.’

Masson’s influence on Barrie’s literary theory is most clearly demonstrated in ‘Tom Nash’ and ‘The Rector of Diss’, two academic articles held, in manuscript form, in the Barrie Collection at Yale. They also use the allegorical practice of Renaissance writers such as Nash and Skelton to test out Barrie’s own artistic problems. The problem of authors who cannot sustain high seriousness, for example, is considered in a modern context. Today’s Englishmen would rather ‘seek reputation at the cannon’s mouth’ than accept a comic argument. Barrie felt that the Victorian working playwright intent on yoking enjoyment with profundity, levity with profundity had a harder task than had faced Skelton or Shakespeare, when drama was the most popular mode.

This evidence has not been presented before. Barrie’s early biographers discouraged research by denying any major influence from his teachers. But it does exist. Moreover, it helps to explain both the structure of Barrie’s best-known plays and why they remain intractable to Blake’s analysis (based as it is on a diametrically opposed set of critical premises). *Quality Street* (1902), *The Admirable Crichton* (1902) and *Peter Pan* as well as
Dear Brutus (1917) and Mary Rose (1920) follow the basic structural principles of The Tempest. In various respects, they do not merely echo past practice, however. Most obviously the literal level of Barrie’s romances offer a more sustained comic translation of the problems faced than will be found in The Tempest. His reasons for this are pragmatic. As the failure of his one serious play, The Wedding Guest (1900), would confirm, he lacked Shakespeare’s expertise in serious and tragic registers. His was essentially a comic genius, as the opening interchanges between conservative butler and ‘radical’ lord in Crichton or the debate between learned, Scottish ghillie and genteel Englishman on Mary Rose’s island vividly illustrate. The wit with which serious issues are introduced, imaginatively developed and finally re-assessed was also pragmatically suited to the populist demands of London’s West End.

To do this without sacrificing that ambition, recalled in The Greenwood Hat, to be the ‘heaviest writer of his time’, he relied on a more self-conscious and wide-ranging allegorical superstructure. This is where the value of generative research re-enters the equation. That Barrie’s early romances move out from a political base while Peter Pan and the later ones include social comment within a primarily metaphysical context is consistent with Masson’s dual guidance to Scottish authors: like Walter Scott, they should be proud of their ‘Scotticism’; unlike him, they should not advance it at the expense of ‘Scotch metaphysics’. Barrie’s notebooks define the sociological questions clearly. Quality Street is set in the Napoleonic Wars, a subject Barrie had analysed in the Nottingham Journal. Against that background he poses the question, ‘How can talented women escape from the shutters of Quality Street when a male-dominated society uses gentility to doom them to waste away in useless spinsterhood?’ The Admirable Crichton starts in the notebooks with a specific illustration of another sociological question: ‘Play. Scene. Servants entertained in drawing room by mistress and master à la Carlisle family.’ This was the time when the terrifyingly autocratic Countess of Carlisle met her servants, on set occasions, as if they were equals. Characteristically, Barrie broadens her hypocritical socialism into the wider question of whether Nature teaches hierarchy or democracy.

The remaining romances, Dear Brutus and Mary Rose, follow Peter Pan in addressing political and philosophical themes, but their principal focus is that ‘Scotch’ view of metaphysics which Masson missed in Scott. Human freedom as limited by real time is variously considered, not only in Pan but via Lob’s offer of a ‘second chance’ and Mary Rose’s halting of time processes to enter the world of Faery. His dramas are not only allegorical, they are also poetic and theatrical. We need to pay close attention to the names of his characters. In the notebooks, he toils over these because they sign ideas and images. Phoebe Throssel is imaginatively a caged bird while the servant Crichton is nominally a hero in the mould of his earlier Scottish namesake, whose exploits, as recorded by Thomas Urquhart in his seventeenth-century romance The Jewel, had been published during the preparation period for the play.

A search for confirmation of Barrie’s sentimental conservatism by definition excludes the many interests – modal, meta-narrational and structural – which he shares with the modernist movement. Believing that there were only a limited number of stories with variety being provided by the mode chosen, he prioritised theatrically the visual elements which distinguished dramatic performance from reading a novel or poem. This fact is crucial for understanding the way in which Barrie counterpoints joy and sadness, levity and profundity in his plays. While the ten different modes into which the Pan theme is translated provides the most ambitious example of his method, the way in which visual sadness may undercut verbal joy is more economically illustrated in Quality Street. As the curtain falls, Phoebe wears her wedding gown and has her husband on her arm. Allegorically, his
name – Valentine Brown – reminds us that he is a romantic second-best, far below the natural level of species-selection open to someone of Phoebe’s talent. But it is the sight of her sister Susan who provides the scene with its sadness. Phoebe may stand triumphantly in her wedding dress, her ringlets hanging down – the visual sign of female liberty in the play. But that wedding dress was once Susan’s. Her presence, hair contrastively swept up under her Quaker bonnet, recalls the many who have failed and so remain behind the symbolic shutters of the street. If the limit of even fictive optimism is to show one lady of quality flying out of the cage of patriarchal condescension, aided by the literally fantastic opportunity of playing her own niece in a Cinderella-like ball, then how much more difficult must it be for real women to do so!

Barrie’s opposition to structural closure provides another example of his literary radicalism. Even the relatively established final scene in The Admirable Crichton as played in England prior to 1916 offers a number of minor variations. In each case, the butler-hero, having proved his hierarchical case as ruler on the island, returns to subservience in London and then, quietly, leaves the Loam household. Sometimes he does so with the maid, Tweenie, sometimes without her; sometimes his new home is undefined, sometimes it is a public house; sometimes that public house (echoing the play’s subtitle) is called ‘The Case is Altered’. Critics thought these minor changes suggested artistic insecurity. They believed their point proved when the 1916 version introduced a confident, martial Crichton offering to lead again. In fact, the logic of Barrie’s ‘Case’ could only be ‘Altered’ in England after 1916. Crichton is a servant-hero who must literally wait in the real word for a different kind of hierarchy to exist before he can fulfil himself. From 1902 onwards, the American productions – designed for an anti-aristocratic post-revolutionary society – had presented a darker vision of England’s reliance on birth rather than merit. Only with the First World War can a new order of merit be anticipated at home. Only now can a butler who believes that Nature determines different kinds of hierarchy properly voice a hope that ‘With the rolling of the drums, England will awaken’ and he will rediscover the leading role that he enjoyed on the island. A situationally sensitive thematic consistency, not dramatic insecurity, determines Barrie’s range of endings.

The constraints of the Kailyard readings have prevented appreciation of another radical line in his work. The support Barrie gave to the Women’s movement in his Nottingham articles on female rights to education, property and free entry into the professions continues in his drama. There he consistently places woman’s Russian-box mind above man’s in Darwin’s gender contest. To discover the many dramatic sources for this, however, one has to look beyond his successful plays. The conventional and patriarchal London theatre of his day was not ready for such radicalism and so Little Mary (1902), The Adored One (1913) and The Ladies’ Shakespeare (1916) – a feminist reworking of The Taming of the Shrew – were box-office failures. Little Mary provides a fitting end to this study. When Barrie calls it a ‘riddle’, he employs Masson’s term for complex allegory. And it is precisely that – its heroine being, variously, a romantic outsider, the political voice of Ireland, an icon of the female will to power and purveyor of God’s mysterious Word. Shaw said it was the first of Barrie’s plays to prove his genius, but the London public dismissed its complex erudition as superficial nonsense. Perhaps it is carrying the argument rather far to see in their reaction a shadow of Barrie’s current critical fortune. Yet many still condemn as superficial, the many-voiced, multi-levelled structures which he spent so long planning without following the guidelines he provided for understanding them. If this continues Scotland’s greatest dramatic myth-maker may remain an undeserved victim of another myth which, in more senses than one, is not of his own ‘making’.
Further reading

Introduction

The Celtic Twilight or Revival is a term given to the upsurge in interest in Celtic culture, mythology, literature and history in the period between 1885 and 1920. W. B. Yeats’s study of 1893, *The Celtic Twilight*, which argued for the surviving continuance of Celtic mythological beliefs in the west of Ireland, lent its name to an entire movement, which had branches in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany and (to an extent) the Isle of Man and Cornwall. The Irish Revival has become by far the best known, because it alone was combined with an effective political nationalism after Charles Parnell’s (1846–91) fall from grace; but at the time its Scottish equivalent seemed almost as important, and it remains sadly neglected today.

Pan-Celticism was a cultural as well as a political dream for a fin de siècle age in revolt against the complacency of the bourgeoisie and the oppressive machinery of modernity. As with William Morris and the followers of Walter Scott in both England and America, a nostalgic politics, of whatever dye, suited many of the artistic individuals of the age better than industrial socialism or communism. ‘L’art pour l’art’ was a sentiment which could learn nothing from Marx, but which seemed suited to an idealisation of the Celt, the ethnocultural victim of British modernity, typecast by Mathew Arnold and others as the bearer of a passive, imaginative culture, ill at ease with Anglo-Saxon reality. The Arnoldian high Victorian Celt was feminised, the ‘Angel in the House’ of the British Empire, a creature of impulse and imagination. To some extent the artists of the Celtic Revival valorised this caricature; to some extent they reacted against it.

Not all Celtic Revivalists were dreamers. In Ireland in particular, early acceptance of the Arnoldian Celt by Yeats and others gave way to a remasculinised Celticism, usually identified with the ‘Gael’, itself the name of the penny weekly of the Gaelic Athletic Association, which brought Victorian ideas of athleticism into a Celtic context, fiercely resistant in Ireland at least to the so-called ‘garrison games’ of the British. The Land League protests had linked Ireland and Scotland, while the idealisation of Celtic landholding practices, which W. F. Skene’s (1809–92) *Celtic Scotland* (1876–80) bequeathed to the crofting reform of the Napier Commission set up in 1883 in response to mounting anxiety and political pressure over Highland land rights, was also found in Ireland, perhaps brought there from his native Scotland by James Connolly (1878–1916). Besides this political infrastructure, itself riddled with the Tir nan Og politics of Celtic communism,
there were a number of artistic and linguistic developments, and a marked increase in cultural interchange.

In 1891, An Comunn Gaidhealach (the Highland Association) was founded; in 1893, the Gaelic League of Ireland was established (a Scottish equivalent was created in 1897), followed by Kevredigez Vroadal Freiz (the Breton National Union) in 1897, Yn Cheshagh Ghailekogh, the Manx language society, in 1899 and Kowethas Kelto-Kernoweg for Cornish in 1901. Welsh delegates began to visit An Comunn's Mòd. Pan-Celtic congresses were held in Dublin (1901), Caernarfon (1904) and Edinburgh (1907). Delegates – including figures such as Theodore Napier (1845–1928), W. B. Yeats, An Craoibhinn Aobhinn (nickname of Douglas Hyde, 1860–1949) and Standish O'Grady (1846–1928) – were often dressed in a Celtic variant of arts and crafts costumes. The revivification of a mythical or remote historical past as the premise for an alternative future was widespread in Scotland.

The fancy dress of the Caernarfon Congress found its counterpart in the 1908 ‘Scottish National Pageant of Allegory, Myth and History’ held in the grounds of the Scottish National Exhibition at Saughton Park in Edinburgh, with designs by John Duncan (1866–1945) and Phoebe Traquair (1852–1936). Traquair herself bought Dun Emer work for her house in Edinburgh, and was, like Yeats’s sister Elizabeth, who studied with the Scots artist Norma Borthwick, part of a group which linked the Scottish and Irish Revival, as Bowe and Cumming point out.

**Patrick Geddes and The Evergreen**

Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) was one of the few thinkers of the period to seek to combine the values of Celticist nostalgia with a commitment to modernity, particularly to a specific Scottish modernity. When he died (as Professor Sir Patrick Geddes) in 1932, The Times obituary termed him a ‘Biologist and Town Planner’, and certainly it is in those realms that his reputation has lasted best; however, this able and versatile man became interested in many disciplines. From 1887, he was responsible for developing summer schools that brought artists, political thinkers and scholars from different countries into contact; in 1891, he asked the artist John Duncan (1866–1945) to supervise a Celtic Arts and Crafts school. During the decade that followed, Geddes was not only teaching Botany at University College, Dundee, and undertaking a large-scale renovation of Edinburgh buildings, but was also playing a major role in the development of the Celtic Revival in Scotland, related to, but not altogether an offshoot of, its Irish counterpart. Geddes already had Irish connections through the Countess of Aberdeen (1857–1939), twice Vicereine of Ireland, who helped to provide Irish exhibits for the 1886 Edinburgh International Exhibition. As her cultural mentor, Geddes subsequently became involved in her attempts to improve living and cultural conditions in Ireland.

