

The Literature of Scotland

The Middle Ages to the
Nineteenth Century

SECOND EDITION

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ments for the best, but old customs and loyalties could not be uprooted without pain. The evictions carried out by her agents, and the particular cruelty of Patrick Sellar in the small glen of Strathnaver, made the Sutherland 'Clearances' and Sellar's name notorious. Many Gaelic poems were written about the pains of eviction, and the small crofters conceived a hatred of sheep and the English language alike:

Not sweet the sound that waked me from slumber,
coming down to me from the mountain tops:
the Lowland shepherd whose tongue displeases,
Shouting there at his lazy dog.

(Iain MacLachlainn, 'Och, och mar tha mi' / 'Alas my State'
trs. D. Thomson)

The use of Gaelic in Highland schools was officially permitted, but in practice the Education Act of 1872 set up a system of national control and inspection that inevitably favoured English. For the most part the Highlanders offered only passive resistance to changes forced upon them; but there were outbursts from time to time between evicted crofters and the police, the militia and even the army. Women often joined in these skirmishes, and their leading part in the famous 'Battle of Braes' in Skye in 1882 gained the support of public opinion and helped to bring about the Crofters' Act, which finally offered secure tenure and controlled rents. Not the least effective in this campaign were the songs and poems of Mary Macpherson of Skye, who spoke out fearlessly on behalf of the old culture and land reform.

For the first half of the century, however, the poorer parts of the north-west Highlands had no protection from the demands of capital and the burgeoning of market forces elsewhere. When wool prices declined, or when the demand for kelp¹ collapsed in the face of cheaper imports, workers lost their livelihood, many old families went bankrupt and landownership fell into new, perhaps less caring, hands. The pattern of clan obligations had not survived the aftermath of the 1745 rising, and many chieftains now regarded themselves as landowners in the capitalist mould, spending their time and their money elsewhere. When the potato crop failed in 1846 there was no government relief for famine in the north, and thousands of impoverished Highlanders

¹ Kelp seaweed was collected on the shore and burned to produce potash and soda, used to make glass and soap. Cheaper chemical imports from Germany eventually put an end to the home business, but it did well during the wars with France when trade was difficult. Gathering kelp on the tide line was hard, cold, raw work.

6 The nineteenth century: history, industry, sentiment

IN Scottish cultural history the writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century contribute to a remarkable period of change and creative activity. Walter Scott made Scotland and its past famous throughout Europe, periodical literature flourished in the capital, and there was a massive expansion of cities and industry. The population of Edinburgh doubled, with a powerful middle class to confirm its supremacy in law, medicine, the Church, banking, brewing and publishing. Farming and fishing were equally well established, on the east coast, along with heavier industries in coal, textiles, paper and especially the manufacture of linen. Great streets and houses in London were built with Aberdeen granite, and the finest American clippers were matched by sailing-ships from yards in the north-east.

The north's most significant export was people, and the economic and cultural life of the area was dominated by emigration to Canada and America. Estate owners and clan chiefs had been enclosing the land from the 1770s, and the ancient runrig style of strip cultivation, with its emphasis on subsistence farming shared by the community, had finally begun to disappear. Sheep-farming made a profitable appearance in the south-west, where there was plenty of grazing and urban markets close to hand, but in the Highlands, where the poorer land could no longer support an expanding population, the arrival of sheep only added to their problems. Landowners in search of grazing encouraged tenants to leave their crofts by offering them new jobs or assisted passage and emigration. In the second decade of the century the vast Sutherland estate set about 'improvement' in this manner, planning to resettle families on the coast, where the herring industry was enjoying a boom. (Neil Gunn's novel *The Silver Darlings* is set in this period.) The Countess of Sutherland intended these develop-

went abroad or came in search of work, like their Irish fellows, to the Lowland cities of Scotland. Little wonder that many Gaelic verses of the period, composed in Glasgow or in the settlements of Nova Scotia, are steeped in nostalgia for the communities, customs and girls left behind in the 'homeland'. Yet it is difficult to imagine how even the most enlightened of policies could have solved all the problems of the Highlands, in the face of their limited resources and a growing population.

