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# The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism

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to say, calls attention to itself as narrative construct and straddles the boundary between real and imaginary worlds. Performance and performativity are evident in Galt's construction of fictional narrators who manifest their subjection to history by echoing received idioms and expressing traditional ideologies. Yet his narrators also relate their stories in idiosyncratic ways, blending chronicles with subjective perceptions, using flashbacks, flashforwards and other distortions of temporality, and reflecting different views of providence, accident or progress. While all these features serve to characterise Galt as a product of early-nineteenth-century print and performance culture, they also give his fiction a distinctly modern and even postmodern inflection.

Throughout his career, Galt had a very basic reason to stay in close touch with the publishing milieu of London and Edinburgh: he wrote to make money. It was usually the only way he had of supporting his family given the failure of his multifarious ventures in business, trade and government lobbying. Galt's financial exigency tinctures his writing in many ways, sometimes even breaking into the fiction in the form of explicit authorial asides. Towards the end of the first volume of his 1820 novel *The Earthquake*, for instance, the narrative about sensational adventures in Sicily is suddenly interrupted by the narrator's comment that he needs to finish the book quickly because of his publisher's demand that it get onto the market in the right season, and because he stands in need of the agreed-upon payment.<sup>3</sup>

While such a disruption of verisimilitude (to the extent that verisimilitude exists in the implausible narrative of *The Earthquake*) might seem excessive, allusions to a reality beyond the covers of the novel feature in all of Galt's fictional works. His novels of Scottish life and history are interwoven with cross-references to each other's characters and incidents. This kind of cross-referencing is unsurprising, given that Galt thought of these novels as an interrelated series and would have preferred to publish them under the unified title 'Tales of the West', had his publisher William Blackwood not vetoed this marketing concept. Cross-references among works of the early 1820s such as *The Ayrshire Legatees*, *The Steam-Boat*, *Annals of the Parish* and *The Provost* tend to contribute to verisimilitude by delineating a self-contained fictional world of characters and locations in the west of Scotland. Yet the same texts also contain other kinds of cross-referencing that has exactly the opposite effect, disrupting verisimilitude by exposing the constructed nature of the fiction and thereby blurring the boundary between the fictional world Galt creates and the real world in which he lives and writes.

Even *The Entail*; or, *the Lairds of Grippity* (1823), Galt's most self-enclosed and tightly plotted three-volume novel, contains extra-textual allusions of this kind. A family saga set in Glasgow and the west of Scotland and extending from the mid-1700s to 1815, *The Entail* follows three generations

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# John Galt's Fictional and Performative Worlds

Angela Esterhammer

John Galt (1779–1839) was a familiar figure in literary and business circles in his day, circulating almost as widely in person as through his voluminous literary works. He travelled the Mediterranean at the same time as Byron in 1809–11, produced reams of travel writing, biography, geography, history and school texts in London during the following decade, and rose to prominence as a novelist during the early 1820s. He had a hand in numerous mercantile, legal and governmental ventures, culminating in a role as land agent in Upper Canada that also installed him as a significant figure in Canadian literary history. A best-selling and widely reviewed author, Galt was especially popular for his humorous chronicles of Scottish life, but his fiction also exhibits a remarkable range over historical periods from the medieval to the Napoleonic and geographical locales from the west of Scotland to London, the West Indies, North America, the Mediterranean and Asia Minor.

Galt's posthumous reputation and reception, by contrast, have been ironically restrained. Recently, works such as *The Entail*, Ringan Gilhaize and Bogle Corbet have begun to receive serious consideration in studies of the Scottish and the Romantic novel.<sup>1</sup> Yet Ruth Aldrich's observation, made in 1978, that 'Galt is one of the truly experimental novelists of the early nineteenth century'<sup>2</sup> still merits much more attention. The current critical climate seems propitious for highlighting Galt's innovations in fiction, given the wealth of new research on print culture and on various inflections of the concept of performance during the Romantic period. Galt's experimentation is heavily conditioned by both these contexts. He was thoroughly involved in the periodical-writing and book-making world of London and Edinburgh, and his experience of this print-culture milieu permeates his writing. The theatrical culture of the Romantic era also registers in Galt's fiction through frequent allusions to theatre as well as insights into what is now termed cultural performativity: identity-construction, disjunctions between intention and appearance and the formative effect of social discourses. The influence of print culture and performance gives Galt's fiction a texture through which his presence as author and storyteller can clearly be felt. His fiction, that is

