

Longman Literature in English Series

General Editors: David Carroll and Michael Wheeler  
Lancaster University

For a complete list of titles see pages x-xi

Scottish Literature  
since 1707

Marshall Walker

ix  
x  
iii  
v

1  
1  
3  
4  
9  
1  
5  
)



Longman  
London and New York

moral confusion is embodied in a work which deploys generic confusion. A dark vision is constructed out of satire and the supernatural, melodrama and social iniquity, perverted theology and psychological collapse to present a conflict of good and evil which is shot through with comedy. This fugue of incongruous elements is a refinement of impulses discernible in *The Three Perils of Man* and *The Three Perils of Woman*, mirroring the intransigent messiness of experience, its immunity to the constraints of religious and political dogmas and its resistance to the artificialities of generic literary regulation. It constitutes the realism of Hogg's projected world.

The opening of the book is strongly comic, with the laird of Dalcastle capering at his wedding while his disapproving bride talks theology with the odious Mr Wringhim; then there are the inebriated laird's vivid wedding-night dreams, the bugle calls of his snores and his triumphant morning retrieval of his new wife rolled in a blanket. There is Lady Dalcastle's father's pretence of revenge on the laird for ill-treating his unlovely daughter by punishing her in her persona as the wicked laird's wife. On a social scale there is the comic chaos of the combat between Whigs and Cavaliers with the mob thrown in to underline Hogg's satirical point about the farce of sectarian politics in which doctrinaire party lines are quickly obscured by the gratifications of violence. There are the comic excesses of the Reverend Wringhim as in his visit to chastise Lord Dalcastle, his vicious psalm, 'Set thou the wicked over him', and his gullibility in Robert's manipulation of the John Barnet episode. There is the mixture of candour, precision and cunning in court of Bessy Gillies, Hogg's working-class Portia. In contrast to the theological hair-splitting of Lady Dalcastle and Mr Wringhim, Bessy's pedantry on points of law is to the humane purpose of being kind to the much abused Arabella Calvert:

'... Did you ever see these silver spoons before?'

'I hae seen some very like them, and whaever has seen siller spoons has done the same.'

'Can you swear you never saw them before?'

'Na, na, I wadna swear to ony siller spoons that ever war made, unless I had put a private mark on them wi' my ain hand, an' that's what I never did to ane.'

'See, they are all marked with a C.'

'Sac are a' the spoons in Argyle, an' the half o' them in Edinburgh I think. A C is a very common letter, an' so are a' the names that begin wi't. Lay them by, lay them by, an' gie the poor woman her spoons again. They are marked wi' her ain name, an' I hae little doubt they are hers, an' that she has seen better days.'

(pp. 66-7)

In Robert Wringhim's 'Private Memoirs and Confessions' there are comic moments too. Robert's persistent crowding of his bewildered, good-natured brother is diabolic in motivation and effect, but there is something inherently comic in Robert's waiting until George has profaned his Maker's name three times, then kicking him and ingenuously remarking out of the hubris of his twisted faith that this 'had . . . the effect of rousing up [George's] corrupt nature to quarrelling and strife, instead of taking the chastisement of the Lord in humility and meekness'. There is the comedy of the rigidly righteous people of Auchtermuchty and the Devil whose cloven feet are revealed just in time by Robin Ruthven in the folk-tale *exemplum* retailed by Samuel Scrape (pp. 198-203). Thus there is more than one valency even in this predominantly dark section of the book, and a basically comic stiffness in the mechanism of Robert's fearful sanctimony. The moral, then, is that if you believe yourself redeemed 'by grace, preordination, and eternal purpose' you have gone to the Devil. There may be tragic consequences, but they will not exalt you to tragic stature: you are, after all, an essentially comic object. Hogg's assessment of the Church's damage to the lives of people of all classes anticipates the view expressed by William Soutar in 1932: 'the disintegration of the Church may be a pointer; a necessary preliminary to our faith in MAN'.<sup>28</sup>