If the brash and confident heart of the industrial nineteenth century belongs to any one area of Scotland, it belongs to Paisley, Greenock, Glasgow and the south-west. The groundwork was done by many small merchants who had invested in the weaving of cotton imported from the Americas. Their business had begun as a scattered rural industry with hand-loom for linen and cotton; next it developed with water-powered mills as in New Lanark near the Falls of Clyde, a model village developed by Robert Owen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Owen had a far-sighted vision of the industrial community, setting up a nursery, a school, a concert hall and a church along with the workshops, dwelling places and of course the cotton mills, all in one beautiful location. Many of the workers came from the Highlands, and at its height the village contained about 2500 people. Such sites were rare, however, as was Owen's philanthropy and, with the development of steam power, factories with large work forces were concentrated nearer the cities. This led to an increased demand for coal, more industrialisation and higher wages for the miners, who had only recently been emancipated from virtual slavery on the estates of mine-owners.

Iron foundries began to produce more and more steam engines to pump the mines and power the mills. Chemical works developed new techniques in bleaching and dyeing for the textile trade, and the production of coal-tar and gas brought advanced lighting to many factories and towns. The Industrial Revolution saw Glasgow's population increasing faster than that of any other town in Britain. Thousands of labourers arrived from Ireland and the Highlands, and under such pressure the old fabric of the city could not cope. By the 1850s half the children born in Glasgow died before the age of five, and there were outbreaks of cholera until the new Loch Katrine water supply was brought into service ten years later. The Scottish Act of the great Reform Bill of 1832 was welcomed by everyone, but gradually it became apparent to the new labourers that their lot had hardly improved at all. The Chartist movement's demand for universal male suffrage found ready support in industrial Scotland, and its struggles in

the 1840s confirmed a radical sensibility in the south-west and a sense of solidarity among the working class. But early attempts to gain better wages when times were hard had failed. In later years unions such as the Coal Miners' Association did better for their members, but it was 1867 before most workers got the vote and the Factory Act afforded some protection and a limit to the hours worked by women and children.

After the expansion of the railways in order to transport coal and then manufactured goods and passengers, the second half of the century saw an astonishing growth in heavy industry. Blast furnaces, fuelled by cheap coal and ore, supplied the raw material for engineering and shipbuilding. For twenty years after 1850 nearly three-quarters of all the iron vessels launched in Britain came from Clydeside, and the developing British Empire ensured that these ships, locomotives, boilers, pumps, marine engines, and the engineers themselves, went into service all around the world. 'Clyde-built' became synonymous with advanced technology and durability. Glasgow was called the 'second city of the Empire'; middle-class ironmasters and shipbuilding families made their fortunes and beautiful new terraces and parks were created in the city. But a shortage of housing for the proletariat meant that social problems got worse and worse. In 1880 a quarter of the city's families lived in one-room apartments, and many took lodgers as well. New tenements in the Scottish style were erected, and life in these crowded buildings had a special sense of community. But they were also subject to overcrowding and decay, until by the end of the century the slums of Glasgow were among the worst in Europe, breeding-grounds of violence, drunkenness and vice. Yet the booming city bred a native resilience in its people, and if the influx of families from Ireland led to religious prejudices between Protestants and Catholics, it also contributed a unique humour and vitality to the working population, not to mention a healthy scepticism about the British establishment.

As far as the Kirk was concerned, the old Presbyterian principles were once again in arms against centralised government control and patronage by landowners, while fundamentalist Evangelical preachers were coming to the fore, especially in the crowded cities, where there was a fear of Catholic emancipation. Ten years of wrangling between the state and various Church factions came to a head at the General Assembly of 1843, when nearly 40 per cent of the establishment broke away from the 'Auld Kirk' on a matter of principle and formed the Free Church, claiming to represent the true values of Presbyterianism. The 'Disruption' caused considerable hardship to the rebel congregations

and their ministers, for in the early days they were harried by their landlords and forced to worship on the open hillside. They survived, however, to form a General Assembly and a parallel organisation of their own, even down to schools and overseas missions. The Free Kirk was particularly successful in the Highlands, much to the dismay of the landowners, and its radical tendency immediately made itself felt in votes for the Liberal Party that unseated many established Tory members. In other respects, however, the Protestant ethic was entirely in tune with the pursuit of profit and the age's materialistic belief that every man should make his way by dint of personal initiative, 'respectability' and hard work. Thousands of Scots took this course by leaving home, and skilled, unskilled, Highland and Lowland alike, they spread throughout the British Empire to become a byword – both loved and hated for their ambition, hardiness and ingenuity.