of the Walkinshaw family through the economic machinations, marriage alliances and legal manoeuvring with which they seek to enrich themselves and tighten their hold on property. In addition to the usual cross-references that readers of Galt's earlier novels might recognise, *The Entail* contains allusions to books he has not yet written, as when Leddy Grippy refers to 'my cousin, Ringan Gilhaise'<sup>4</sup> – that is, to a character conceived by Galt as the protagonist of a future novel. *The Entail* also contains more tendentious allusions, at one point appropriating a character from Walter Scott's *Rob Roy* and briefly alluding to her future beyond the part that Scott wrote for her (*Entail*, pp. 45–6). At the end of *The Entail*, the narrator characteristically offers to produce a sequel 'as soon as ever we receive a proper hint to do so, with ten thousand pounds to account' (p. 363).

Other 'Tales of the West' include similar references to the circumstances of publishing and print culture; in *The Ayrshire Legatees*, for instance, the Pringle family sojourns in an Edinburgh hotel 'next door to one Mr Blackwood, a civil and discreet man in the bookselling line'.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes fictional characters propose to negotiate with real-world publishers to produce the book in which they themselves appear. This occurs in the introduction to *The Provost*, and more ostentatiously in *The Last of the Lairds*, where the Laird aspires to sell his memoirs to the publisher Blackwood for even more money than the (fictional) Reverend Balwhidder of Dalmailing got for *Annals of the Parish* or the Provost's widow for her husband's papers. Metafictional allusion of this kind is common in the world of Scottish Romantic writing, on display above all in the hoaxes and the quasi-real, quasi-fictionalised personae that appear in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, to which Galt was a regular contributor. But Galt's use of metafictional play predates his involvement with *Blackwood's* and often goes further. Ironically, when Galt's novels were published in book form, real-world references and in-jokes that appear in his manuscripts and in the original serialised publications were sometimes removed by Blackwood and other editors in an attempt to 'turn the book into a self-contained novel as opposed to a work which constantly crossed and re-crossed different levels of reality'.<sup>6</sup> While it is endemic to Galt's print-culture milieu, the blurring of boundaries between the imaginary world inside the book and the outside world of writing, publishing and marketing also resonates interestingly with postmodern techniques.

*The Last of the Lairds* (1826) extends these allusions to literal book-making into a more elaborate experiment with narrative perspective. The novel's subtitle, *The Life and Opinions of Malachi Mailings Esq. of Auldbiggings* – echoing Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* – sets up an expectation that the narrator will be the 'Last of the Lairds' himself, Malachi Mailings. While this was Galt's original plan, he later revised it to include himself, or at least a self-representation in the form of an unnamed

writer, as the first-person narrator. Astounded to find the Laird engaged in writing his autobiography in half a dozen school copy-books, the narrator questions him about his motives and undertakes to correct his methodology. As becomes clear from the sample chapter of the Laird's manuscript that the meddling narrator secretly copies out for his readers, the Laird is a hopeless speller and historiographer, although his lack of aptitude by no means deters him from his project. Near the end of the novel he even determines to adapt to the contemporary book market by publishing his memoirs in serialised form in an Edinburgh journal: 'I'll publish my book in numbers and mak [sic] a monthly income by that'.<sup>7</sup> Aided by the presence of a self-conscious writer-narrator within the novel, *The Last of the Lairds* thus foregrounds the process by which Malachi Mailings' 'life and opinions' emerge from a discussion about strategies of writing and publishing.

If metafictionality is one aspect of Galt's achievement that deserves greater recognition, another is the performativity that pervades his fiction. The performative dimension of Galt's writing takes a variety of forms, including actual references to the theatrical culture of his day, the depiction of characters who construct their own social, economic and class identities (or even assume a new identity through fraud) and the author's 'performances' of fictional narrators with distinctive idiolects, preoccupations and ways of telling their stories. Most of the critical discussion about Galt has, with good reason, focused on his representations of local, national, international, social, religious and economic history, but his fictional historiography is inseparable from his experiments with performance and identity-construction.