With William Sharp (1855–1905) as manager, and John Ross as accountant, Geddes set up a publishing firm, Patrick Geddes and Colleagues. It was intended to publish material relating to the Celtic Revival, including the works of ‘Fiona Macleod’ (Sharp’s alter ego, discussed below) and J. Arthur Thomson. The firm’s most famous production by far, however, was to be *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal*, a paradoxical title on the face of it, though one suitable perhaps for a transient magazine which sought to make a permanent contribution. Others connected with the enterprise were John Duncan (1866–1945), whose paintings Sharp inspired, James Cadenhead RA (1858–1927) and Charles Hodge Mackie (1862–1920), who designed the first (spring) issue.
The Evergreen was a magazine with a title indicative both of Celtic tradition and its rebirth. It was named after Allan Ramsay’s 1724 Vernacular Revival collection of the same name, one which supported a peculiarly national Scottish pastoralism and celebration of nature. Geddes’s 1892–3 design of Ramsay Garden in Edinburgh incorporated Ramsay’s old house (known as ‘Goosepie’), and it was in Ramsay Garden that the idea of The Evergreen was born in December 1894. It appeared in four numbers between spring 1895 and winter 1896–7, each number corresponding to a season, representing the cycle of natural and human life, which nonetheless continues ‘evergreen’ through all its changes and vicissitudes, or, as Geddes would have it, evolutions: for he sought to emplace an idea of human culture as evolving through its contact with Earth’s lapse and renewal, one which also heralded a return to the localist traditions of Ramsay. In Scotland’s case, he saw its links with the continent and Ireland, both old and new, as evoked through the magazine, while as a counterpart to the Pan-Celtic Renaissance, Geddes spoke in the first (spring) issue of the journal of a ‘Scots Renascence’ for the first time. He aimed (as Ramsay indeed had done) to establish ‘Edinburgh as not only a national but an imperial culture-capital’, noting that Ramsay’s publication was ‘as little in harmony with the then existing fashion of the day in literature, as its new namesake would hope to be with that of our own,—the all pervading “Decadence”’. This rejection of ‘Decadence’ came not from the manly or imperial perspective favoured by writers such as Sir Henry Newbolt (1862–1938) and W. E. Henley (1849–1903) south of the border, but rather from a rejection (as made by J. Arthur Thomson and W. Macdonald in the spring issue) of the stress on individual experience and pleasure in the Decadent writers: the ‘rule of conduct “Each for himself”—which is held good enough for the beasts, has but little relevance to human intercourse and social action’. And while Ramsay’s Ever Green could be reckoned to have inspired later collectors, Geddes hoped that

our new ‘Evergreen’ may here and there stimulate some new and younger writer [. . .] and, then add a fresh page to that widely reviving ‘Literature of Locality’ to which the kindly firesides of Thrums and Zummerzet [. . .] are ever adding their individual tinge and glow.

The value, therefore, of The Evergreen was to be calculated primarily by the effect it had on others, rather than in its own right.

In ‘The Scots Renascence’ article itself (spring 1895), Geddes starts by looking back at the deaths of two major Scottish figures: Professor Blackie and Robert Louis Stevenson. He states the belief that with their demise ‘our best days of nationality and genius are finished’, but it is not one he holds. Rather, he argues, Scots are always conceiving themselves to be ‘finished’ when they are in fact ‘a Renascent-ever Renascent-unconquerably renascent people’. The current revival is part of a natural cycle: people should not be cast down by ‘winter’s literature’ (realism and decadence), because ‘buds and shoots’ of ‘industrial initiative and artistic life are reappearing’. The ‘Scottish, our Celtic Renascence’ will move away from ‘the moral irresponsibility, the random subjectivity of the time’ to ‘take part in that national literature for which the epic history of Scotland offers rich material’. For Geddes, spring is the ‘dawn of a new age’, summer when ‘most work is done, and the stores of energy accumulated for another year’, while in autumn ‘we must correct the oppressive vision of a dying world with a thought of the reparation which is given in sleep’.

In his draft essay for the end of the winter issue, Geddes reflected on the achievement of The Evergreen and ‘the opening of a period of preparation before another Spring’, while praising the democratic impulse of Celtic art as ‘the art o’simple folk’; in the published article he examined The Evergreen’s diverse initiatives as ‘a way of looking at things, that
increasingly reveals the unity of science and literature and art’, whose initiatives now need
‘to separate, to develop apart for a season’. This itself is the promise of a general
Renascence, for if The Evergreen now sleeps, its evergreen impulses have sown seeds in
coming artists and writers to blossom in new springs and be reaped in new autumns.
Geddes’s idea of the Scots Renascence is visionary, but also rather fey and vague. The Scots
Renaissance when it came was to be rather different.

Nonetheless, it was Geddes who was to the fore in imagining the material and cultural
environment for such a revival, which, as his paper ‘A Plea for Celtic Art’ makes clear, was
an extension of the Arts and Crafts movement’s priorities from the imagined medieval
realm to the Celtic legendary world of Scotland and Ireland. One of the greatest profundi-
ties of Geddes’s thought was its multi-disciplinarity, its belief that all the perspectives of
human intellectual and cultural effort partook of a single vision, one which could render
the human experience aesthetic to the point of expressing its transcendent spirit. Geddes’s
verdict, that ‘in the age of capitalism all beauty has departed from the home of the workman
and left it utilitarian and ugly’, could easily have come from the pen of Morris or Ruskin,
though Geddes tried to separate his intentions entirely from these English or Anglo-
Scottish writers by arguing that Celtic art came through entirely separate stages of devel-
opment from its Graeco-Gothic-Renaissance counterpart. This was arguably part of
Geddes’s project of a revived Celtic localism, for he argued that in Scotland, with

a renewal of historic sentiment in the public, we may look forward to a corresponding progress
in our coming artists and men of letters [. . .] Quite seriously now it is not for London to
educate Iona; it is for Iona to educate London.

Geddes sought to revalue the Celt, and to claim writers such as Byron for Celticism. This
represented an important shift towards the kind of masculinisation of the Celt being prac-
tised in Ireland, as opposed to the Celt as feminine, hysterical and disorganised: the imag-
ination and sentiment of empire, as opposed to its Saxon rationalism. Against this, Geddes
argued that everywhere we see ‘the Celtic type rising to the top’ of the artistic world. He
saw this as a Pan-Celtic phenomenon, a threat to England’s dominance: metaphorically a
reprise of the last Jacobite rising. The threat was intensified by the democratic and hence
radical character which he attributed to Celtic art. Geddes contributed to the pan-Celtic
Revival elsewhere, up to and including the 1907 Edinburgh Pan-Celtic Congress.

Geddes saw his task, however, as primarily linked to a particular Scottish revival.
Scotland, increasingly conscious of its history and culture, was to be projected as one of the
European cultural powers. The Evergreen was positioned in order to hint in its designs and
elsewhere at tentative rapprochements with the French dimension in Scottish culture, as well
as with a wider Pan-Celticism. Geddes and the artist John Duncan themselves played a
leading role in renewed Franco-Scottish links in the 1890s following their first meeting in
Dundee in 1893. Just as the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s was described by Compton
Mackenzie as ‘pro-tartan and pro-Catholic’, so The Evergreen is described in the Geddes
papers as ‘Catholic rather than Protestant; Celtic rather than Teutonic; archaic rather than
modern’. Besides ‘Fiona Macleod’ (whom by 1894–5 Geddes knew was identical with Sharp),
Geddes also wrote in praise of Neil Munro (1864–1930). But Geddes’s concept of
Renascence was far wider than was subsequently adopted by the movement of the 1920s.
This was the man who allegedly as Professor of Botany at University College, Dundee,
offered a garden to the Professor of Literature for a garden of poets’ flowers, such as the daf-
fodils of Wordsworth and the rose of Burns. Although the offer was spurned, it reflects
Geddes's ability to make connections where others did not and to expand knowledge rather than seek solace in parochial specialisms. Therefore, it is not surprising that Geddes's concept of revival was a broad one within a wide international perspective. In the ‘Prefatory Note’ to the autumn issue, Geddes and Victor V. Branford state that their ‘first appeal is [. . .] to Magna Scotia beyond the Tweed and over sea, but we would also share in that wider culture-movement which knows neither nationality or race’.

The magazine thus contained an amalgam of contributions. Alongside the fictional works of ‘Fiona Macleod’ stand the biological articles by J. Arthur Thomson and the sociological work of Geddes himself. A virtue was made of the sheer variety of contribution as ‘seasonal melody’ with ‘no central authority’, although this could equally be interpreted as a lack of focus.

Copies of The Evergreen were sent to journals and sympathetic individuals, as well as to national and provincial papers in the British Isles, Australia and Canada. It was well reviewed, being regarded as an equivalent (often a healthier one) to the English Yellow Book by papers such as London, The Sunday Times, the Glasgow Herald and The Scotsman. If ‘greenery-yallery’ was the sign of the Aesthetic movement, as Gilbert and Sullivan’s Patience (1881) proclaimed, then Geddes’s paper was seen as a ‘springlike’ counterpart to the pessimistic Bodley Head Yellow Book. Many reviewers picked up on Geddes’s own comparison with the contemporary Decadent movement. The Glasgow Herald is typical in its May 1895 suggestion that the Yellow Book is an autumnal counterpart of its Scottish rival. The Evergreen was thus being positioned by its reviewers as the Scottish counterpart to the Decadent movement, or, as The Times termed it in June 1895, the ‘Anti-Decadent “Yellow Book”’.

In 1896, The Evergreen’s publication came to an end. It was, on one level, just another of the ‘little magazines’ of the 1890s; on another, it evoked the possibilities of Arts and Crafts thinking conjoined to a national history and identity. Its lack of a political dimension in the era of the Scottish Home Rule Association and developing (if low-level) nationalist activity prevented it from fulfilling the role a similar publication might have had in Ireland. But Geddes’s call for a Scottish Renascence and his determination to contribute to the positive re-evaluation of Celticism may have played a part in what he himself thought of as a coming spring in the Scottish arts, to begin after the close of the last number, winter, of The Evergreen.

William Sharp and other Revival writers

It is important, however, to note that the Celtic Revival in 1890s Scotland was occurring in many places outside Geddes’s journal. The man with the greatest reputation outside its pages, and the most prominent Celticist Scottish writer of the period, was William Sharp, Geddes’s right-hand man. Sharp was the son of a textile manufacturer in Paisley. He had left Scotland for London in 1878, and by 1881 had launched an artistic career there with the help of Sir Noel Paton (1821–1901), who had been a pattern-designer for the Sharp family firm, and himself a powerful exponent of the spirit of Scottish patriotism in his designs. Paton gave him an introduction to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). In 1883, Sharp became London art critic of the Glasgow Herald. In the following years, he began to manifest one of the most peculiar examples of the ‘divided self’ trope of Scottish literary history, devising an entirely new personality for himself, as ‘Fiona Macleod’, who corresponded separately with literary contacts and even earned a place for her fictitious self in
Who’s Who. Few knew the secret of Sharp’s descent into a world of transgendered fantasy, but whatever its origins, the emergence of Fiona’s persona in the early 1890s appeared to accompany a liberation of Sharp’s imagination to do more experimental work. His 1891 book of poetry, *Sospiri di Roma*, printed at Anzio, was pioneering in its use of free verse. Its most anthologised poem, ‘The White Peacock’, probably gave D. H. Lawrence the title for his first novel, and Lawrence was possibly also influenced by its free-verse form. As Fiona, Sharp became a cult writer: James Connolly gave his daughter the name, which Sharp had popularised so widely that it became typically ‘Celtic’ in mood and intention.