By the 1880s Scotland was indisputably part of British Victorian industrial society, yet the Scots' own sense of their cultural differences from England had not died out. Thus, when the country's prosperity was most fully centred on heavy industry in the urban areas, there grew up a vogue for 'cabbage-patch' literature – backward-looking and sentimentally rustic tales extolling simple 'Scotch' folk, pawky humour and 'honest' feeling. When Queen Victoria built Balmoral in 1855, it confirmed an English vogue for tourism, tartan and turrets in the north, and 'Scottish baronial' architecture in the same style appeared throughout the country in a rash of railway stations and hotels. A monument to Wallace towered over the plain at Stirling; the new railway station at Edinburgh was called 'Waverley', and the Scott monument commanded Princes Street like a mislocated cathedral spire. Burns had his monument in Auld Reekie too, and Burns Associations were formed throughout the world to promulgate his works and to consume a ritual supper each year on the anniversary of his birth. The typical 'canny Scotsman' began to appear in the press with a famous Punch cartoon in 1860 along the lines of: 'I hadna been in London mair than half-an-hour, when bang! went saxpence!' This northern counterpart to John Bull – staid, bewhiskered and famously cautious with his money – has more in common with his petit bourgeois Victorian inventors than he has with an older, prouder and more volatile Scottish spirit.

Not all was tartan ribbons and bardolatry, however, and national feeling took a political dimension too, for the Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights was formed in 1853, and, of course, the Disruption of the Kirk had already served to remind folk of old Scottish

values. When those crofters on Skye resisted eviction by physical force, they were aware that similar action had made nationalism a potent political issue in Ireland, and so the Highland Land League was formed along Irish lines to press for reform. In the face of the 'Irish question' to the west and the so-called 'Crofters' War' to the north, the Liberal government was pleased to make concessions by passing the Crofters' Act. When the government fell after the failure of the Irish Home Rule Bill in 1886, Liberal and nationalist opinion in Scotland was further stimulated and an all-party Home Rule Association was formed to promote political independence. Their case did not have the urgency or the violence of the Irish movement, but it contained a separatist and a nationalist feeling which has played a part in Scottish politics ever since.

Although the century began in Scotland with Walter Scott's verse romances, there was no poet to match the achievement of Burns, nor was there any Scottish equivalent to the English Romantic poets, unless, of course, George Gordon, the sixth Lord Byron (1788–1824) is seen as a Scottish writer. This claim is not as eccentric as it may seem, for Byron's early childhood was spent in Scotland – he attended Aberdeen Grammar School and his mother was Elizabeth Gordon of Gight, an unstable member of an unstable family from Donside. He himself claimed to be 'half a Scot by birth and bred / A whole one' (*Don Juan*), and T. S. Eliot believed there was a particularly Calvinist element in his delight in posing as a damned creature. Gregory Smith identified Byron's mercurial temperament with the 'clean contrair' spirit of the Scottish sensibility, and it must be admitted that the poet's swift transitions from pathos to mockery, or from moral satire to self-deflating parody, scarcely correspond to an English conception of literary decorum. Not that his origins helped him when the pontifical *Edinburgh Review* reported on his collection of poems *Hours of Idleness* in 1808, to note a flatness in his verses 'as if they were so much stagnant water'. Within a year Byron had retaliated with his lengthy satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* in which he lambasted the editor Francis Jeffrey, his magazine and almost every other author in Britain – including Walter Scott whom he accuses of foisting his 'stale romance' on public taste. Byron's complex relationship with Scotland can be developed at greater length, but for present purposes his career must be left to the realm of English letters, where he came to prominence with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812 to join Walter Scott, no less, as one of the most famous writers in Europe.

Notwithstanding Byron's fame and Scott's early success in verse, the medium of the age in Scotland was undoubtedly prose, and the spread

of literacy, of circulating libraries and the book-buying habit created an enormous appetite for books and periodicals of all sorts. Writers came to depend on the periodical scene to make their living, and, of course, many novels appeared there in serial form. Edinburgh became a most influential publishing centre, largely due to Archibald Constable and William Blackwood, whose presses, along with the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, made them household names throughout the kingdom. The phenomenal popularity of Scott's fiction was intimately bound up with Constable's firm and it exactly matches the expansion of what was coming to be known as 'the reading public' – a new critical conception and a new market.