Persistent allusions to dramatic performance throughout Galt's fiction testify to his lifelong involvement with the world of theatre. Although he never achieved success as a playwright, he continued writing dramas throughout his career; he also wrote theatrical reviews and dramatic criticism, edited a series of his own and other writers' plays (*The New British Theatre*, 1814–15) and published a volume of brief biographies of actors and actresses (*The Lives of the Players*, 1831). In his novel *The Earthquake*, the protagonist Castagnello, illegitimate son of a Neapolitan actress, gains an entrée to the theatre worlds of Paris and London by way of his sister, a celebrated opera singer. Castagnello's theatrical heritage manifests itself in an adventurous lifestyle that involves playing many roles in widely varying social contexts throughout Europe and Asia Minor; it culminates in his fraudulent impersonation of a Sicilian nobleman, in which guise he successfully deceives even the nobleman's relatives and servants for many years. The small towns of Galt's Scottish novels, such as *Annals of the Parish* and *The Provost*, are inevitably visited by travelling players; in *The Member*, the narrator-protagonist Archibald Jobbry wins an election by hiring an acting troupe to distract the townspeople from his popular rival. Even brief references to the theatre

generate reflections on the performative quality of individuals and institutions. At the end of *The Entail*, the formidable Leddy Grippy, in her late seventies, decides to follow up the unexpected success she has had in personal lawsuits by undertaking a more formal study of the law. She asks her grandson James to take her to the Parliament House in Glasgow so she can observe legal proceedings, but 'by some mistake' he leads her 'to that sink of sin the Theatre' instead, where they witness a performance of *Othello* (*Entail*, p. 354). The legal profession whose machinations have been on display throughout the novel is thus superimposed for a moment onto Shakespearean drama, as if to reveal the interchangeability of the law-court and the theatre – two institutions of which Galt had extensive personal experience.

The *Autobiography* and *Literary Life* that Galt published during the 1830s also testify to his awareness of living in an age of ostentation and public spectacle. When he reminisces about the coronation of George IV in 1820, for instance, he calls it 'the show' and uses the terms 'performance', 'spectacle', 'exhibition', 'pageantries', 'tricks of state' and even 'tomfoolery'.<sup>8</sup> In a cluster of fictional writings Galt imagines the responses of Scottish observers to these spectacles in order to stage a contrast between rural Scottish and urban English customs. The observers in *The Ayrshire Legatees; or, the Pringle Family* (1821) are the minister Dr Zachariah Pringle, his wife Janet, daughter Rachel and son Andrew, who travel to London to sort out the legalities surrounding a legacy. The events they witness include the funeral of George III in 1820 and the ensuing scandal and divorce trial of Queen Caroline at the time of George IV's accession, in addition to fashionable entertainments like 'Almack's balls, the Argyle-rooms, and the Philharmonic concerts' (*Ayrshire Legatees*, p. 240). The Pringle family's responses to these events are presented in a way that is itself (in Galt's words) 'undoubtedly dramatic' (*Literary Life* I: p. 227). Manifesting impressions, interpretations and modes of expression that correspond to their individual characters, each of the Pringles writes letters to friends back home in Ayrshire, where their accounts are shared around and discussed within the community. Galt followed up the success of *The Ayrshire Legatees* with two sequels in which Scottish characters again witness royal spectacles: the coronation of George IV in *The Steam-Boat* (1822) and the king's visit to Edinburgh in *The Gathering of the West* (1823). All three of these works were first serialised in *Blackwood's* and *The Steam-Boat* in particular engages in the metafictional play typical of the magazine: the characters who come together during the steam-boat voyage and in London include newly created fictional personalities, characters from existing Galt novels (the Pringles), real people (Walter Scott, Lord Castlereagh) and people who are both real and quasi-fictionalised due to their regular portrayal in *Blackwood's* (the 'Odontist' Dr James Scott).