## John Galt: theoretical history

Comedy, usually in the ironic mode, is the key to John Galt's most memorable creations, the Rev. Micah Balwhidder of Dalmailing in *Annals of the Parish* and Provost James Pawkie in *The Provost*. Son of a sea-captain, then a London businessman who turned entrepreneur in an abortive scheme to set up a trading company in Gibraltar, Galt became Secretary to the Canada Company which was involved in developing unexplored areas of Canada. His life in Britain and Canada and his travels in Europe might have been expected to yield literary works on a grand scale, but he found his *métier* in portrayals of small-town Scotland as surely as Jane Austen found hers in '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village'.<sup>29</sup> Yet the sense of global implications is there in Galt's work, from *The Ayrshire Legatees* (1821) with its background in India to his American novel, *Lawrie Todd; or the Settlers in the Wood* (1830), making him 'the most cosmopolitan of parochial writers'.<sup>30</sup> India and Virginia have greater local significance than Edinburgh or London for the Rev. Micah Balwhidder in *Annals of the Parish*. In *The Steamboat* (1822), *The Member* (1832) and *The Radical* (1832) he deals with British politics of the period which included the passage of the first Reform Bill. *Ringan Gilhaize* (1823) is an ambitious

attempt at realistic folk history on an epic scale, written to redress the wrong Galt thought Scott had done the Covenanters in *Old Mortality*. Like the best work in his six 'Tales of the West' – the novels he wrote for William Blackwood between 1820 and 1822 – *Ringan Gilhaize* is a study of self-revelation in the form of imagined autobiography. Galt's only obviously passionate book, its strengths are in his reanimation of a critical phase of Scottish history in relation to several generations of the Gilhaize family and his creation of an appropriately grave, biblically measured style for the zealous Ringan. Galt runs his characteristic risk of making his narrator unpalatably egotistical. Ringan's obsession with the divine right of resistance and the odour of sanctity in his language almost alienate the reader's sympathy, yet his despatch of the brutal John Graham of Claverhouse (the historical 'Bloody Clavers' was killed at the Battle of Killiecrankie on 27 July 1689) to meet 'the audit of his crimes' is felt as a triumph for a man who loses himself in his cause, sustains the psychological injuries of his fanaticism, and puts faith before self. 'A terrible beauty is born,' as Yeats says of the Irish resistance fighters petrified by political conviction in 'Easter 1916'. This man is no Robert Wringhim:

I took off my bonnet, and kneeling with the gun in my hand, cried, 'Lord, remember David and all his afflictions'; and having so prayed, I took aim as I knelt, and Claverhouse raising his arm in command, I fired. In the same moment I looked up, and there was a vision in the air as if all the angels of brightness, and the martyrs in their vestments of glory, were assembled on the walls and battlements of heaven to witness the event, – and I started up and cried, 'I have delivered my native land!' But in the same instant I remembered to whom the victory was due, and falling again on my knees, I raised my hands and bowed my head as I said, 'Not mine, O Lord, but thine is the victory!'

(Chapter XXXIII)

Prolixity, Galt's besetting fault, damages the art of *Ringan Gilhaize*, though the novel deserves to be grouped with Hogg's *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* and Scott's *Old Mortality* as a literary reconstruction of a tense, ambiguous era in Scottish history. Wordiness, however, is essential to the garrulous self-revelations of 'old doited [simple-mindedly confused as in dotage]'<sup>31</sup> Micah Balwhidder in *Annals of the Parish* and smug, self-made Mr Pawkie in *The Provost*.

After the serial success in *Blackwood's Magazine* of *The Ayrshire Legatees* (1821), an epistolary novel modelled on Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* about the impact on the Pringle family and their correspondents of a journey