Scott, Hogg, Galt, Ferrier, Lockhart and Moir were all writing at the same time, and this talented 'Blackwood's' group played a large part in the growing status of prose fiction throughout urban Britain. Yet their work is curiously divided, not least because they rarely deal with city life. Susan Ferrier brings English and Scottish society together, and town and country, too, for the purposes of mutual satirical comparison. Scott and Hogg look to an earlier and still potent Romantic or Gothic tradition; while Galt and Moir, with their sharp novels of small town or rural society, foreshadow the petit bourgeois provincialism of late-Victorian Scottish culture. In fact the essence of this latter vision had first appeared as early as 1806 in the work of the painter David Wilkie (1785–1841). In that year Wilkie, a son of the manse from Fifeshire, made his reputation at the Royal Academy in London with a picture called 'Village Politicians'. He produced genre paintings in similar vein for the next two decades – all distinguished by a novelistic desire to imply a story and to portray humour, pathos and sturdy 'Scottish' character-types, rather in the manner of 'The Cottar's Saturday Night' or Wordsworth's poems about Cumbrian folk. When Galt and Moir wrote for *Blackwood's* they confirmed a whole country's view of its own nature in terms that were not essentially different from Wilkie's genre painting. This is not to undervalue Galt's keen documentary eye and his sense of comedy, character and irony, but in the hands of lesser men and women the inheritance became 'provincial' in the worst sense of the word, leading to the 'Kailyard' at the end of the century, with its vision of Scotland as a charming rustic backwater.

Unaware of these future developments, Scott's contemporaries felt themselves to belong to the 'second generation' of the Scottish Enlightenment. That hater of the Gael, John Pinkerton (1758–1826), had tried to repair the public neglect of poets such as Barbour and Dunbar with his collection of *Ancient Scottish Poetry* (1786), and the

Revd Dr John Jamieson (1759–1838) produced his *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808, 1825) a work that remained a substantial scholarly reference until modern times. As antiquarians, Sibbald, Irving and Laing wrote biographies and literary histories, and Scott founded the Bannatyne Club in 1823 to publish rare historical texts. In the field of moral philosophy, Duguld Stewart (1753–1828) succeeded Adam Ferguson as professor at Edinburgh, and, while Stewart was not an original thinker, being content to follow Thomas Reid's 'common sense' school, his personality, eloquence and liberal views influenced a whole generation. Most prominent among his peers were Henry Thomas Cockburn (1779–1854), and his friend Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850), two middle-class lawyers who played a part in establishing the Reform Bill and went on to become Whig law lords. Cockburn's *Life of Jeffrey* (1852) and his own various memoirs, published posthumously, give an attractive account of his life and times. Francis Jeffrey started the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802 with the support of Henry Brougham and the English clergyman and wit Sydney Smith – former pupils of Duguld Stewart – and the new quarterly immediately made a name for itself. Within ten years the *Review* had a circulation of over 13,000 and its publisher Constable could attract the best writers in the country with astonishing fees of up to 20 guineas a sheet for anonymous reviews and £1000 or more for a single poem or article. Cockburn wrote on matters of law, and during the 1820s and 1830s Macaulay and Carlyle contributed regularly with some of their most famous essays.

The Edinburgh Review was never more successful than during its early years. Jeffrey was sympathetic to the literature of feeling, but it had to be supported by formal style and moral content, so that Burns, for example, was criticised for espousing 'vehement sensibility' without 'decency and regularity'. In this sense Jeffrey's values are neoclassical and it is not surprising that he began a famous review of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* on a typically proscriptive note – 'This will never do.' The *Review* was celebrated for the scathing and superior tone of its criticism, and, while it allowed Wordsworth and the English 'Lake School' to have 'a great deal of genius and of laudable feeling', it did not hesitate to chastise the poets for 'perverseness and bad taste'. Scott's *Marmion* was pruned with equal rigour, as if the task were an irksome duty – 'because we cannot help considering it as the foundation of a new school, which may hereafter occasion no little annoyance both to us and to the public'. Little wonder that Byron satirised Jeffrey and his 'critic clan' by referring to them as the 'bloodhounds of Arthur's Seat'!