Galt's attraction to performative modes and his skill in working with

them are also evident in the short novel *Andrew of Padua, the Improvisatore* (1820). Until recently, this text was not even recognised as Galt's because it advertises itself as an anonymous translation from an Italian author named 'Francisco Furbo' – and because Galt, seriously or not, maintained in his memoirs that he could not remember writing it, even when a friend insisted he had (*Literary Life* I: p. 349). However, the tale is unmistakably Galt's invention: the title character already appears in *The Earthquake* under the slightly altered name 'Andrea' and Galt later republished most of *Andrew of Padua* verbatim as a short story entitled 'The Improvisatore' and annexed to his historical novel *Rothelan* (1824). The invented Italian author and the fake documentary paratexts of *Andrew of Padua* show Galt deftly fusing performance and metafiction. The title character Andrew is an *improvisatore* who claims to have charmed theatre audiences from Palermo to London with his ability spontaneously to create and perform poetry. In fact, though, he has fabricated his entire 'autobiography' in order to take advantage of his listener Francisco Furbo, as the surprise ending reveals. The character Furbo (whose name means 'trickster'), the novel's first-person narrator and its purported author, is Galt's device for extending this hoax to a meta-level and putting one over on his own readers.<sup>9</sup>

The apparently ephemeral *Andrew of Padua* casts a revealing sidelight on the fiction Galt produced during the next decade. Many of his books are, as he called them, 'imaginary autobiographies'<sup>10</sup> featuring a first-person narrator-protagonist who relates his own experiences together with those of his family or community. The imaginary autobiography is a performance of self on the part of the narrator, but it can also be understood as the performance of a persona on the part of the author, and sometimes – superimposing these two levels – as a self-depiction of Galt the market-conscious, improvising author in the form of a shrewd and pragmatic narrator-protagonist. Making use of distinctive speech patterns, psychological obsessions and chronologies, Galt's experiments with the genre of fictional autobiography foreground the practice of storytelling, the construction of history and the performance of identity.

These performances are especially effective when the narrator-protagonist is a 'self-made man', a successful agent in the socio-economic marketplace who is also highly aware of the self-construction on which his success is based. A prime example is *The Provost* (1822), which begins with a typically metafictional frame. In a brief introduction, the author explains that he came into possession of the memoirs of Provost James Pawkie from Pawkie's widow after she heard that he had edited 'that most excellent work, entitled, "Annals of the Parish of Dalmailing"'.<sup>11</sup> Galt is thereby cast as an editor whose role is to give 'historical coherency' to the 'detached notes' left by the Provost (p. 2). The remainder of the book, narrated in Provost Pawkie's own voice, skips quickly over his economic rise from apprentice to prosperous

shopkeeper in order to concentrate on his strategies for success in the local government of Gudetown. The Provost combines pride, self-confidence and an aptitude for Machiavellian machinations with an explicit awareness of the importance of performance. He carefully gauges the effect of his words on listeners; he is always conscious of the appearance he makes, and often of the gap between appearance and inward intention. From the beginning, a key to achieving his goal of public office is his willingness to adapt to situations and appear to play the part that others expect: thus, he relates, 'I [. . .] assumed a coothy and obliging demeanour towards my customers and the community in general' (p. 4) and 'maintained an outward show of humility and moderation' (p. 6). Paradoxically – although typically for Galt – Provost Pawkie is a sincere performer, one who narrates with engaging frankness how he employed trickery, manipulation and pretence to achieve basically responsible goals in his community. A central theme of the Provost's memoir is progress, more specifically the general improvement in political morals that results in public officials becoming more disinterested and less corrupt over the course of his half-century in office. Thus, he can claim near the end of the book that 'my third provostry was undertaken in a spirit of sincerity, different, in some degree, from that of the two former' (p. 140). Nevertheless, the Provost employs his theatrical tactics until the moment of his retirement, an event that he stage-manages by manipulating a young fellow-councillor into making sure he is honoured with a farewell speech and gift, effectively casting, scripting and rehearsing with him what he must say in the council chamber to bring about this desired dénouement. Summing up the performative practices by which the Provost has advanced and maintained himself in public office, this final scene also shows him passing on his acting skills to a carefully chosen member of the next generation of politicians.

Galt's more extended portrayal of a self-made man and a sincere performer, written at the same time and published in the same year as *The Provost*, is the three-volume *Sir Andrew Wylie, of that Ilk* (1822). This novel depicts Andrew, the son of a Scottish peasant, achieving economic and social success in London and returning to his home town as a rich and titled baronet to marry his childhood sweetheart, the daughter of the local laird. Like Provost Pawkie and Francisco Furbo (whose last names mean 'wily' in Scots and Italian respectively) and like the eponymous protagonist of Galt's 1830 novel *Laurie Todd* (which is dialect for 'sly fox'), Andrew Wylie wears his dominant character trait in his name. Indeed, when he makes his fortune, acquires a title and buys the hereditary Wylie estate, he becomes 'Sir Andrew Wylie, Baronet, of that Ilk, or of the same'<sup>12</sup> – that is, 'Sir Wylie of Wylie', as if to indicate his compounded cleverness. Yet Andrew's most memorable trait is a combination of naïvety and wiliness, manifested in his ability to act the frank, natural, unaffected rural Scotsman in a manner that plays