to London, Galt recovered from the failure of his 'European' novel, *The Earthquake* (1820), with the stories of *The Steamboat* (1821), notable for an account of George IV's coronation, and his finest book, *Annals of the Parish*. In 1822 he added to his set of Blackwood novels *Sir Andrew Wylie* (1822) and *The Provost* (1822) which ends with James Pawkie's considered opinion 'that there is a reforming spirit abroad among men, and that really the world is gradually growing better'. The world, certainly, has grown steadily better for Mr Pawkie of Gudetown who has progressed from apprentice to shop-owner to Dean of Guild to Bailie to Provost, collecting substantial property on the way. *The Entail* (1823), which, with *The Provost*, prompted Coleridge to put Galt 'in the front rank of contemporary Novellists – and second only to Sir W Scott in technique',<sup>32</sup> is an indictment of the materialism that motivates the sly Provost and of a world increasingly submissive to the tyranny of economic forces. An essentially political novel, *The Provost* should be compulsory reading for anyone contemplating a career in municipal politics. It is both a manual of manipulative technique and a warning of what one may become in such a world. It is with 'a sense of appropriateness', comments Ian Jack, 'that we discover that Galt was a great admirer of Machiavelli' and decided that *The Prince* should be read as satire.<sup>33</sup> 'Galt's irony never falters,' says Ian A. Gordon,<sup>34</sup> noticing that it is Pawkie's growing older and wealthier that comfortably enables him not 'to be so grippy' and 'to partake of the purer spirit which the great mutations of the age had conjured into public affairs'. *The Entail*, a study of materialism's power to corrupt and victimize and of the capacity of some to rise above it, is an ironic refutation of the Provost's complacency.

Galt was displeased by the public reception of *Annals of the Parish* and *The Provost* as novels. His intention was 'to exhibit a kind of local theoretical history, by examples, the truth of which would at once be acknowledged'.<sup>35</sup> Read as an inter-connected series, the Blackwood books comprise 'a complex tableau of a society which could not be encompassed within the limits of a single work, nor understood from a single point of view'.<sup>36</sup> Critics have tended to agree with his own judgement that the *Annals* 'is so void of any thing like a plot, that it lacks in the most material feature of the novel'.<sup>37</sup> Yet his contemporary, Susan Ferrier, could see beyond the genre's orthodox mechanical requirements, appraising Jane Austen's *Emma* in terms appropriate to one of Galt's studies of small-town life: 'there is no story whatever, and the heroine is no better than other people; but the characters are all so true to life, and the style so piquant, that it does not require the adventitious aids of mystery and adventure'.<sup>38</sup> Like Jane Austen, Galt was changing the scope of the novel by parodying 'the fad of memoir',<sup>39</sup> but if plot is simply defined as narrative pattern, *Annals of the Parish* clearly has one, and if Aristotle's requirements for *mythos* are the criteria, it also presents a beginning, a

middle, an end, and obvious wholeness. After giving us the text of his last sermon – worthy of anthologizing with such literary imitations of the form as Father Mapple's sermon in Melville's *Moby Dick*, Robert Colquhoun's last sermon in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Cloud Howe* and the Easter sermon in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* – Mr Balwhidder begins on the fifty years of his ministry (1760–1810) with an account of his abuse by 'mad and vicious' people on the occasion of his 'placing' in the parish kirk of Dalmailing. The middle of the memoir is Chapter XX for the year 1779, by which time the minister has won over his congregation, developed a rudimentary sense of humour sufficient to recognize the absurdity of Lady Macadam's revenge on Betty Wudrife in Chapter XVI, and reached the peak of his career as delegate to the General Assembly (the annual supreme court of the Kirk), commanded to preach before his Grace the Commissioner (the king's representative at the Assembly). The end of the action is Balwhidder's last sermon, his receipt of a silver server from a grateful congregation, and his comically matter-of-fact anticipation of pleasant reunions after death, especially with the first and second Mrs Balwhidders.

The microcosm of Dalmailing reverberates to events in the greater world beyond the parish as Scotland wakes 'from a long rural sleep to the promise of industry and commerce'.<sup>40</sup> In his annal for 1809 (Chapter L) Balwhidder says that he writes 'to testify to posterity anent [about] the great changes that have happened in my day and generation – a period which all the best informed writers say, has not had its match in the history of the world, since the beginning of time'. In the same year Byron comments on the pace of change in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

Thus saith the Preacher; 'nought beneath the sun  
Is new', yet still from change to change we run.  
What varied wonders tempt us as they pass!  
The Cow-pox, Tractors, Galvanism, and Gas  
In turns appear to make the vulgar stare,  
Till the swoln bubble bursts – and all is air!