The first work Sharp published as Fiona Macleod was *Pharais* in 1893, a book which set in train a sequence of Highland fantasies which presented the Gàidhealtachd in Arnoldian terms, as feminine, passive and with a diseased imagination. Disturbing and comic as these books now are to read, they produced a Highland equivalent to the Kailyard writing of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859–1914) and Ian Maclaren (the English-born John Watson) (1850–1907), and were influential on Neil Gunn’s (1891–1973) conception of the Highland landscape. ‘Fiona Macleod’ was, however, attacked in the *New Ireland Review* by George Russell (‘A.E.’) (1867–1935) for poor ideas and derivativeness.

In the early 1890s, Sharp also branched out into new areas of literary journalism, editing (and indeed entirely composing) *The Pagan Review* (1892), one of the chief texts of the ‘new paganism’ of the decade. In it he argued against discriminating between men and women in language suggestive of the fraying of the boundaries of sex themselves. He was, of course, already trying to realise in his own personality an imagination freed from the limitations of gender. In the years that followed, this experimentalism was to test his personality and health to its limits, and beyond.

In 1894, he returned to Scotland to give a series of lectures at Edinburgh University, where he collapsed after giving his first address. Nonetheless, he was able to aid Geddes in developing *The Evergreen*. As well as contributing to the journal, Sharp published (as ‘Fiona MacLeod’), *The Sin Eater and Other Tales, From the Hills of Dreams* and *The Washer of the Ford* with Geddes’s publishing house, where *The Sin Eater* at least sold much more quickly than Fiona’s *Mountain Lovers*, published with the London firm of John Lane. In 1896, Sharp published (under his own name) *The Centenary Ossian* and (with his wife) *Lyra Celtica* as further contributions to the Celtic Revival. Together with Geddes he planned to organise a symposium on the Celtic Renascence, at which George Meredith (1828–1909) was to speak, but there is no evidence that this ever took place. Geddes’s company did, however, publish other texts, such as Ernest Rhys’s *The Fiddler of Carne*.

After *The Evergreen* ceased publication, Sharp went to Ireland, now the clear heartland of the Celtic Revival; but the increasing political commitment of the cultural nationalists there was alien to him, and he left. His health deteriorated further, and he made frequent trips abroad, finally dying in Sicily in 1905.

Sharp’s standing was much higher in the 1890s than it subsequently became: *The Academy*, for example, on 11 July 1896, printed the opinion that Fiona Macleod had done much to originate the Celtic Revival, for ‘her books make us acquainted with the Celt in his most primitive and unsophisticated form’. For the *Dundee Advertiser* of 4 June 1896, Macleod was the ‘High Priestess of the Celtic Renascence’. Geddes, who greatly admired Sharp/Macleod, annotated both these articles.

Some areas of the Celtic Revival were less cautious in their politics. Theodore Napier combined romantic neo-Jacobitism with more sophisticated campaigning for the restoration of Scottish autonomy and opposition to British imperialism. Napier’s journal, *The Fiery Cross* (1901–12) contains much interesting thinking (on such topics as the connection between
nationhood and football) which would be influential on a later generation of nationalists, and in particular on the earlier years of the Scots Independent, founded in 1926. In his heyday he represented the extreme wing of a movement towards political change in Scotland which had begun with the crofting MPs, the Napier Commission and the restoration of the Scottish Secretariatship in 1885.

In London, William Robertson Nicoll (1851–1923) edited the Expositor and British Weekly, which was a great engine for the distribution of Kailyard writing to an expatriate market. Among the authors (Barrie and Crockett were the other main figures, though Barrie’s take on the Kailyard had a narrative subtlety which belied its subject), Ian Maclaren’s (John Watson’s) Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush of 1894 sold more than 750,000 copies in Britain and the USA. In 1891, Nicoll founded a periodical, The Bookman, which was to provide an outlet for Celtic Revivalist writers in the capital. Articles on Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Manx themes were contributed by a number of authors, including William Wallace, D. Hay Fleming, William Sharp (as ‘Fiona Macleod’) and W. B. Yeats. Barrie, Andrew Lang and Ian Maclaren were also contributors.

Andrew and Leonora Lang’s international and multicultural collections of fairy stories, beginning with the Blue Fairy Book of 1889, helped to place the supernaturalist and aesthetic priorities of the Celtic Revival within a broader context, one further opened up to a hitherto unimaginable degree by Sir James Frazer’s Golden Bough study of 1890–1915. Sir James Barrie’s (1860–1937) The Admirable Crichton of 1902 portrayed a Scottish hero who was the reverse of the imaginative, impulsive and exhausted Celt, a man fit to run an empire unlike his Anglo-Saxon masters. In later works, such as Mary Rose (1920) and Farewell, Miss Julie Logan (1932), Barrie returned to the iconography of a feminised experience as critical to a balanced understanding of the world, a theme first taken up by Sharp in the Pagan Review, and also powerfully present in Lilith (1895), the haunting last novel of George MacDonald (1824–1905).

As well as contributing to the Celtic Revival in Scotland and Ireland, Scottish authors also contributed to the fin de siècle movement in London, where John Davidson (1857–1909) provided a radical realist voice counterbalanced by the self-absorbed contemplation of the ‘Decadent’ Lord Alfred Douglas (1870–1945) and John ‘Dorian’ Gray (1866–1934), who both converted to Catholicism. Gray trained at Scots College, Rome, and became a priest, ministering first in the Cowgate and then in Morningside. His work developed very considerably from the beautiful narcissism of Silverpoints (1896), and in later years at Edinburgh he produced both verse and prose of considerable distinction and rare experimental qualities, largely neglected because Gray shunned publicity and literary circles. Work such as The Flying Fish (1926) and Park (1932) display a profound if quirky imagination which should be incorporated more clearly into any account of the Scottish Renaissance.

Other Scottish writers and critics such as William Archer (1856–1924), who played a large part in establishing Ibsen on the British stage, promoted (as did Davidson) realism and naturalism in the continental mode, while D. S. MacColl (1859–1948) promoted Impressionism. A southern literary coterie (‘the Souls’) developed around the philosopher-politician Arthur James Balfour (1848–1930). This was also the era of George Douglas Brown’s (1869–1902) exposure of Kailyard writing to a telling combination of Hardy’s tragic localism and the savage naturalist mode of Zola in his The House with the Green Shutters (1901), and of Arthur Conan Doyle’s development of the fin de siècle artist as detective in the Sherlock Holmes stories, which began with the publication of A Study in Scarlet in 1887.
In art, the work of the Glasgow Boys, men such as James Guthrie (1859–1930), George Henry (1858–1943), John Lavery (1856–1941) and W. Y. Macgregor (1855–1923), which had risen to prominence in exhibitions at London and Munich in 1890, also contributed to the Celtic Revival; Pittendrigh MacGillivray (1856–1938) was the sole sculptor of this group. Henry’s and E. A. Hornel’s (1864–1933) *Druids* (1890) combined Celtic subject matter with the suggestion of the *correspondances* of French Symbolism (those parts of empirical reality which correspond with the world of symbols in Symbolist thought) in a painting of striking cultural hybridity. Hornel’s interest in *Japonisme* was not unique; James Cadenhead (1858–1927) shared it, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928) was later to combine *japonaiserie* with the inherited styling cues of Scottish vernacular, Romantic and Celtic iconography. The Orientalism and flexuousness of the new Glasgow art of this period owes not a little to the combined influences of Whistler and Beardsley. At the same time, there was a continuing tribute to the pageantry and representation of Scottish history, not only in the masques and murals of the exhibitions and the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh, but also in the neo-Jacobitism of figures such as Napier and W. G. Blaikie Murdoch, a theme also taken up by writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson (Kidnapped, Catriona, The Master of Ballantrae), Neil Munro, John Buchan (A Lost Lady of Old Years), Margaret Oliphant (‘The Queen and the Duchess’ and ‘The Young Chevalier’), William Power (Prince Charlie), Leila Crackanthorpe, Violet Jacob (Flemington), Douglas Ainslie (The Song of the Stewarts) and A. C. MacDonell (Lays of the Heather).

Although it did not play nearly so central a role as it was to do in the MacDiarmid era, verse in Scots continued to be produced throughout this period, not only in newspapers, but in works of lasting merit such as Charles Murray’s Hamewith (1900) and the poetry of Violet Jacob. At the same time, some Scottish writers such as Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932) became more English than the English: Graham’s portrayal of the rural English countryside in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) became iconic to generations of children. Some Scottish authors, like Conan Doyle, concentrated on the threat to English civilisation posed by foreign or imperial influences: Mary Hawker’s (1848–1908) Mademoiselle Ixe (1890) was a popular work of this kind in Scottish literature.

It was, however, in the core areas of the little magazines of Edinburgh and London, the productions of Geddes and Nicoll, and the journalists and artists that surrounded them, that the distinctive features of the Scottish 1890s are seen. In the Celtic Revivalism of The Evergreen’s circle, Scottish literature contributed to the Pan-Celtic Revival and foreshadowed the Renaissance proclaimed in the 1920s; in the Kailyard, the domestic localism of high Victorian sentiment exhausted itself in a manner which revolted later writers; while in the shrewd acerbity of Barrie and the brutal naturalism of Douglas Brown, we see the beginnings of a Scottish literature which, if not nationalised along Irish lines, was still increasingly determined to ‘gang its ain gait’ apart from the literary themes of Wilde, Forster, Lawrence, De La Mare, Newbolt and Brooke. Scottish history, particularly the history of the Jacobite past, was as dominant a theme as it had been for Scott; it was a continuing obsession, now joined by a revival of that old Enlightenment suspicion of empire, found in work as diverse as that of Stevenson and Conan Doyle: for the former, colonialism was a cause for suspicion; for the latter, the return of colonialis and their booty brought with it too often the dismissive attitude to life found in the world of empire, as in the characters of Grimesby Roylott, Leo Sterndale and many others. If Scotland’s Celticism was not remasculinised in the image of Pearse’s Gael, or Yeats’s Cuchulain, the gendered nation survived as a powerful memorial to Scotland’s own love affair with its lost past: the Katrine Yester of Buchan, the Mary Rose and Julie Logan of Barrie, the Chris Guthrie of...
Lewis Grassic Gibbon. The Scots Renaissance grew from the 1890s in Scotland, its neglected root.

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Further reading


Geddes Archive, University of Strathclyde: The Geddes Papers.


The Collectors: John Francis Campbell and Alexander Carmichael

John Shaw

Scotland's intellectual and literary circles, along with those of other countries in nineteenth-century Europe, witnessed a growing interest in their indigenous, if marginalised, popular traditions that paralleled the exposure to exotic peoples and cultures in the outer reaches of a growing empire. The Ossian sensation and its ensuing controversies had effectively brought to the surface issues of nationhood and identity surrounding the largely unwritten traditions still current in the Highlands, leading directly to the fruitful and productive field collecting that continued into the first decades of that century. In terms of the Highlands, however, the preservation and publication of folklore are to be seen within an overall social and political context of massive depopulation; increasingly explicit expressions of social stratification through language, culture and wealth; and a devaluing of the orally transmitted traditions that played a central role in the lives of the common people. The major collections based on fieldwork from the opening decades of the century consisted primarily of folk songs and Fenian (‘Ossianic’) verse, and included few items of prose narrative. It was not until after the middle of the nineteenth century that John Francis Campbell of Islay (Iain Òg Ìle) and his younger colleague Alexander Carmichael were to emerge as the major Scottish folklorists of the century, whose work was to determine the direction of subsequent folklore studies in Scotland. Both were Gaelic-speaking, raised in the Highlands, well educated, and respected by their contemporaries from rural Gaeldom to academia.