It was not long before Scottish Tories lost patience with the dominance of the *Review* and its Whiggish politics. Walter Scott helped to found the (London) *Quarterly Review* in 1809, but Jeffrey's periodical did not meet its match until 1817, when William Blackwood, Constable's rival in publishing, produced the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, which was soon changed to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The revised 'Maga' or 'Ebony', as it came to be known, was edited by John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson, two young lawyers determined to make their mark on the cultural scene. This they did without delay, helped by James Hogg, in a mock biblical 'Translation from an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript', which satirised the 'war' between Constable and Blackwood and provided malicious caricatures of their Whig enemies and literary rivals. There was an immediate scandal, the October issue sold out, new readers were left panting for more, and the (anonymous) authors found it expedient to leave town. Over the next two years the publisher had to pay out £1000 in damages, but he stood by his 'wild fellows' and *Blackwood's* flourished, to be published without a break until 1880. Under Wilson and Lockhart, and an Irishman William Maginn, 'Maga' continued to make a stir, particularly in its wholehearted opposition to the poetry of Leigh Hunt, Shelley and Keats, motivated, perhaps, by the fact that Francis Jeffrey had greatly praised Keats in the *Edinburgh Review*. Whatever the reason, *Blackwood's* roasted 'the Cockneys' with a vituperative glee virtually indistinguishable from snobbish and personal spite. Of course, Keats's fiery mind was not 'snuffed out' by any such 'article', as Byron has it in *Don Juan*, nor was he the only writer to suffer from the critical hostilities declared between Constable and Blackwood. Wilson and Lockhart were not above petty lies and libels and political prejudices and old scores were settled forcefully on all sides. Nevertheless, *Blackwood's* supported many fine writers and serious articles, showing a particular interest in Gothic fiction with a famous series of 'Tales of Terror'. (Walter Scott's review of *Frankenstein*, for example, was very favourable - except he thought it was really written by Percy rather than Mary Shelley.)

John Wilson (1785-1854) continued as contributing editor to *Blackwood's*, and as 'Christopher North' he produced many of the 'Noctes Ambrosianae' (1822-35), a long-running series of essays in the form of conversations or monologues supposedly overheard by the scribe. (They were published in four volumes in 1885.) These often featured a version of his friend James Hogg somewhat broadly sketched as the 'Shepherd', a bibulous and loquacious countryman,

spokesperson for common sense, but given to tall tales or sudden flights of philosophising:

Tickler: James, would you seriously have North to write dramas about the loves of the lower orders - men in corduroy breeches, and women in linsiey-woollen petticoats -
Shepherd: Wha are ye, sir, to speak o' the lower orders? Look up to the sky, sir, on a stary nicht, and, puir, ignorant, thochtless, upsettin' cretur you'll be, gin you dinna feel far within, and deep down your ain sowl, that you are, in good truth, ane o' the lower orders - no, perhaps, o' men, but o' intelligences! and that it requires some dreadfu' mystery, far beyond your comprehension, to mak' you worthy o' ever in after life becoming a dweller in those celestial mansions. Yet think ye, sir, that thousand's, and tens o' thousand's o' millions, since the time when first God's wrath smote the earth's soil with the curse o' barrenness, and human creatures had to earn their bread wi' sweat and dust, haena lived and toiled, and laughed and sighed, and groaned and grat, o' the lower orders, that are noo in eternal bliss, and shall sit above you and Mr. North, and ither o' the best o' the clan, in the realms o' heaven!

Tickler: 'Pon my soul, James, I said nothing to justify this tirade.

The 'Noctes' proved very popular, and other writers, most notably Lockhart and Hogg, contributed, while De Quincey featured as a character in them and wrote for *Blackwood's* in his own right. (Wilson had befriended him and Wordsworth during a stay in the Lake District in his earlier years.)