With commercial promise comes the caprice of market forces and new vulnerability: in Dalmailing the industrial bubble swells and bursts when the cotton mill built in Chapter XXIX is sold in Chapter XLIX, Mr and Mrs Dwining despair and commit suicide. For a time the town is 'suddenly thrown out of bread' as it is drawn into 'the great web of commercial reciprocities'. National politics encroach on the rural idyll: some parishioners panic in 1780 when news reaches them of the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots and the rabble-rousing Lord George Gordon's committal to the Tower of London on a charge of high treason (Chapter XXI); the wars with France become parish business in 1782 when Charles Malcolm is

killed in the Battle of the Saints (Chapter XXIII); and the parish children turn from their victory merry-making to enact a touching lesson in true community. Mr Balwhidder has broken the news of her son's death to his revered Mrs Malcolm, and they leave the Manse together:

All the weans were out parading with napkins and kail-blades [leaves of green kale or cabbage] on sticks, rejoicing and triumphing in the glad tidings of victory. But when they saw me and Mrs Malcolm coming slowly along, they guessed what had happened, and threw away their banners of joy; and, standing all up in a row, with silence and sadness, along the kirk-yard wall as we passed, shewed an instinct of compassion that penetrated to my very soul. The poor mother burst into fresh affliction, and some of the bairns into an audible weeping; and, taking one another by the hand, they followed us to her door, like mourners at a funeral.

(Chapter XXIII)

The changing world converts Balwhidder from abhorrence of smuggling (Chapter III) to sympathy with the 'poor smugglers' (Chapter XXI) harried by the relentless, bounty-hunting exciseman, Mungo Argyle. Canny Presbyterian materialism, which assesses the state of the world in terms of local prosperity and condones the second Mrs Balwhidder's purchase of a silver teapot (Chapter XX), gives way to apprehension of the 'evil and vanity of riches' and prescient sermonizing: '... in that same spirit of improvement, which was so busy every where, I could discern something like a shadow, that shewed it was not altogether of that pure advantage, which avarice led all so eagerly to believe' (Chapter XXXII). With industrial progress come the division of the parish into Government men and Jacobins, and a new crisis for the Rev. Balwhidder when he preaches against materialism only to be accused of being a 'leveller' (Chapter XXXIII).

Scott's attempts to be realistic are invariably thwarted, to some degree, by his histrionics even when he achieves psychological or social truth. By comparison Galt's less gesticulant art, despite its bias towards caricature, comes closer to the surfaces of recognizable life. Yet the chamber music of Galt's *Annals* is not as far removed as it might seem from the grand opera of Scott. As Francis Russell Hart says, 'Galt was as much interested as Scott in the end of the past'.<sup>41</sup> As original and successful an adaptation of the form of the novel as Hogg's *Confessions*, Galt's *Annals* tells of the evolving world of middle to late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century small-town Scotland in the characterful voice of a plausibly conceived minister of the time (and a type by no means extinct). The book contains 'no false note and not a surplus page'; it is at once 'an evocation

of a period . . . an illustration of a theory of social change', and 'a highly entertaining comedy'.<sup>42</sup> If twentieth-century sensibility cannot easily warm to the egotism, 'humdrum preaching' and self-delusion of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder it should, at least, experience no difficulty in laughing at them. He is, after all, a good man who does the best he can, and his vanities are small. The Scottish literary canon holds a secure place for Galt's minister in his small symptomatic place. Galt's friend and first biographer, David Macbeth Moir's *The Life of Mansie Wauch Tailor in Dalkeith* (1828), is a lively imitation of the Galt formula, but lacks the portrayal of enveloping social transition by which life in Dalmailing or Gudetown is implicated in the wider world.

### Susan Ferrier: pride, prejudice and Christianity

Susan Ferrier's work retains its documentary value both as period fiction and as an informed appraisal of the contemporary circumstances of women. At least Galt's equal in psychological penetration, she fails to achieve his coherent economy of art; but her false notes and surplus pages are offset by her humour – particularly in the first volume of *Marriage* (1818) – her social satire, her eye for prejudice and her sturdily Christian resolution of the competing claims of sense and sensibility.