Among Scotland’s literati, interest in Highland traditions, at least in its initial stages, was intimately attached to a growing awareness from various perspectives of the Gaelic Finn Cycle. The collecting of ‘Ossianic’ ballads began around the mid-eighteenth century (and thus at least a decade before the 1761 publication of James Macpherson’s Fingal) with the early collections of the Highland clergymen Revs. Alexander Pope of Reay (fl. mid-eighteenth century) and Donald MacNicol (1735–1802), a native of Glenorchy. Rev. James McLagan (1728–1805) of Blair Atholl, a contemporary, was generous in providing Macpherson with ballads from his own collecting in 1760–1. Those from outside the Highlands were also active, an early collector being Jerome Stone, a schoolmaster in Dunkeld, originally from Fife, who published ballads in translation in 1756. Thomas Ford Hill, an Englishman, gathered material in Dalmally in 1780, to be followed by a Doctor Young from Ireland, who visited the Highlands in 1784 with the express purpose of testing the authenticity of Ossian. A strong pro-Ossian position was taken by Ranald MacDonald of Eigg in his Gaelic song collection (1776), and a good number of ballads appeared in later
collections by John Gillies of Perth (1786) and Alex and Donald Stewart (1804). The 1805 *Report of the Highland Society on the Authenticity of Ossian’s Poems*, in addition to providing a balanced approach to the controversy, contains useful information on fieldwork in the Highlands during this period in the form of first-hand testimonials. A subsequent report for the Highland Society by the musician and field-collector Alexander Campbell (1815) provides an account of Gaelic song-collecting during the early nineteenth century. In the Lowlands growing interest in Highland oral traditions is evidenced by Robert Burns’s journey to ‘Ossian’s country’, extending as far north as Inverness in 1787, and James Hogg’s *Jacobite Relics of Scotland* (1819), which included Perthshire materials from Col. David Stewart, and John Stewart of Dalguise.

John Francis Campbell (1822–85), the son of Walter Frederick Campbell of Islay and Lady Eleanor Charteris, grandson of the Earl of Wemyss and great-grandson of the Duke of Argyll, was raised on his father’s Islay estate. Such close family ties to the Argyll aristocracy would seem a most unlikely beginning for the central role that he was later to assume in the study of the folktale. Campbell senior, however, endeavoured to retain the population on his estate through land reforms, and took the step – almost unheard of for people of his standing – of ensuring that his son gain access to the life of the common people on the island by placing him at an early age under the care of a local piper who introduced him to folktales. By his own account, the acquisition of Gaelic language, social skills and cultural perspective allowed him to experience directly the extensive living oral and musical traditions among the older people, and these were to exert a profound influence on his later life and work. Campbell’s more conventional education at Eton and Edinburgh University (he was called to the English bar in 1851) introduced him to the main intellectual, social and economic movements of the day.

An important early influence from the Highland intelligentsia came in the person of the Gaelic writer Rev. Norman MacLeod (‘Caraid nan Gàidheal’) (1783–1862), who having collected tales himself, encouraged Campbell, ‘then a tall lanky boy’, to begin gathering folklore. His first collecting was undertaken while in his early twenties, around the time his father was forced to forfeit the Islay estate. His friendship with the Norse scholar George Webb Dasent during the 1850s, however, provided the impetus to pursue his fieldwork in the Highlands ‘in earnest’. In the course of diplomatic work in Sweden, Dasent, cosmopolitan, well travelled and academically accomplished, had become acquainted with Jacob Grimm, who urged him to pursue his interest in Scandinavian traditions. His translation of Norwegian tales collected by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Moltke Moe, published in 1859 as *Popular Tales from the Norse*, incorporated many of the ideas from continental folktale scholarship and was widely read. The numerous comments written by Campbell in the margins of his personal copy leave no doubt as to the extent to which his own theoretical views on the origins and diffusion of tales were ultimately derived from those put forward by the Grimms in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1819 edition). In a personal communication Dasent offered advice regarding fieldwork techniques that was far ahead of its time, recommending the faithful transcription of story texts as given by the reciter and drawing attention to the importance of recording variants. Campbell’s adoption of such guidelines accounts in part for the lasting value to scholarship of his published collections. In the same year he was called to serve on the Lighthouse Commission, the first of a number of public appointments (Mines Commission of 1863, Coal Commission of 1866) that he was to accept during his career. Gathering tales over such a wide geographic area was an immense task, and it was the postal surveys used by the Lighthouse Commission that provided the inspiration for the methodology, or ‘machinery’, that enabled him to
contact and recruit (with offers of remuneration for tales) the key figures throughout the Highlands and in the Lowland Gaelic diaspora communities.

Campbell recruited as his main colleague a former tutor and Islay schoolmaster Hector MacLean, who edited the tales from the field for publication and provided many valuable accounts of reciters and storytelling in letters from his travels. The remaining collectors were selected for their language skills and local knowledge, being often as not men of some standing (factors, gamekeepers and a minor aristocrat) in their districts. The resulting network, rapidly constituted, covered the Highlands, extending to the most isolated districts. It proved remarkably effective, ultimately yielding a total of 791 tales, mostly unpublished and now among the large collection of Campbell's papers held at the National Library of Scotland. The first volume of *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* appeared in 1860, followed by three more volumes over the next two years. The work was widely acclaimed, attracting the attention of such major luminaries as Max Müller and Edward Tylor, and has yet to be superseded in Scottish folktale scholarship. Despite the curiously antiquarian references to international tales as ‘flotsam and jetsam’, ‘light mental debris’ and ‘curious rubbish about to perish’, together with some speculative etymologies, the collection was pioneering in its perspectives and organisation. On an international level, the quality, presentation and intrinsic interest of the material served to secure the place of Scottish Gaeldom as one of the important cultures for international folktale study. The lengthy introduction deals with tale migration within a theoretical framework ultimately derived from continental comparative philology, and in its approaches to tale classification, narrator typologies and performance it anticipates developments elsewhere in the field by many decades. Where multiple versions of a tale had been gathered, one was selected to be given in full, followed by summaries of the variants. Campbell was not adverse to commenting on social conditions, expressing high regard in his descriptions of reciters of the humblest backgrounds, declaring his respect for Gaelic tradition and once remarking, ‘I am one of themselves, so I got on famously.’

Campbell was no mere gatherer of tales; he could more accurately be described as a polymath whose scientific and legal training, combined with his broad interests, informed his study of ‘the science of Storyology’. His papers contain portrait sketches of some of his most important reciters (occasionally done in a mixture of whisky and soot) in addition to Highland landscapes and a number of photographs. He travelled and wrote extensively, making frequent visits to Scandinavia from 1849, which he recorded in informative and colourful accounts of journeys among the Lapps. He also journeyed in Ireland and Man, Iceland and Greenland, Russia, the Far East and South Asia, North America (described in *A Short American Tramp in the Fall of 1864*, 1865) and embarked on a world tour in 1874–5, which he describes in *My Circular Notes* (1876). Among the more important scientific publications produced was an illustrated work on geology (*Frost and Fire*, 2 vol. 1865). He made an important contribution to meteorology with the invention of a device for recording sunshine, first conceived in 1853, that was put to use by the Royal Observatory at Greenwich in 1876 (see his *Thermography*, 1883).

Over the decades following the publication of *Popular Tales*, Campbell’s folktale activities continued and he maintained close contact with his co-workers in the Highlands. In the autumn of 1871 he returned to the Outer Isles on a gathering expedition, during which Alexander Carmichael assisted him in noting down important materials still largely unpublished. A long-standing interest in the history of folktales had led to a study of the older story and Fenian ballad manuscripts in Edinburgh’s Advocates’ Library, and in 1872 *Leabhar na Féinne*, a collection of manuscript and oral sources of ‘Ossianic’ materials appeared, printed
at Campbell’s own expense. It was a landmark in scholarship for its time and remains a standard work on heroic ballads to this day, but its reception by the public was clearly a disappointment, and a projected second volume was never published. A further unpublished manuscript, ‘Oral Mythology’ contains theoretical discussions on the folktale that strike the modern reader as insightful and progressive for an emerging discipline. This and earlier writings demonstrate that Campbell did not limit himself to a single theoretical approach, and preferred whenever possible to base his work on direct ethnographic observation. He produced further writings of long-term interest to ethnology. Canntaireachd: Articulate Music (1880) deals with bagpipe music, and a critical study on the origins of the tartan strongly suggests that the associations so prevalent in the nineteenth century of specific patterns with various clans are an invented tradition.

Campbell campaigned successfully in Islay for his kinsman Lord Colin Campbell in 1878, but his expressed interest in politics, even with regard to Highland issues, was slight. A life-long commitment to Gaelic language and culture, however, led him to deplore the ‘extraordinary and culpable neglect’ of Gaelic in Scottish universities, and to lend his support during the 1870s to Professor John Stuart Blackie’s campaign to establish a Chair of Celtic at Edinburgh. Campbell did not consider himself a candidate for the position, and his trenchant views on academic politics are recorded in his letters. Nevertheless, he maintained a cordial international academic correspondence with some of the leading folklorists of his time, including Alfred Nutt and Francis J. Child.

During his final decades Campbell continued to maintain close contact with collecting colleagues, leading to significant results in the field. John Dewar of Glendaruel, an industrious and able collector, at Campbell’s suggestion was granted the means by the Duke of Argyll to engage in full-time fieldwork. On Dewar’s death in 1872 his collection (now known as the Dewar Manuscripts), consisting primarily of historical legends and one of the most important to be amassed in Scotland, was sorted by Campbell and bound in several large volumes. He continued with his scientific experiments until his death in Cannes in 1885, and the influence arising from the fieldwork and publications over many years provided the inspiration and groundwork for important publications over the following seven decades, notably the five-volume collection of tales, Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition (1889–95). Additional story materials from Campbell’s papers were later published by John G. MacKay in two volumes (More West Highland Tales, 1940, 1960).

Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), ten years Campbell’s junior, was one of the most assiduous collectors supporting his initiative, and was to spend some fifty years in all gathering Gaelic lore. He was born in Lismore to a farming family that had earlier enjoyed some social standing. From early youth he was reputed to have taken an unusual interest in the oral traditions of his district, and obtained a post in the civil service after being educated in Greenock and Edinburgh. His livelihood took him to Islay, Skye, Oban, Uist and the Lowlands, as well as Cornwall and Dublin; it proved to be a considerable asset to his field collecting activities, and led to contacts with many important tradition bearers throughout the Highlands. Campbell’s description of the geographical extent of Carmichael’s fieldwork at the time Popular Tales appeared (‘Mr Carmichael visited Lismore, his native island, walked through part of Sutherland, and the mainland of Lorne, and searched the districts where he was stationed in Harris, Skye and Islay’) indicates an enthusiasm for Gaelic lore equal to his own, and the young Carmichael was to become the best known of all of his colleagues. His collecting within folklore was wide-ranging, and included areas of oral tradition, notably tales, now only rarely associated with his name. During the particularly fruitful expedition by Campbell to Uist and Barra in 1871, he and Carmichael became storm-stayed for a week
on the island of Mingulay, south of Barra, where Carmichael was able to take down a unique and colourful description of the storyteller Roderick MacNeill. Continuing through Uist, they visited Hector MacIsaac, who provided an oral version of the early Irish Ulster Cycle epic tale the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, published by Carmichael in 1872. During that year he took down a Benbecula version of the same tale, as well as a lengthy and detailed Barra version of another early Irish tale, *Eachdraidh Chlann Uisne*, more widely known as the *Deirdre* story. Likewise noteworthy are the traditions taken down at various districts of the Highlands concerning the *Clìar Sheanchain* – an itinerant band of entertainers from medieval times who were said to be active as late as the eighteenth century – and a Uist version of the lengthy hero-tale *An Ceithnarnach Caol Riabhach* (‘The Slim, Swarthy Champion’). Folktales collected by Carmichael appear in *Popular Tales*, and contributions in the fields of proverbs and antiquities came out as occasional publications during his career. Much of Carmichael’s material, however, remains unpublished, and a more complete indication of the variety and extent of his interests and fieldwork can be ascertained from the extensive folklore materials that he left among his papers. These are typically written down in excise journals that he used in the field, and cover a wide spectrum: Fenian heroic ballads; oral history; riddles; nature beliefs; legends of fairies, the water horse, mermaids; rare Gaelic words and expressions; and notes on his own experiences in various parts of the Highlands.