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

Scott's career belongs to the nineteenth century but his sympathies start with the earlier Edinburgh of Burns and Mackenzie, and it was his interest in ballads and Romantically 'medieval' adventure-poems that led him to prose fiction and the virtual invention of the 'historical novel'. He was born in a house in College Wynd among the crowded, disease-ridden streets of Old Edinburgh, where only six of his parents' twelve children survived infancy. Walter was the third of three healthy boys, but at eighteen months a bout of infantile paralysis left him weak with his right leg permanently lamed. His next eight years were spent at his grandfather's farm in the Borders, where he regained his health and acquired a taste for tales and ballads and stories of the Jacobite rebellion. He never did lose his lameness, but he thrived among dotting elders, turning into a robust lad, forthright and full of confidence. Back with the family at a new house in George Square, he attended the old

Journal, the *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, *Fraser's Magazine* and, of course, *Blackwood's*. This work was later collected as *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1829), *Songs* (1831), and *A Queer Book* (1832). He visited London for three months in 1832 and was a considerable social success while organising a collected edition to be called *Altrive Tales*, only one volume of which ever appeared. Two years later he produced essays on good manners and *The Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, which Lockhart found so very offensive because Hogg dared to recall his old friend's undignified end, and remarked on Scott's 'too strong leaning to the old aristocracy of the county' - namely those families descended from 'old Border Barbarians'. 'In Wilson's hands the Shepherd will always be delightful', wrote Lockhart, putting the Chaldee manuscript and his old collaborator firmly behind him, 'but of the fellow himself I can scarcely express my contemptuous pity'. Undaunted by the quarrel, Hogg continued to select and revise his prose, and a three-volume collection of previously unpublished stories appeared as *Tales of the Wars of Montrose* in the spring of 1835. That November he died of a liver disease at the age of sixty-five. *The Tales and Sketches of the Ettrick Shepherd* were published two years later, but Hogg had abridged the *Justified Sinner* to 'The Confessions of a Fanatic' and his greatest novel was not printed again until 1895, nor appreciated by literary critics until at least the 1920s. The French novelist André Gide set the book in a European perspective with an enthusiastic preface to the edition of 1947, and this started the modern reevaluation of Hogg's work which began to understand that the unstable tone and the mixed modes and the conflicting and erratic narratives of his work showed an original and challenging intelligence at work in the written medium, and a man with his roots in an oral tradition, rather than a naive author who did not understand literary decorum and the 'proper' genres.

John Galt (1779-1839)

Although it was *Blackwood's Magazine* that serialised his early novels, John Galt did not seek out or belong to the Edinburgh milieu of Scott, Hogg and Ferrier. He was born in Irvine on the coast of Ayrshire and brought up in Greenock, the seaport to the west of Glasgow where his father was a shipmaster to the West Indies. Galt left for London when he was twenty-five, but by 1809 his business plans in the capital had foundered and he took a two-year tour through the Mediterranean

and the Near East, befriending the young Lord Byron along the way (and eventually publishing a biography of him in 1830). Back in London he wrote about his travels and produced a biography of Cardinal Wolsey and a volume of five tragedies. He turned to writing full-time after his marriage in 1813, and offered Constable a book looking back to an old-fashioned Scotland to be called *Annals of the Parish*. The publisher turned it down as too local and too Scottish, but the success of *Waverley* was soon to change such assumptions. Galt drew on his voyages again for a book of poems and an equally unsuccessful novel called *The Masjolo* (1816), and he persevered with a variety of articles and projects, including textbooks, further biographies and two more novels. But these were dull, hard years and critical success eluded him until he entered his forties and *Blackwood's* began to serialise *The Ayrshire Legatees* in 1820. Galt may have taken his pattern from Lockhart's *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, or from Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*, for the work comprises a series of letters in which an Ayrshire family tells their friends at home all about their visit to London. The exchanges are full of topical details, and the Scots family - naive and level-headed by turns - is used as an affectionately comic and ironic touchstone for the sophistication of London. The epistolary form also allows Galt to present the same incidents from several different points of view, recognising the relativity of all internal experience. This was to be a key element in his own understanding of human nature and in his technique as a writer. The *Legatees* series (which was presented anonymously) proved very popular. William Blackwood made it into a book in 1821 and asked Galt for more. The author sent him *Annals of the Parish* and this time it was published straight away.

Galt did not consider these books to be true novels, preferring to call them sketches, observations or 'theoretical histories' that outlined the manners and the changes in provincial society, often through the voice of a single character. The *Annals* purport to be the chronicles of the country parish of Dalmailing from 1760 to 1810, as recorded in the Revd Micah Balwhidder's journal. Its companion volume *The Provost* (1822) reminisces about small-town politics and public events over the same period, all recounted in the revealingly opportunistic and blithely unselfconscious tones of Provost James Pawkie. ('Pawkie' in Scots means artful, with suggestions of country cunning.) These ironic 'autobiographies' owe their success to Galt's capacity for sympathy with his narrators, even while he uses their voices to cast indirect reflections on their own failings. 'What happened in my parish was but a type and

index to the world', Balwhidder assures us serenely, and no doubt Galt's urban readers allowed themselves a smile at his parish-pump priorities:

The Ann. Dom. 1763, was, in many a respect, a memorable year, both in public and in private. The king granted peace to the French, and Charlie Malcolm, that went to sea in the *Tobacco* trader, came home to see his mother.