First impressions of her three novels – *Marriage* (1818), *The Inheritance* (1824) and *Destiny* (1831) – suggest a novelist of manners. Her infectious enjoyment of the contrast between provincial Scottish behaviour and English suavity is responsible for much of the appeal of *Marriage*. Modelled on the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, the first sentence of *The Inheritance* is a deliberate reminder of Jane Austen's world: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that there is no passion so deeply rooted in human nature as that of pride.' The liveliest part of the novel is garrulous Miss Pratt, cast in the same mould as Jane Austen's Miss Bates in *Emma*:

Every body wearied of her, or said they wearied of her, and every body abused her; while yet she was more sought after and asked about, than she would have been had she possessed the wisdom of a More or the benevolence of a Fry. She was, in fact, the very heart of the shire, and gave life and energy to all the pulses of the parish. She supplied it with streams of gossip and chit-chat in others, and subject of ridicule and abuse in herself.<sup>43</sup>

(I, 10)

The opening pages of *Destiny* exhibit a colourful digest of Highland life in the decadent chief of Glenroy, his parasitical kinsman, Benbowie, and the genuinely pious widowed housekeeper, Mrs Macauley. Ferrier's pleasure in drawing character is evident in her scheme for *Marriage*: 'the sudden transition of a high-bred English beauty, who thinks she can sacrifice all for love, to an uncomfortable solitary Highland dwelling among tall red-haired sisters and grim-faced aunts'.<sup>44</sup> High-born Lady Juliana's horrified encounter with her husband's aunts ('three long-chinned spinsters'), with his sisters ('five awkward purple girls'), with his forthright, Scots-speaking father, the Laird of Glenfern, and with the omniscient Lady Maclaughlan and her petulant, disintegrating husband, Sir Sampson, is rich comedy of manners, influenced by Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), but based on Susan Ferrier's own shrewd observation of types. Ferrier's caricatures are very funny, but, like Mary Brunton, she is a Christian moralist and the comedy is there to serve the homily. In *The Inheritance* and *Destiny* the moralist is too much with us. *Marriage* is her most successful novel because it achieves the most effective balance of morals and manners with an impressive range of realized life to carry its didacticism. The title of each novel proclaims its topic, but Ferrier's message, common to the three, is the equation of full humanity with the difficult life of intelligent Christianity.

Susan Ferrier resembles Jane Austen only superficially. Her novels lean much further than Austen's towards the moral tract and her observation, judged aesthetically, takes too much 'the form of description and explicit comment rather than that of dramatic portrayal'.<sup>45</sup> Thematically, however, *Marriage* does recall Jane Austen in combining the topics of *Sense and Sensibility* with those of *Pride and Prejudice*. In a world of aggressive stupidity and vulgar prejudice Mary Douglas's task, like her foster-mother's before her,<sup>46</sup> is to resolve the tension in herself between the dutiful promptings of sense and the heart's sensibility. The novel's satirical humour largely derives from its display of prejudice. 'Destitute of every resource in herself', Lady Juliana is briefly prejudiced in favour of marrying for love, rejects her aristocratic moneyed suitor – 'a hunchback of fifty-three' – but is converted by cold-comfort Glenfern and her invertebrate husband's inconsiderate penury to the opposite persuasion whereby, as her father had told her, 'it was very well for ploughmen and dairy-maids to marry for love, but for a young woman of rank to think of such a thing, was plebeian in the extreme' (I, 1).<sup>47</sup> Accordingly she rejects one of her twin daughters, disastrously schools the other in her own view of marital felicity and social propriety, and is parodied in her prejudice by Lady Maclaughlan's remark: 'Miss McKraken has bounced away with her father's footman – I hope he will clean his knives on her' (I, 16). National prejudice makes the Laird reckon 'all foreign music, i.e. every thing that was not Scotch, an outrage upon his ears'; Miss Nicky exclaims, 'The