Like Campbell, Carmichael directed his work towards preserving as much as possible of Gaelic oral tradition. His perspective, however, was less determined by science, and he echoed fellow-Highlanders earlier involved in the Ossian controversy in seeking to vindicate Gaeldom to the outside world through the interpretation and dissemination of folklore materials. Kenneth MacLeod’s account (in *Carmina Gadelica*) emphasises in almost exalted terms his position of *anam-chara*, ‘soul-friend’, to the Gaels, noting the access such status provided to their most intimate traditions. Folk memories of his visits, particularly in Uist, have persisted until after the middle of the last century, generally describing an imposing presence in kilt and plaid who was generous to storytellers. One account, however, from North Uist, recounts an episode between a local whisky-maker and Carmichael in his role of exciseman based in Lochmaddy, suggesting that his welcome was not always an unreserved one in all circumstances.

The first two volumes of Carmichael’s major work *Carmina Gadelica* were published in 1900 and received considerable attention. They consist primarily of prayers and charms (termed ‘hymns and incantations’ by the author) that have existed in abundance throughout the Highlands and represent less public, more intimate aspects of Gaelic oral folklore and spirituality. Throughout, Carmichael does not hesitate to express his views on the demise of Gaelic lore and its suppression by the clergy. In addition to an English translation, he provides valuable notes on many of the individual items, names and descriptions of reciters, notes on rare words, and a description in the introduction of a storytelling performance at a *cèilidh*. The following four volumes, published posthumously, contain more categories of charms, along with bird calls, plant lore, divination techniques, fairy lore, local legend, waulking songs, and an extensive section on words and expressions. In recent scholarship, questions have been raised by Hamish Robertson and Alan Bruford concerning the accuracy of Carmichael’s work published in *Carmina Gadelica* and elsewhere, particularly with regard to linguistic representation. It is evident through comparisons with the original field notes that textual alterations were routinely made, undoubtedly with a view to presenting Gaels in the best possible light; such practice, however, was still accepted in the late nineteenth century. Carmichael was in any case partial to archaic and picturesque turns of phrase gleaned from his reciters, and tended to apply ornate language at every opportunity,
occasionally to the consternation of his Gaelic-speaking audiences. In at least one case there is evidence of a lengthy interpolation based on other sources in his published *Deirdre* tale; elsewhere a passage of considerable historical interest has been excluded from the published version of a shorter story in order to comply with Victorian views on propriety. Carmichael was known as a generous friend and supporter of other field collectors, among them Donald Campbell, Frances Tolmie and Fr. Allan McDonald of Eriskay. Retiring to Taynuilt and finally to Edinburgh, he remained active in Gaelic organisations until his death in 1912.

**Further reading**


Scottish Gaels have always understood that there is a strong connection between language, literature and identity. It was through Gaelic that they expressed their experiences as a community and as individuals, and had access to centuries of oral tradition – poetry, legend, folktale, proverb and genealogy – which embodied their collective past as a people. Language was one of the few characteristics to distinguish European immigrants from one another in North America and with the disappearance of language the assimilation of Scottish Highlanders into anglophone society was likely to be rapid and thorough.

Poetry was the Gaels' primary means of literary expression and we know that all ranks of Highland society composed poetry about their experiences. Although we cannot now measure how much of the poetry once circulating orally has ever been committed to paper, it is safe to say that only a small percentage of this corpus has been properly edited or been recognised widely for its literary or historical import. Gaelic poetry is rooted in community to provide a social context for performance and a range of topics of discourse, so the nature of the Gaelic poetic tradition was necessarily affected by social changes.

When they arrived in America, Highlanders had already been exposed for generations to the assertion that English was the sole vehicle for success and that their own language and culture was unsuited to the modern world. Some immigrant communities enjoyed periods of relative isolation during which Gaelic tradition was allowed to follow its natural course of development; others struggled to reconcile their attachment to Gaelic with the prejudices against it and sometimes attempted to create an infrastructure to maintain it. Some Highland communities migrated practically en masse and it was a relatively short time before they reconstituted themselves and were functioning again in North America. The settlement of Highland families on Cape Breton island began in 1784, with immigration reaching its peak between 1828 and 1838. Cape Breton became the bastion par excellence of Gaelic conservatism in North America, due, at least in part, to its long-lasting isolation. Styles of music, poetry and dance survived here largely unaffected by the nineteenth-century institutions that developed in Scotland to 'improve' Highland arts and the composition of Gaelic poetry continued well into the second half of the twentieth century. Other Highland communities did not have the ability to create a defensive infrastructure for Gaelic before their integration into the anglophone world. Gaelic died as a community language in the Carolinas in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, and Gaelic poetry as a community art form expired along with it. In Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Glengarry County, Bruce County (Ontario) and the Eastern Townships of Quebec, the composition of Gaelic poetry ceased in the first half of the twentieth century.

During the late nineteenth century, as Gaelic was receding from rural settlements, many Gaels from Scotland, but especially from Highland communities in Canada, were migrating
to the industrial cities of Canada, the northern United States and the western frontier. Organisations arose in places such as Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Guelph, Chicago, Boston, New York and San Francisco where there were concentrations of thousands of Gaelic speakers and these became patrons of, and provided a social context for, Gaelic literary endeavours. The short-lived Highland Society of Canada, formed in 1818 in Glengarry, sponsored a Gaelic scholar as well as two Gaelic poets at the Williamstown Fair of 1820. The Celtic Society of Montreal and the Scottish Gaelic Society of New York had officially appointed Gaelic poets, and odes to other Highland and Gaelic societies were composed, possibly by designated bards.

Religion, literacy and publication

Until the evangelical movement emphasised universal access to scripture in the later eighteenth century, literacy in Gaelic tended to be confined to the learned classes, especially the clergy. The Ossianic controversy galvanised a number of ministers in Scotland to document vernacular poetry at a level of detail not previously attempted and from ranks of society not previously regarded. While there are signs of the popularity of James Macpherson's Ossian in colonial British America, the debate over the authenticity of the poetry apparently was not of sufficient relevance to immigrant Highland pride to instigate the collection of secular Gaelic poetry in America.

The Church harnessed the expressive power of Gaelic as long as it survived as a community language. Anecdotes recorded regarding the emotional intensity of Gaelic hymns and the verbal prowess of Gaelic-speaking ministers attest to the important role that Gaelic had in articulating religious convictions and spiritual experiences. The first text composed and published in Gaelic in North America is a booklet of sermons printed in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in 1791. It was written by the Rev. Dugald Crawford, a native of the isle of Arran, who came to preach to the Scots of the upper Cape Fear Valley after 1781. The fact that he deemed it worth printing suggests that it would find an audience of literate Gaels. A larger and more diverse selection of religious texts was printed in Canada. In 1786, Rev. James MacGregor became the first Gaelic-speaking Protestant minister in Nova Scotia. His book of original Gaelic religious poetry (set to secular tunes) was published in Glasgow in 1819 and was popular in Nova Scotia as well as Scotland. A Gaelic translation of the religious tract Christ’s Famous Titles was reprinted in Prince Edward Island in 1832 and Peter Grant’s popular book of religious songs was reprinted in Montreal in 1836. A Catholic text was reprinted in Prince Edward Island in 1841 and Rev. F. J. Macleod published a book of original hymns in Toronto in 1877. Although the Church offered Gaelic an institutional haven, it did not see itself as responsible either for the preservation of the language or the development of a distinctive secular culture. Gaelic-speaking ministers were happy to meet the spiritual needs of monoglot emigrants in Gaelic only, but educated the younger generations in English. Rev. John MacLeod was selected in 1735 to accompany the Highland settlers of Darien, Georgia, but he was also to be a missionary to Native Americans and to open a school to teach them and the Highland youth the English language.

By the second half of the nineteenth century it was too late to reverse the terminal decline in the old Highland settlements of the United States, but urban and Canadian communities were able to share in some of the progress that had been made in Scotland. Until the Education Act of 1872 made education through the medium of English compulsory, Highlanders were becoming increasingly literate in Gaelic. This created a market
for secular literature that was met in Scotland by cheap periodicals and affordable collections of secular Gaelic poetry. The anthology Sàr Obair nam Bard Gàidhealach became so popular in Scotland that an unauthorised and expanded version of the volume was printed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1863. The periodical An Gàidheal began life in Toronto in 1871, but after the first issue it was relocated to Glasgow when its editor returned to Scotland. Nonetheless, it had subscribers and correspondents in the United States and Canada and printed numerous poems composed in Canada. An Gàidheal struck a more strident note in defence of Gaelic than previous publications, and its content was thoroughly secular.

Apart from two short-lived Gaelic newspapers in Canada the first all-Gaelic periodical published in North America was Mac-Talla, based in Cape Breton. It ran from 1892 to 1904 and had a readership throughout Scotland, Canada, and the western and northern United States. All materials – whether letters, news, advertisements, fiction or poetry – were written in Gaelic. Mac-Talla coined and broadcast Gaelic neologisms, encouraged the collection of traditional poetry, voiced ideas about linguistic revitalisation and gave literate Gaels (particularly in Canada, which Scottish Gaels might have perceived as distant and provincial) a medium of expression they otherwise did not have. After Mac-Talla's demise Gaelic featured in several other periodicals in Nova Scotia, and books of Gaelic literature were printed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Canada (nine by the hand of Alexander Maclean Sinclair alone) and the United States (only one known example).

Poets

Although the early Highland settlements in the United States must have had many Gaelic poets very little is known about them now. Tradition recorded in Scotland in the second half of the nineteenth century asserts that Iain mac Mhurchaidh (known in English as ‘John MacRae’) went to settle in Cape Fear shortly before the American Revolution, but little tangible documentation of his existence survives. Several songs set in America were attributed to him, but the most famous of these (‘Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach’) is certainly not by him and the authorship of the others are in serious doubt, a matter discussed in ‘In Their Own Words’ in Scotia 25 (2001). A recently discovered manuscript contains a four-stanza love song, apparently composed by Confederate soldier John MacLean. He was a second- or third-generation American whose family emigrated in the 1820s from Cape Fear to Thomas County, Georgia. This multi-generational transmission of Gaelic linguistic and poetic skills was highly exceptional. In parts of Canada, however, more prolonged isolation allowed for a poetic tradition that lasted four, or more, generations. Again, the most impressive area of literary activity is Nova Scotia (including Cape Breton): a recent survey identified 170 Gaelic poets from printed sources, although it is certain that there is no textual trace of many others.

Important advocates for Gaelic emerged in North America in the late nineteenth century. Alexander Maclean Sinclair was born in 1840 in Glenbard, Nova Scotia, the grandson of the celebrated Gaelic poet John Maclean (Bard Thighearna Chola), who emigrated in 1819. Sinclair, a poet himself, became a leading authority on Gaelic literature and edited and published several volumes of poetry, many of which came from his grandfather’s important manuscripts. Sinclair sought out texts and tradition-bearers in North America and argued to readers of The Scottish-American Journal in 1889 that ‘the true history of the Highlanders is to be found in their poems and nowhere else’.
When he addressed the Gaelic Society of Canada as president in 1896, Alexander Fraser suggested that the group should collect Gaelic poetry in Canadian Highland communities and use their substantial funds to publish their results. Fraser made a similar plea to the Royal Society of Canada in 1903, naming some of the most accomplished poets and the many Highland settlements where Gaelic poetry could still be heard. His plans did not come to fruition.

Subjects and literary conventions

‘Old country’ songs remained popular in Gaelic-speaking communities and immigrants kept some songs alive after they were forgotten in Scotland. Poets made frequent recourse to this inherited literary corpus when composing new songs, reusing familiar choruses, metrical structures, tunes and literary conventions. Many of the poems convey homesickness and melancholy (cianalas). In some poems, the author says nothing of his current situation, but recounts in painstaking detail the names and places left behind. It would be wrong, nonetheless, to assume that all Highland emigrants viewed life in America as a painful exile, or that emigrants were not able to adapt to American life.

Reasons for the recurring theme of exile may be found in both poetic tradition and Gaelic culture. There was a well-established genre of exile poetry dating back centuries in the Gaelic literary tradition and this exerted a powerful influence on emigrant poets. Additionally, the Highland sense of belonging and homeland (dùthchas) was extremely strong, and the poetry of exile can be seen as expressing the fact that a person born on hereditary soil could never feel the same connection to another location, even if they were able to acculturate and succeed materially. Indeed, songs composed by those born in immigrant communities when they migrated elsewhere in North America duplicate the same themes (and sometimes use the same tunes) found in the songs of their ancestors who left Scotland.