Yet Galt has the eye of a social historian, and these amusing chronicles accumulate a host of minor but significant details in fashion, economics, manners and politics as the old ways of speaking and living gradually changed during the second half of the eighteenth century. Galt's intention was to chart the recent past just as Scott claimed to have done with *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*, and it can be argued that his diaristic approach allowed him to do a better job without (apparently) imposing his own voice on that of his characters. In this respect Galt, like Hogg, shows a clear interest in plural voices and limited and multiple narratives. The autobiographical style also suited Galt's strengths as a writer because it allowed him to use the distinctive rhythms of Lowland speech (in Scots or English) as his central narrative medium, with plenty of scope for broad Scots and proverbial expression. He uses a denser dialect than Scott allowed himself – amounting to a *tour de force* in the case of Lady Grippy in *The Entail* – and this oral flow, with its encapsulation of regional and national attitudes, lies at the ironic heart of Galt's understanding of how 'voice' reveals character, and how that 'local' voice can be used to make double-edged social comments on the wider world of his more sophisticated readers.

The Entail (1823) completes Galt's sequence of major Scottish books and it is closer to a conventional novel in that it abandons the autobiographical mask and follows the fortunes of a single family over three generations and a forty-year period. As a study of the ties of property, avarice and affection in the rise and fall of a self-made man, and in the legal disputes within the family after his death, *The Entail* has been seen as a forerunner in the line of Balzac, Dickens, Zola, Hardy and Galsworthy. It has a claim to be Galt's most powerful novel, if less fully realised than *Annals*; yet, while Scott, Byron, Coleridge and Jeffrey had all admired the Scottish series, there were also complaints about the latest book's 'sordidness' and its impenetrable dialect. It was not reprinted in the author's lifetime. Galt stepped up his output of fiction with four more novels using Scottish settings and three histori-

cal novels all within four years of 1822, but, not surprisingly, these works seem hastily written and were less successful than their precursors.

Ringan Gilhaize (1823), however, is notable as another imaginative autobiography, this time in a grim and tragic mode. It was written to vindicate the Covenanting spirit, 'hugely provoked', in Galt's words, by *Old Mortality* and by what he felt to be Scott's ridicule of the defenders of the Presbyterian Church and their sufferings over more than three generations. This time Galt immersed himself totally in the mind and voice of his narrator – full of long phrases, ringing with biblical rhythms and echoes, as he asserts, 'I have not taken up the avenging pen of history, and dipped it in the blood of martyrs, to record only my own particular woes and wrong.' There is no hint of comic or ironic distance in Ringan's savage experiences and in his ultimately successful quest to shoot Claverhouse down. Galt's achievement is to let that iron-hard, obsessive nature speak for itself, without apology and without entirely forfeiting the reader's sympathy. He was particularly proud of this technique of what he called imaginative 'transfusion', but it was not fully understood by readers and the novel got little credit for a serious attempt to come to terms with some of the most painful themes in the Scottish inheritance.

Galt's success was on the wane and his best books were behind him. Between 1825 and 1829 he worked in Ontario as superintendent for the Canada Company, but his health was poor and problems with the board of directors led to resignation, bankruptcy, and a spell in debtors' prison in London. He continued to write, but a series of strokes in his mid-fifties left him an invalid, and in 1834 he returned to Greenock, where he died five years later.

Perhaps the popularity of Galt's early Scottish novels obscured the subtleties of his approach to imaginative biography, and the importance of sympathy in the chain of ironic distances that he established between author, 'narrator' and reader. His successors settled for much broader effects, almost exclusively in the vein of domestic comedy. The first step in this direction was taken by David Macbeth Moir (1798–1851), a friend and biographer of Galt's and a doctor in Musselburgh near Edinburgh. Moir contributed regularly to *Blackwood's* with both prose and poetry under the *nom de plume* of 'Delta', or Δ. His best-known book, *The Life of Mansie Wauch, Tailor of Dalkeith* 'written by himself', began as a series for the magazine in 1824 and was published as a book four years later. These small-town 'memoirs' were dedicated to Galt, but they lack the older man's sense of perspective and social irony. The

result is closer to genre literature, and the pattern was set for the 'Kailyard' and a Victorian vogue in Scottish 'worthies'.