extraordinarily well among London's *beau monde*. At his first introduction to London society, the joke is on the newly arrived Andrew: he is invited to a masked ball at the Earl of Sandyford's mansion but deliberately given the impression that he is being taken to the theatre. Completely unacquainted with London manners, Andrew believes that the aristocratic party-goers are hired entertainers while they all derive amusement from his unwitting performance in 'the part of a Scottish lad' (I: p. 116). Andrew, however, quickly turns the tables by learning from this incident that he can ingratiate himself with high society by, in effect, playing himself as a simple Scotsman. Meanwhile, he shrewdly observes the manners and language of others so that he can imitate these when appropriate. Throughout the novel's varied scenes of action – from upper-class dinners to the offices of London newspapers, a gypsy encampment and a morning walk with King George III at Windsor – Andrew excels in adapting to circumstances and mediating between different classes and worlds. Alternately fulfilling and manipulating others' expectations, he progresses to extremely elaborate stage-managing projects including a sensational murder trial and an election that brings him into Parliament.

Andrew makes his way in the world without the advantages of looks, birth or fortune and without any real skill at his supposed profession, the law. Throughout the novel, it remains ambiguous whether people react so positively to him because of his personal qualities – as the Earl of Sandyford implies by calling him 'a singular being' (II: p. 37) and 'a human being' (I: p. 146) – or for exactly the opposite reason, because he reassuringly fulfils a national stereotype. The novel's final sentence sums up the source of his success as a combination of character and circumstances ('prudence and good fortune united', III: p. 310), but other descriptions of Andrew suggest a more explicit discrepancy between his actual cleverness and the appearance of naïvety: he is a 'sly simpleton' (I: p. 285) who manifests 'supposed rustic simplicity' (I: p. 287), yet maintains 'a degree of system in the simplicity of his manners' (III: p. 99). More than any other of Galt's characters, Andrew Wylie wilyly performs candour and profits from an economy that values both stereotype and reputation.

In several other novels the primary performer is Galt himself, as he takes on the role of a fictional narrator whose perspective is determined by his subjection to historical, religious and economic discourses. Galt's first successful experiment in this genre of imaginary autobiography is *Annals of the Parish* (1821). The historical orientation signalled in the title 'Annals' is borne out by the subdivision of the book into fifty short chapters, each one corresponding to a year of the Reverend Micah Balwhidder's tenancy as pastor of the rural parish of Dalmailing from 1760 to 1810 – a term that, as Balwhidder points out, corresponds exactly to the reign of George III. The narrative's high degree of verisimilitude, achieved through accuracy as to local detail

and dialect, credibility of characterisation and the authentic representation of the repercussions of historical events, led many readers to accept it as the actual chronicle of a retired minister – and encouraged Galt to perpetuate the fiction of the chronicle's truth through intertextual references to the world of Dalmailing in several later novels. Yet *Annals* represents his extended performance of a fictional narrator, in this case a conservative but pragmatic elderly pastor who observes and interprets the history of his parish.

Balwhidder's retrospective narrative and his maturing psyche both work against the strict linear chronology suggested by the 'Annals' structure. The narrative begins proleptically with an introduction in which Balwhidder quotes his farewell sermon of 1810, before jumping back to begin his history with the year 1760. In the process of introducing characters for the first time, he often flashes forward to anticipate their death or their present state. When he brings his first wife home, they are accompanied by 'her little brother Andrew, that died in the East Indies';<sup>13</sup> at the birth of his daughter Janet, he thinks of her 'now in the married state [as she] makes a most excellent wife' (p. 54); when the first Mrs Balwhidder dies, he anticipates the shifting of her headstone at the time the second Mrs Balwhidder is buried in the same grave, and then stops himself: 'But I must not here enter upon an anticipation' (p. 24). Local temporal disruptions of this kind create a tension between the chronological order of history and the achronological patterns that emerge when memory records events in terms of their causes, consequences and affective associations. Later in the *Annals*, Balwhidder becomes increasingly aware of the achronological perspective he developed even at the time events were occurring. He refers increasingly to his 'prophetic powers', which is to say his mature ability to reflect on his observations of parish life and extrapolate from the local to the global level. This partly recollective, partly proleptic narrative serves to express Balwhidder's faith in divine providence as well as Galt's more secular interest in Scottish Enlightenment concepts of the progress of civilisation or 'theoretical history'.<sup>14</sup>