There is poetry about emigration that displays a sense of optimism and liberation, and about settlement in immigrant communities that reflects contentment and resolution. There are also examples of debates between poets about the pros and cons of emigration and their newly adopted home. Iain Sealgair MacDonald’s unflattering comparison of Mabou Ridge (Cape Breton) with Scotland in 1835 prompted Ailean (‘the Ridge’) MacDonald to respond with a song reminding Iain and the rest of the community of the grinding poverty and social betrayal which had driven them to Canada and praised the worldly advancement of his countrymen there. Michael Kennedy discusses this in “Lochaber no more”: A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology in Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory (1999).

The landscape of North America made a strong impression on the immigrants, especially as many of them had come from barren islands to a heavily wooded terrain that they referred to with such epithets as Dùthaich nan Craobh (‘The Land of Trees’). Traditional nature poetry described the environment in minute detail and evoked the historical associations between people and place. Nature was not used as allegory or as a vehicle for philosophising, and no sign of the ‘sublime’ appears until external influences began surfacing in the nineteenth century. But descriptions of nature in Gaelic song were not just objective observations about flora and fauna: they often reflect the poet’s feelings about emigration and community. Poets optimistic about the prospects of a new life in America described the trees in terms of fecundity and wealth, while those overwhelmed with the
challenges of pioneer life and disheartened by the loss of their kin and community portray
the forests as forbidding and dark. The first song composed by John MacLean in Canada
in 1819, commonly known as A’ Choille Ghruamach (‘The Gloomy Forest’), complains of
the work of clearing the forests awaiting the first pioneers and of the loss of his old com-
community. This song remains his best-known and least representative work; after a short
period of adjustment, he composed a large corpus of poetry in praise of his new country
and community.

The Gaelic poetic tradition in North America inherited the literary conventions of
Scottish clan poetry, particularly the ‘Gaelic Panegyric Code’. The underlying purpose
of this poetry was either praise or satire, and the subject was usually the clan elite. Men
and women remained the most common subjects of poetry in North America, with the
emphasis on the traditional qualities framed in familiar terms, usually in love songs or
elegies. Panegyric was extended to handle the novelties of modern life in North America.
Numerous odes (and at least one satire) were composed in Gaelic to Mac-Talla, as well
as to other periodicals in Canada. The poets of a community were expected by custom
to comment on the merits and flaws of new items, and some poets were creative and
resourceful in reworking traditional symbolism to discuss inventions such as the radio
and telephone.

While Highlanders retained an interest in their ancestry and nostalgia for the pre-
Culloden Highlands, clanship was clearly dead as a social institution. There are a few
examples of clan praise in immigrant poetry (‘Clann Domhnuill’ by Alasdair ‘the Ridge’
MacDonald, son of Ailean ‘the Ridge’ MacDonald, is a literary response to reading Niall
MacLeod’s eulogy of the MacLeods in his popular book Clàrsach an Doire), but the groups
extolled in North America were much more likely to be communities (and their natural
environments), social organisations (especially Scottish or Highland societies), military
regiments, political parties or the Gaels themselves as a distinct ethnic group.

Depictions of anglophones were modelled on much earlier stereotypes of Scottish
Lowlanders and immigrant poems generally remark on the alien customs and values of
North American society. There was some ambivalence in Gaelic communities with self-
identifying wholly as ‘British’, and they occasionally used the term Gall (with its implicit
disparaging tone) to refer to North American anglophones. The ‘racial definition’ of
Scottish Gaels was in flux over the nineteenth century with allegiances shifting accord-
ing to circumstances. Protests over Clearances sometimes made comparison with the
plight of Native Americans, Highland travellers to North America remarked on similar-
ities between indigenous cultures and languages and their own and many Highland fur
traders assimilated successfully into indigenous groups. During the presidency of Ulysses
S. Grant (1869–77), however, a Highlander resident in the United States composed a
poem reflecting contemporary racism; this is discussed by Newton in We’re Indians Sure
Enough (2001). By arguing for inclusion in the ‘white race’, Highlanders could secure its
privileges as their own.

A profusion of verse, much of it humorous, simply chronicles the life of the local com-
munity. Any slight to the poet (such as failing to invite him to a wedding) would be the
cause of a satire; any person assuming airs would be taken down a notch by the poet with
an ironic or faux eulogy; any ambitious endeavour gone awry would occasion a mock-
heroic ode. The first appearance of a modern invention in the community often occasioned
droll verse, especially if the novelty was flaunted. One song, for example, written when a
farmer installed the first telephone in his neighbourhood, paints the ridiculous picture of
his using the device to check in with his cattle, or to speak with Harry Lauder.
Decline

Words or phrases in English were often inserted into songs for comic effect once the community was becoming bilingual. Poets criticised and chided those who went to the cities and returned to their home communities feigning to have lost their Gaelic (and other rural characteristics). Poets demonstrate their role in defence of Gaelic and traditional values in such pieces, but they described linguistic shift merely in terms of personal loyalty. The poetry, at least, did not analyse the roles of institutions in privileging or marginalising particular languages and this limited their effectiveness as John Shaw discusses in ‘Brief Beginnings’ in Scottish Gaelic Studies 17 (1996). One song (c. 1880) Newton discusses in We’re Indians Sure Enough and typical of the genre depicts a chance meeting in Boston between a young man and woman who had been childhood sweethearts in Cape Breton. He addresses her in Gaelic, and asks after her and her family; she, however, is with another suitor, pretends not to understand his Gaelic and moves to leave; he, in his indignation, reminds her of their former fondness and then damns her for her infidelity to their people and language.

Gaelic organisations, periodicals and columns in anglophone periodicals created the rudiments of an infrastructure to defend and maintain Gaelic in North America, but they also acted at times as channels for external literary models and Scottish kitsch unknown to the early immigrants. The Scottish-American Journal (published in New York) began to print Gaelic poetry in the 1860s, but most early pieces were translations of popular Scots and English poems such as ‘Hey, Johnnie Cope’ and ‘God Save the Queen’. Before the end of the nineteenth century, poets in the urban Gaelic societies were reciting their translations of the poetry of Robert Burns and composing Gaelic odes to him.

An Comunn Gaidhealach in Scotland offered a more proactive model of Gaelic development by establishing the national Mòd (an annual event featuring competitions in Gaelic singing, recitation and poetic competition) in 1892, but this only exposed differences in commitment to Gaelic within some North American organisations. A schism in the Scottish Celtic Society of New York occurred in 1894 when they should have held their second annual Gaelic competitions, with dissenters establishing the rival Scottish Gaelic Society of New York. Inspired not only by Scotland’s An Comunn Gaidhealach but by the teaching of Irish in America, leaders of the Gaelic communities of New York and San Francisco made a case in 1902 for a North American Mòd to be established for the encouraging of Gaelic in all large urban centres. As Newton identifies in ‘Becoming Cold-hearted like the Gentiles Around Them’ in eKeltoi (2001), no central infrastructure was ever created, although a few local events were held.

As the descendants of Highlanders lost Gaelic and adopted English, they lost the ability to relate to key cultural landmarks, particularly in the oral tradition. Descendants of immigrants clung to the symbols of tartanry at ritual times to maintain some link with Scottishness, even if they embraced Anglo-American culture in their daily lives and allowed their parents’ language and literary tradition to fade away into oblivion. The recognition of Gaelic culture in contemporary writing, such as Alastair MacLeod’s Cape Breton stories, as discussed by Iain Wright (see Chapter 31 in volume three), shows its continuing presence in the literature of the Scottish diaspora.
Further reading

MacDonell, Margaret (1982), *The Emigrant Experience*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
The Literature of Religious Revival and Disruption

Donald E. Meek

‘Religious revival’ is a difficult concept to define, as it has changed its meaning markedly across the centuries. Developing in seventeenth-century Europe among pietistic groups, often in the face of confessional warfare, political opposition and persecution sometimes leading to exile, the concept came to be applied in the eighteenth century to movements of spiritual revitalisation, occurring generally within evangelical Protestantism, and normally involving powerful preachers or charismatic figures, whose fervour ignited similar enthusiasm among their audiences. A religious revival that develops without such figures remains unusual, though the general view among those influenced by such a movement would be that the experience is God-given rather than human-made, ‘prayed down’ rather than ‘worked up’. Opponents of religious revival may well argue that the opposite is the case, and that a religious revival owes its existence in large measure to the paranoia and neuroses of an intrusive and manipulative preacher, and/or to tensions within society, which cause people to be ‘impressionable’. In Britain and Ireland, a ‘revival’ is normally distinguished clearly from a ‘mission’ or series of evangelistic meetings, with which the term ‘revival’ is now equated in the United States. Nevertheless, both ‘revival’ and ‘mission’ require an element of human planning and strategy.

Revival movements can cross local and even national boundaries, thus becoming international in character. In districts beyond the ‘revival centres’, ‘hot spots’ may emerge, and thereby give the impression that a national or international revival of religion is in progress, though the empirical evidence may not always bear this out. Nevertheless, a succession of religious revivals may produce a wider wave of spiritual activity, which is absorbed far beyond its own shores. Its effect may last for a decade or more, and it may be productive of a great variety of responses, from the founding of missionary societies and churches to the translation of Bibles and a concern for social welfare and political action.

A key element in the response to, and the dissemination of, religious revival is its association with particular communities, defined by their occupations (crofters, tin-miners, fisherfolk etc.) as much as by their locations. Religious revival tends to affect particular age groups within such communities; young people in their late teens or early twenties are most likely to be influenced and converted. This, however, does not rule out responses within older age groups.

In Scotland patterns of religious revival have varied across the centuries. Within the Presbyterian churches from at least the seventeenth century, the centre of spiritual renewal was the Communion Season, or the ‘Occasion’, which was celebrated within parishes usually twice a year. Significant revival movements, affecting people far beyond the bounds of
a single parish, could be triggered by the soul-searching and self-abasing themes characteristic of impassioned evangelical preaching at communion services. Communion-based revival movements were associated with Kirk o’Shotts (1630) and Cambuslang (1742), though both deserve to be set in wider contexts, with Ulster on the one hand, and New England on the other. The significance of the ‘Occasion’ declined in the Lowlands after 1800, but communions, commonly celebrated in the open air until the First World War, retained their central importance in the Highlands and Islands into the twentieth century. After 1800 the activity of itinerant preachers, supported by missionary bodies beyond the Established Church, stimulated small revival movements in many localities, especially in the Highlands and Islands, and the region remained open to external religious influences of various kinds, often reflecting patterns elsewhere in Scotland. Broader Scottish ecclesiastical tensions fomented religious revival in the Highlands and the Lowlands, as happened in the Ten Years’ Conflict, preceding the Disruption of 1843. The Disruption was caused by a dispute about patronage, but it is no less evident that it raised issues of ecclesiastical and spiritual purity, which resonated closely with the pulse of religious revival. The quest for the ‘true’ Church of Scotland was at its heart. In the mid-nineteenth century, Scotland was affected by the revival movements of 1858–62, which began in the USA, and the evangelistic campaigns of the American preacher D. L. Moody influenced Scotland strongly in 1874–5. In the twentieth century, salient, though geographically peripheral, revival movements occurred among the east-coast fishing communities in 1921 and the crofting communities of Lewis in 1949–53. Both took place three to four years after a world war, within a period of uncertainty and social restructuring. They also owed much to the impact of individual preachers, namely Douglas Brown (1874–1940) in Lowestoft, and Duncan Campbell (1898–1972) in Barvas. Campbell was supported by the Faith Mission, founded in 1886 for the evangelisation of the rural areas of Scotland. The Mission was part of a growing late nineteenth-century ‘holiness’ movement. Compared with other revivals in the Highlands and Islands, the 1949–53 Lewis revival achieved great prominence through the literature published by the Faith Mission. Literature is, in fact, of central importance to conceptualising religious revival more generally, and to maintaining awareness of the phenomenon.