Sentimentalists and Spasmodics

By the 1850s nationalism had become a revolutionary force in Europe, but once the social and political unrest of the 1820s had passed, Lowland Scottish culture was to remain remarkably complacent for the rest of the century. The British Empire was thriving, after all, and many Scots were its beneficiaries and its active agents both at home and abroad. And if Scott's novels had a patriotic appeal, they had always been romantic, conservative and Unionist in the end. On the other hand, Patrick Fraser Tytler's *History of Scotland* (1823–43) gave scholarly support to a popular understanding of how the nation had evolved and defended its frontiers, while the Disruption had done much the same for the old values of the Kirk, and movements such as the Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights were formed to attack the centralisation of government around Westminster interests. Yet somehow these scholarly, religious and political stirrings never came together to achieve any truly effective cultural or political expression. With poetry in particular, the distinctively Scottish tradition seems to have completely lost its way.

Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne (1766–1845), disguised as 'Mrs Bogan of Bogan', had written and adapted many Scots songs for *The Scottish Minstrel* in the early 1820s. Her work is genteel and pastoral or suffused with the nostalgic parlour Jacobitism which Hugh Millar memorably characterised as 'a sort of laughing gas', agreeably exciting to the feelings. 'Will ye no' come back again?', 'Caller Herrin', 'The Hundred Pipers' and 'The Land o' the Leal' are still sung today. The various *Whistle-Binkie* anthologies from 1832 to 1890, subtitled 'A Collection of Songs for the Social Circle' have lasted less well (with the possible exception of 'Wee Willie Winkie') and the title has provided a generic label for all such milk-and-water vernacular verse, in a sentimental, complacent and utterly trivialised notion of what poetry might be. On the other hand, the only alternative seemed to be the sub-Miltonic rhetoric of epics such as *A Life-Drama*, which appeared in 1851. Its author, Alexander Smith (1830–67), a working-class lace-pattern-maker from Kilmarnock, was immediately hailed by the critics for the portentous ambition of his English verse, although he was accused of plagiarising from Tennyson after his second collection, *City*

Poems, appeared in 1857. His early literary efforts secured him a post as secretary to the University of Edinburgh in 1854, but he was to die relatively young. Smith also wrote essays, most notably the collection *Dreamthorp* (1863), susceptible to the beauty of the world and haunted by the fleeting nature of human life in the manner of his admired Montaigne. He also produced personal reminiscences of Skye in *A Summer in Skye* (1865) and a novel. He is best remembered today for his poem 'Glasgow', which tackles the reality of urban life in central Scotland, recognising the pains of industrial labour for many thousands, but seeing a hellish glory and a 'sacredness of love and death' in the city's 'noise and smoky breath':

In thee, O City! I discern
Another beauty, sad and stern.

Draw thy fierce streams of blinding ore,
Smite on a thousand anvils, roar
Down to the harbour-bars;
Smoulder in smoky sunsets, flare
On rainy nights, with street and square
Lie empty to the stars.
From terrace proud to alley base
I know thee as my mother's face.

When sunset bathes thee in his gold,
In wreaths of bronze thy sides are rolled,
Thy smoke is dusky fire;
And, from the glory round thee poured,
A sunbeam like an angel's sword
Shivers upon a spire.
Thus have I watched thee, Terror! Dream!
While the blue Night crept up the stream.

The wild Train plunges in the hills,
He shrieks across the midnight rills;
Streams through the shifting glare,
The roar and flap of foundry fires,
That shake with light the sleeping shires;

Smith's vein of extravagantly heated expression had a certain vogue, however, even if it was prone to occasionally turgid lines, self-important solemnity and a second-hand Romantic inflation. This was a failing shared by his English contemporaries, Philip Bailey and Sydney Dobell, so that they all came to be known as the 'Spasmodic school'.

The 'Spasmodics' were christened and parodied by W. E. Aytoun