Galt's more strictly historical novels, those that portray epochs and episodes in Scottish history, also experiment with different narrative perspectives and chronologies. These three-volume novels include *The Spaewife* (1823; about the early-fifteenth-century assassination of James I of Scotland), *Rothelan* (1824; set in the fourteenth century under Edward III) and *Southernan* (1830; depicting the first four years of the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots), but the best known of them is *Ringan Gilhaize; or, The Covenanters* (1823). *Ringan Gilhaize* achieves its powerful and disturbing effect from the I-narrator Ringan, who relates how three generations of his family – his grandfather Michael, father Sawners and he himself – fought for the Presbyterian cause during the religious wars in Scotland from 1558 to 1696. Ringan's heavily biblical, sectarian idiom betrays his partisan rendering of historical events:

becoming increasingly fanatical and intolerant as he tells his story, he borders on being an unreliable narrator. Yet he is also a credible product of the familial, national and religious history he experiences and recounts. Thus, while Ringan Gilhaize is a (tragically) sincere narrator, on Galt's part this historical novel represents the performance of a psyche formed by indoctrination on the part of his forefathers, his religious faction and his historical moment. Even when deliberately imitating a genre – the historical novel in the style of Scott – because it had proven so successful in the literary marketplace, Galt did so in an innovative manner. 'Excellence is his [Sir Walter Scott's] characteristic', Galt commented when comparing one of his own historical novels to Scott's, 'and, if I may say so, originality is mine, and the approbation of time is required to the just appreciation of that quality' (*Literary Life*, I: p. 262).

Like Ringan Gilhaize, the narrator-protagonist of *Bogle Corbet, or The Emigrants* (1831) is the product of performative discourses, particularly economic and colonial ones.<sup>15</sup> The character of Bogle Corbet reflects a good deal of Galt's own background, from his father's role in trade with the West Indies to his own recent experience as (failed) land agent in Canada. Once again, the novel's framing devices blur the boundary between truth and fiction: an epigraph from Thomas Gray's *The Bard* on the title page of each of *Bogle Corbet's* three volumes reads 'Truth severe by fairy fiction dressed', and after its notably inconclusive ending the narrative segues into an appendix consisting of a statistical account of the physical geography of the Upper Canadian townships. This elision of the novel with a scientific gazette is evidence of Galt's intention to include actual 'truth severe' about settlement in Canada for the information of prospective emigrants. The truth/fiction boundary gets pushed in the other direction as well: within the novel, Corbet's decision to emigrate to Canada is influenced by the advice of Mr Lawrie Todd, 'a shrewd Scotchman, recently from America'.<sup>16</sup> 'He has since published some account of himself, and of his adventures and experience as a settler in the woods of the Genesee Country' Corbet adds (II: p. 181) – that is to say, Galt's novel *Lawrie Todd, or The Settlers in the Woods*, which appeared the year before with the same publisher.

Corbet's narrative about his apprenticeship and unsuccessful business ventures in Glasgow, his trip to the land of his birth, Jamaica, and his return to Scotland and subsequent emigration to Canada generally lacks plot and direction; instead, it is loaded with coincidences and with what the narrator himself calls 'accidents'. These include actual physical mishaps, such as an overturned carriage that leaves Corbet with a cut on the forehead. 'This accident coloured the tissue of my subsequent life', he reports (I: p. 257), because he is taken into the nearby house of a Mr Ascomy and meets his daughter Urseline, who will later become the second Mrs Corbet. While 'accidental