Writing revival

The written record of religious revival in Scotland as a whole is sizeable and significant, as it is in other countries where such ‘awakenings’ have occurred. Recent scholarship on the ‘Great Awakening’ in New England and the Middle Colonies in the decade or so from 1730 to 1740 draws attention to the extent to which evangelists such as George Whitefield (1714–70) were able to use the commercial enterprises of their day, and especially the printing press, to promote ‘their’ interests and to stimulate an ‘awakening’ on both sides of the Atlantic. The ‘Great Awakening’ was fostered by particularly powerful figures, and it was sufficiently long lasting to allow the publication of a wide range of material. Although much smaller in scale, similar patterns can be observed in Scotland, where eighteenth-century religious revivals were linked closely to those of New England and the Middle Colonies.

The literature of religious revival can be placed in broad categories relative to its authors and their motives. To raise awareness of the need for revival, and thereby stimulate another such movement, historical accounts of the ‘progress of the gospel’ and other retrospective compendia may be published at intervals, and particularly at a commemorative juncture.
When a revival of religion emerges, accounts of the experience of converts and of those who have been vehicles in its creation and promotion generally provide stimulus and encouragement, and often attract ‘visitors’ from far and near, even after the revival is a spent force. Sometimes the ‘revival’ may attract the attention of the secular press. The publication of journals, pamphlets and newspaper articles, when well managed, may act as a cohesive and overarching ‘glue’. This may give the impression that a revival movement is greater, deeper and more extensive than it really is. When the initial fervour has passed, ‘reviving the revival’, by memorialising the event and recounting the experience of converts, becomes an important literary theme, particularly at a popular level. This, in turn, may help to stimulate further religious revivals following earlier paradigms.

Retrospective material of this nature is often highly subjective. ‘Sympathetic’ accounts bear all too often the hallmarks of an external writer pursuing evidence for a particular theological understanding close to his or her heart. Revival movements of the past thus fall victim to agenda-driven promoters, anxious to condemn the laxity of existing churches or to highlight a particular warp in the theological understanding of others. ‘Times of revival’ and ‘seasons of refreshing’ are perceived with hindsight as the Golden Age of Christianity, which has been followed by a sad declension to the writers’ day, when preachers appear to be mere minnows and the faith has been seriously compromised or abjectly betrayed. In the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first, religious revivals have attracted the attention of charismatic writers, who are anxious to find historical justification for, and exemplification of, the alleged ‘signs and wonders’ of their own time. In an entirely different category from such spiritual gold-diggers are the composers of broadly secular narratives, novels and short stories, who may view a religious revival with varying degrees of scepticism, but who may find it a convenient peg on which to hang their own preconceptions.

Literature produced by its promoters, apologists, memorialisers, supporters and detractors certainly contributed greatly to the making of the Free Church of Scotland, which emerged from the Established Church at the Disruption of 1843. The Disruption was, in fact, such a salient event in Scottish church history that it generated its own body of literature, which stands apart from the general flow of revival-driven publications. It can claim major writers such as the geologist Hugh Miller (1802–56), editor of The Witness, whose vigorous pen covered many different dimensions of Scottish life. Much contemporary writing from and about the Free Church was polemical, but softened towards romantic retrospection by the end of the nineteenth century, as can be seen in Thomas Brown’s Annals of the Disruption (Edinburgh, 1883). The Disruption and its effects in different parts of Scotland have also produced an ongoing critical engagement with the evidence, which has been productive of major academic studies and considerable debate, as to whether (for example) the Disruption in the strongly supportive Highlands was a product of ‘class conflict’ or the natural outcome of the rising tide of evangelical activity in the area in the preceding forty years.

In Scotland, analyses and accounts of the Disruption and religious revival are written primarily in English. Although the Scottish Highlands and Islands are closely identified with these movements and with Gaelic, there are very few surviving Gaelic prose accounts of events. Similarly, there are no accounts of religious revivals written in Scots, although several of the principal religious revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries occurred in strongly Scots-speaking areas of the Lowlands. While there may be practical reasons for the absence of Gaelic and Scots narratives (including the lack of historical writing in both languages), the absence of Gaelic material suggests that revival attracts a great deal of external interest, and that it is constructed primarily as a phenomenon to be shared with an outside readership, particularly within the English-speaking world.
Although literature – predominantly in English – plays a vital part in preserving concepts and impressions of religious revival, it is no less important to recognise that narratives of revival exist orally, beyond the printed or written word, in the minds and memories of those affected by the phenomenon. Thus, in the Scottish Highlands, the experience of comparatively recent religious revivals, such as those in Lewis (1949–53) and in North Uist (1958), can be accessed most readily by speaking to converts, who will readily describe their experiences in Gaelic. Nevertheless, it remains the case that English is the language of published interviews. An audio-cassette in English (1983), featuring interviews with Lewis converts, and a videotape (1995), covering similar ground, have been produced by Ambassador Productions, Belfast. Even so, there is much within the individual and collective memories of Gaelic communities that remains to be recorded and – above all – analysed.

Analyzing revival

There are relatively few modern, analytical accounts of religious revivals in Scotland, though there are signs that a new approach is slowly emerging, most notably in Kenneth Jeffrey’s study of the 1858–62 revival in the north-east of Scotland. Students of religious revivals, who are frequently within the evangelical camp or somehow linked to it, find it difficult to position themselves dispassionately in order to conduct a convincing analysis. The evangelical community expects that such writers will be sympathetic to the movements which they analyse. Attempts to link revival movements to prevailing social and economic conditions, or to assess (in the manner of present-day American scholars and the ‘Great Awakening’) the relationship between these movements and the commercial forces of the time, can be seen by ‘supernaturalists’ as acts of treachery, betraying biblical Christianity. On the other hand, the secular writings of social or economic historians, who may pursue relentlessly one-dimensional arguments based on economic or social determinism, are prone to be dismissed no less vigorously as ‘unbelieving’, sceptical and hostile. The profiles of religious revivals in Scotland suggest that each event requires to be studied in its own right, and with an open mind. A religious revival, as it emerges in different communities, may well be complex and multi-dimensional. It may interact subtly with spiritual aspirations, but also with prevailing social, economic and political circumstances, thus defying easy theorising.

A balanced approach to the study of religious revival requires knowledge of a wide range of fields – social, ethnological, statistical, linguistic and historical, to name but a few – whereas, in Scottish church historiography to date, there has been a tendency to concentrate on major institutions and key figures, to the detriment of demotic religious experience, which is commonly shared, multi-faceted and culturally nuanced. As a consequence, much modern revival literature lives mainly within the popular domain, and is largely uncritical. Nor is there much awareness of literary genre and its significance in this field. A first step towards a properly critical appreciation of religious revival in Scotland is to identify and to evaluate the different types of literature that it has produced – from historical compendia to popular accounts, from weighty tomes to ephemeral pamphlets.

Historical compendia

The principal compendium of revival history produced in Scotland is the foundational volume produced by the Rev. John Gillies (1712–96), Historical Collections Relating to
Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel, first published in 1754. Ordained in 1742, the year of the Cambuslang revival, Gillies was minister of the College (Blackfriars) Church in Glasgow. Gillies's first two 'books' covered the period from the beginning of the Christian Church to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Gillies then proceeded to outline the story of Christian revivals from the seventeenth century onwards, dealing with developments in England, Ireland, Germany, Holland and America, in addition to Scotland. He scoured earlier accounts and reproduced key passages, relating (for example) to the Stewarton revival of c. 1625, and the Kirk o' Shotts revival of 1630, with biographical sections on the presiding ministers, David Dickson and John Livingston. Gillies had a keen interest in biography, and produced the first biography of the transatlantic revivalist George Whitefield, namely Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. G. Whitefield (1772). He also corresponded with influential figures in America, including Jonathan Edwards.

Gillies was not alone in his desire to collect evidence of this kind in a compendium. He drew on the writings of another distinguished clerical collector, the Rev. Robert Wodrow (1679–1734), minister of Eastwood (near Paisley). Wodrow (whose name survives in that of the Wodrow Society) produced a seminal History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland (1721–2). He conducted a voluminous correspondence with (among others) Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman in New England. He also edited works by the Rev. David Dickson of Stewarton.

As W. R. Ward points out in his Protestant Evangelical Awakening (1992), Wodrow and Gillies shared a desire ‘to accumulate archives which would support their understanding of history’, namely that ‘the movements of renewal and revival of the eighteenth century sought their legitimation in the hand of God in history’. Ward wryly notes that Gillies produced ‘an updated version of the Acts of the Apostles’. In so doing, Gillies laid the foundations of the later understanding of religious revival as a divinely ordained phenomenon, initially spanning continental Europe, Britain and the American colonies, but potentially embracing the entire globe. Indeed, through the labours of those extraordinarily energetic and scholarly ministers with broad, international perspectives, Scotland played a central (but hitherto little acknowledged) part in the creation of the concept of ‘religious revival’ as we now know it. Scottish conceptualising made sense of disparate spiritual events as divine 'movements', and laid out their collective hallmarks, in anticipation of the imminent dawn of the promised millennium. It is no accident that this Common Sense, empirical (and, some might say, potentially 'imperial') understanding of the purposes of God developed within the wider envelope of the Scottish Enlightenment, or that the intellectual axis between Scotland and New England is prominent.

In 1845 Gillies's volume was supplemented with an appendix in a new edition, produced by the Rev. Horatius Bonar (1808–89), Free Church minister in Kelso. Bonar edited and reordered material previously compiled and published in a haphazard manner by Gillies himself. It is likely that the enlargement of the volume was encouraged by the Disruption of 1843. Bonar was a warm supporter of the evangelistic campaigns of D. L. Moody in 1874–5, and crossed swords with the Rev. Dr John Kennedy, Free Church minister of Dingwall, who was unhappy with Moody's methods and theology.

Collecting and compiling information about religious revivals continued in Scotland during the nineteenth century (see, for example, the series Revivals of Religion, published by William Collins, Glasgow, n.d.) and into the twentieth, but the scale was reduced from that of Gillies's colossal efforts. Theological understanding changed, and horizons also narrowed. The Scottish localities became more important as time passed. The Highlands assumed special significance as revival impulses forsook the Lowlands. Representative of
growing interest in the Highlands and Islands is Alexander MacRae’s small compendium, *Revivals in the Highlands and Islands in the 19th Century* (1905).

**Converts’ accounts**

If eighteenth-century Scottish ministers were anxious to show how religious revival bore witness to the hand of God in history, they were also concerned to explore the experience itself, as it bore upon the lives of those who were converted. William McCulloch, the parish minister at the centre of the Cambuslang revival of 1742, assiduously recorded in two manuscript volumes ‘the spiritual experiences of 108 people from in and around Cambuslang, representing about a quarter of the final number of converts’. As Kenneth Roxburgh further states in *Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in 18th Century Scotland* (Bern, 1999), these ‘provide a wealth of material about the religious experiences of ordinary men and women who came under the influence of revival [. . .] Several of the converts spoke of being awakened to a sense of their own sins by the preaching of Whitefield in Glasgow in September 1741, although actual conversions had only commenced in February 1742’. The accounts provide details of the means whereby converts were brought to faith: verses of Scripture appearing in their minds ‘with great light’; the singing of Psalms, bringing conviction of sin and ultimate spiritual joy; and even the voice of Christ speaking directly to individuals. Visions of Christ too were attested. These remarkable manuscripts, which demonstrate a deep interest in spiritual psychology, and are held in New College, Edinburgh, have remained unedited and unpublished, although they have been used by scholars researching the Cambuslang revival.

The McCulloch manuscripts bear witness to another important process in the presentation of religious revival – editing of text, and an interest in what might be termed broadly ‘revival management’, to eliminate features of personal experience which might not accord with a ‘correct’ understanding of revival. The Cambuslang revival was criticised severely by the Secession Church (established 1733) for its excesses. McCulloch sent his first volume to several ministers, including Thomas Gillespie, for editing, and, as Roxburgh notes, Gillespie was one of those who was ‘most diligent in weeding out any material which would have backed up the criticisms of the Seceders [. . .] Passages which referred to visions or fainting spells were regularly excised’. Erotic language was left untouched, as it was in tune with the imagery of the Song of Solomon. In his desire to have a correct understanding of the place of visions and premonitions in the process of conversion, Gillespie wrote in 1746 and 1748 to another minister with a great interest in the psychology of conversion, and deep experience of revival, namely Jonathan Edwards, who composed a treatise on *Religious Affections*. Central to the concerns of such men was that Scripture should not be displaced by groundless or irrational ‘revelations’.

The physical manifestations and ‘excesses’ of revival have posed a challenge to editors, chroniclers and apologists across the years. Jerking, fainting, prostration and unusual noises (shouting, groaning, barking etc.), sometimes resembling the symptoms of panic attack, have seldom been absent from revivals, but the narrative of revival is frequently (and often deliberately) manipulated to maintain ‘institutional decorum’. The phenomena accompanying the revival movements that preceded the Disruption in Skye in 1842 shocked local Baptist ministers, but they were conveniently overlooked in the ‘streamlined’ version of the Free Church story in later years.
Accounts of revival experiences written by converts, rather than by ministers or other interested parties, are attested. The conversion narrative (1796) of the Rev. Alexander Stewart (1764–1821) of Moulin, Perthshire, became a classic of its kind. Mary Morrison, a convert of the Lewis revival of 1949–53, provided her own testimony in *Hearken, O Daughter* (1966), with immensely vivid pictures of cottage meetings and intense preaching. The style reflects the oral delivery:

The preacher with perspiration streaming down his countenance thundered the gospel from room to room. He preached hell; he preached an eternity without God and without hope. He preached on the end of the sinner’s way. Oh, he preached the gospel; it was full! He preached the gospel; it was free! It was the gospel that was terrible to the ears of a sinner!

We may assume that unwritten accounts, presented as oral testimony in churches and at special meetings, flourished in the context of religious revivals throughout Scotland.

**Preachers’ accounts and itinerants’ journals**

Religious revival was a portable commodity, or so it would seem from the manner of its dispersal by Moravians and others to Britain and the American colonies. It was also closely wedded to a strong missionary impulse, and stimulated by the ‘progress of the Gospel’. Itinerant evangelism, which flourished in Scotland and in other parts of Britain in the early nineteenth century, had its roots in the self-same, urgent desire to proclaim the Gospel as had compelled George Whitefield, in the previous century, to cross the Atlantic several times in both directions. Whitefield discovered the power of the journal/diary, as did his successors. The writing of regular despatches became a way of preserving a record of exciting events, but it was also a way of obtaining support from, and conveying information to, the public. Journals soon became an important means of communicating with the home missionary bodies (for example, the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland, and the Congregational Union of Scotland) which supported the labours of itinerant missionaries.

Itinerants’ journals provide general outlines of their preaching tours, their audiences and the spiritual state of the districts in which they operated. They also contain frequent references to, and sometimes fairly substantial descriptions of, small religious revivals in the localities that they visited. The arrival of a stranger, with a new and invigorating message to proclaim, appears to have made an impact in relatively isolated areas. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century rural Perthshire was still comparatively inaccessible, but it was exposed to religious revivalism through the labours of missionaries supported by Robert and James Haldane. As a consequence, young people were deeply affected in a series of revival movements which led to the creation of group of small Independent/Congregational churches around the shores of Loch Tay. These are graphically portrayed in journals by a former Edinburgh ironmonger, John Campbell (1766–1840). Similarly Dugald Sinclair (1777–1870), a Baptist preacher based at Bellanoch (and later Lochgilphead) who emigrated to Canada in 1831, left a fine account of his travels in mainland Argyll and the Inner Hebrides in his *Journal of Itinerating Exertions* (1814–17). Annual despatches from ministers such as the Rev. Peter Grant (1783–1867), of the Baptist church at Grantown on Spey, provide vivid insights into movements within their churches. The imagery that dominates their descriptions of revival is often coloured by the natural environment of the Highlands and Islands, its rainfall, rivers, floods, mountains and harvests.
Monographs by ministers who were central to revival movements include James Robe's *Faithful Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God at Kilsyth* (1742), which was frank about 'Trembling, Fainting, Histerisms in some few Women, with Convulsive-Motions in others', and Duncan Campbell's *The Lewis Awakening, 1949–1953* (1954).

**Journalism, magazines and newspapers**

Magazines and newspapers were an important means of providing information about religious revival to the general public. George Whitefield, who established his own magazine, appreciated this very clearly in the eighteenth century. In Scotland between 1742 and 1748, the chroniclers and promoters of religious revival, John Gillies, William McCulloch and James Robe (Kilsyth), were involved in the writing and editing of newspapers and magazines. McCulloch edited the *Glasgow Weekly History* and Robe the *Edinburgh Monthly History*. Such magazines stressed the harmony and unity of the Christian world by carrying reports from other parts (Germany, Holland and America) and supplementing it with Scottish material. They received correspondence and news items from such ministers as Jonathan Edwards in New England. Nineteenth-century journals were a continuation of this practice, but were more likely to be published by missionary societies, and to survive longer than the eighteenth-century ventures. Schoolmasters of the Gaelic Schools Societies (founded 1811) were in regular touch with their patrons by means of annual reports, which often contain accounts of localised revivals.

New bodies and churches, aided into existence by revival movements in the nineteenth century, commonly founded institutional journals to preserve and reinforce their identity, and these carried reports of revivals. Extracts from preachers' journals found their way into such organs. Evidence from the magazines of the Congregational Union of Scotland, for example, has been conveniently gathered and edited most recently by William D. McNaughton in *Early Congregational Independency in the Highlands and Islands and the North-East of Scotland* (2003).

The secular press in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries developed an oblique interest in religious revivals. The fisherfolk's revival of 1921 was covered in the Scottish press, and so too was the 1958 campaign by Faith Mission 'pilgrims' in North Uist: 'The gas jets and Tilley heaters hissed in the background as Miss Wilson sent waves of emotion round the hall,' reported the *Scottish Sunday Express*, which claimed that the female preachers were attracting and converting a predominantly male audience. Reporting in the secular press was not always sympathetic, but even within a Christian context revivals were a contentious issue.

**Addresses, sermons and hymns**

The contentious nature of religious revivals is well reflected in a significant book published in 1840 and entitled *The Revival of Religion: Addresses by Scottish Evangelical Leaders delivered in Glasgow in 1840*. The preface opens:

The very term, 'Revival of Religion,' we are perfectly aware, causes some persons to recoil with a species of instinctive antipathy, as if it inevitably brought before their minds nothing but images of wild and extravagant fanaticism.
The first address, by the Rev. John Bonar, sought to deal with 'the agitation, the alarm and even bodily convulsions, which sometimes accompany a revival'. It is telling that the book was published within three years of the Disruption, and that several of the key contributors joined the Free Church. Indeed, John belonged to a distinguished Scottish clerical family, and he and his two brothers, Andrew and Horatius, went out at the Disruption. They were significant contributors to the debate about religious revivals. Horatius (who ‘respected Scott, but loved Ossian’) gained an international reputation as an English hymn-writer. Although Horatius Bonar's hymns cannot be linked to specific religious revivals, they reflect the evangelical pulse of the time and the vigorous creativity that typified the new and broad Free Church in the second half of the nineteenth century, before it was reborn in the narrower confessionalism of 1900.

Religious revival unquestionably stimulated creativity, but within certain limits. The number of sermons delivered orally throughout Scotland in revival periods must have been immense. Only a small proportion of these have survived in print, among them the sermons of the Rev. William Chalmers Burns (1815–68), who contributed to the 1840 volume, and who had been at the centre of another religious revival in Kilsyth in 1839. In the Gaelic context, there was a reluctance to commit sermons to print, and what survives in published form is patchy. Traditional memory, however, preserves vivid recollections of early twentieth-century revival sermons in Gaelic communities.

Gaelic hymns became the primary means of conveying, largely orally, basic theology and spiritual understanding. The pulse of religious revival can be detected strongly in much Gaelic hymnology from the time of the celebrated hymn-writer Dugald Buchanan (1716–68), who heard George Whitefield preaching at Cambuslang in 1742. In the nineteenth century, spiritual poets such as the Rev. Peter Grant of Grantown on Spey, and John Morrison (c. 1796–1852), the Harris Blacksmith, were involved deeply in religious revivals in their own localities. Grant’s verse encompassed the tribulations and ultimate victory of the believer following a Bunyanesque path from the City of Destruction to the Heavenly City, while Morrison focused most memorably on the struggle between the regenerate ‘New Man in Christ’ and the ‘Old Man’, ever seeking to lay the ‘New Man’ low in the dust of defeat. Revival movements continued to energise hymn-writers in the twentieth century. In Lewis, the 1949–53 revival stimulated several new Gaelic hymns, such as the invitational ‘An tèid thu leam do Gharaidh a’ Bhàird?’ (‘Will you go with me to Garyvard?’), and brought to prominence some splendid traditional singers of Gaelic hymns, chief among them Mary Morrison (now Mrs Mary Peckham). Among east-coast fishermen, a lively tradition of revival hymn-singing and composition, revitalised in successive spiritual movements, drew richly on the metaphors of sailing and seamanship integral to their calling, which can be sampled in Jackie Ritchie’s atmospheric Floods upon the Dry Ground: God Working among Fisherfolk (1983).

Biographies and creative writing

Gaelic verse of spiritual experience was stimulated by revivals, but so too was Gaelic biographical verse, commemorating the achievements of ministers, in the Highlands and beyond, who had laid the foundations of a new spiritual epoch in 1843. Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Disruption Free Church, was memorialised in Gaelic verse following his death, as were numerous other patriarchs of the first generation. Rev. John MacDonald
Free Church minister of Ferintosh and a tireless itinerant evangelist who reached St Kilda in 1822, was the main exponent of versified biographies of this kind. His lengthy eulogies included one on the Rev. Alexander Stewart, minister of Moulin, Perthshire, who had been converted in 1796 with a consequent revival in his parish, and had served thereafter as minister in Dingwall and in the Canongate, Edinburgh. Prose memorials of the Disruption fathers, published in such well-tooled and golden-edged volumes as Disruption Worthies of the Highlands (1886), emerged forty to fifty years after 1843. For the pious and the sentimental of the late nineteenth century, revival and Disruption fuelled a lasting, retrospective image of ‘Bible-loving Scotland’, with its loyal ministers, its faithful elders and deacons, and its indelible Kirk o’ Shotts. The Rev. John Watson and the Rev. Samuel Rutherford Crockett, both Free Church ministers, elaborated such portraits in ‘Kailyard’ novels.

Revival and Disruption in themselves, however, did not transfer easily into fiction, probably because of the antipathy between faith and fiction. Only two notable novels with the Disruption as significant themes were published in the mid-nineteenth century: Lydia Miller’s Passages in the Life of an English Heiress or Recollections of Disruption Times in Scotland (1847), which features Thomas Chalmers, and William Alexander’s Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk (1871), which is set against the Disruption in the north-east of Scotland. In the twentieth century, creative writers in English or Gaelic have not found much to enjoy in either the Disruption or revivals. Robin Jenkins’s The Awakening of George Darroch (1985) offers a rather grim picture of an evangelical minister racked by sexual temptation. Gaelic poets, such as Derick Thomson and Donald Macaulay, comment on awakenings and cottage meetings in Lewis with wry humour and critical detachment. For Thomson, the Free Church minister is a scarecrow figure, repressing Gaelic culture and substituting the alien Calvinism of Geneva. Alasdair Campbell takes swipes at the apparently strange goings-on in the Lewis revival of 1949–53, when grown men took to their beds at mid-day. Finlay J. MacDonald noted the unattractive preaching styles that were allegedly imported into Highland parishes in the wake of the Billy Graham campaign in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, in 1955. This was a modern-style experiment in mass evangelism, which may have marked the peak of residual revival interest in Scotland, but it was not so far removed in message and in purpose from the campaigns of George Whitefield in the eighteenth century.

Across the centuries religious revivals have played an important part in shaping the spiritual heritage of Scotland. These same revivals have also been described, memorialised, manipulated and reconstructed in writing. Literary creativity, which is by no means neutral, is therefore at the very heart of how ‘revival’ is imagined, transmitted and anticipated by successive generations.

Further reading

Meek, Donald E. (1993), ‘Revivals’, in N. M. de S. Cameron, David F. Wright, Daved C. Lachman and Donald E. Meek (eds), The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, pp. 711–18.
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