narrative' as (in Ian Duncan's terms) 'the narrative mode of common life: the empirical, material domain of here and how'<sup>17</sup> is the typical form of agency in many of Galt's novels, Bogle Corbet as narrator shows a particular fascination with the term 'accident'. His perspective merits contrast with the Reverend Balwhidder's providential view of accidents in *Annals of the Parish*, where seemingly trivial or chance events unfold far-reaching consequences in the fullness of time – a view represented rather unconvincingly in *Bogle Corbet* by the long-winded Mr Moth who opines, 'accident is one of the main weapons with which Providence, or Destiny, achieves its greatest results' (II: p. 93). Corbet, however, fails to achieve anything like Balwhidder's 'prophetic' sensitivity to progressive connections between events and outcomes. Despite his awareness of the double perspective involved in writing a retrospective narrative ('When we describe in retrospect our first impressions, we are little aware how much they have been insensibly modified by intervening circumstances', III: p. 5) and his strong interest in omens, the events of Corbet's life continue to be so many accidents that never coalesce into meaningful patterns. His vocabulary and the lack of pattern in his retrospective narrative reflect his sense of subjection to history, a perspective quite different from those of Galt's other narrators who thrive by adapting to circumstances and pursuing a vision of personal and societal progress. Corbet, instead, sees himself as 'a man fighting with adversity, and tracing, in all the movements of a variegated life, how truly he has ever been but a cog on one of the great wheels of the social system, directed by no effort of his own' (II: p. 69). Rather than learning from the past, he is haunted and even tortured by it, lamenting that his memories are 'like those gnawing insects and reptiles which are said to fasten themselves in the flesh and will not be shaken away' (II: p. 189).

*Bogle Corbet* comes to a sudden metafictional end in a scene where the characters begin to feel that they are, or might as well be, in a novel. After a number of highly coincidental meetings take place in their new Canadian settlement, Mrs Corbet comments that a romance might be written about their adventures: 'I do think we shall soon have matter for a novel in three volumes of our own [. . .] Who ever thought that I would be a heroine, and live in a midnight turret in America?' (III: p. 282). Her remark is addressed to the mysterious Scottish visitor Mr Jocelyn (himself a character out of the world of romance), who thereupon reveals that he is engaged in 'writing his life' (III: p. 283) – as, of course, is Bogle Corbet. Mrs Corbet's opinion about the relative merit of the two books is ironically self-reflexive in the context of Galt's fiction. Jocelyn's book, she exclaims, 'will be worth seeing', but her husband's 'is whey and water: he never met with a right novel-like adventure in all his days – what he has read to me of it, is as common as an old newspaper' (III: pp. 283–4). Throughout his career, Galt was uncomfortable about applying the term 'novel' to his own fiction, being conscious of

his shortcomings as to plot, resistant to the three-volume format demanded by the literary marketplace and inclined to experiment with mixed genres including the chronicle form suggested by Mrs Corbet's reference to 'an old newspaper'. Mrs Corbet's acerbic comment on her husband's writing brings his memoirs (and hence the novel *Bogle Corbet*) to an abrupt end, as she commands him to 'Finish your book, Bogle, outright' (III: p. 296) so that Jocelyn can carry the manuscript back to England for publication.

Ruth Aldrich has summed up Galt's typical (male) protagonists as 'worldly minded, shrewd, adaptable, [and] confident of turning circumstances to their advantage'.<sup>18</sup> This chapter has suggested that Galt's imaginary autobiographies display such characters both in their successful incarnation (Andrew of Padua, Sir Andrew Wylie, Provost Pawkie, Reverend Balwhidder) and in the more tragic form of subjects at the mercy of circumstances (Ringan Gilhaize, Bogle Corbet). In dramatising their varied experiences and versions of history, Galt creates hybrids of real and imaginary characters, settings and events, experimenting throughout his career with different forms of factual fiction. Often his narratives derive their factual dimension from his own experience amidst the literary marketplace of his day, which required him to be as shrewd and adaptable as his protagonists in order to make a living as a writer. Public spectacle and innovative forms of entertainment featured prominently in early-nineteenth-century urban culture, and the literary milieu of London and Edinburgh generated experiments with the kind of boundary-crossing between fictional and real-world characters at which the Blackwood's group excelled. Galt's adaptation to his contemporary literary field, therefore, also renders him well versed in themes and techniques that would come to the fore in a later age: the performativity of everyday social life, the construction of character by social discourses and the blurring of real and imaginary worlds. These preoccupations of twenty-first-century fiction and criticism should bring about a new appreciation of Galt's originality in chronicling material and theoretical history.