



University  
of Glasgow

McKeever, Gerard (2011) *Enlightened Fictions and the Romantic Nation: Contesting Ideological Formations of Scottish Writing over the Long Eighteenth Century*.  
MPhil(R) thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3010/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlightened Fictions and the Romantic Nation: Contesting  
Ideological Formations of Scottish Writing over the Long  
Eighteenth Century

---

Gerard McKeever

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of M.Phil. in the College of Arts

University of Glasgow

September 2011

## Abstract

This study engages with the contemporary academic revision of Scottish Romanticism. It attempts to aid an understanding of both how this literature functions ideologically, and the nature of the relationship between this work and the wider British Romantic literary sphere. Central to the topical focus is the issue of Scottish national identity, and how over the 'long eighteenth century' – citing the Union of 1707 as one crucial ideological origin for Scottish Romanticism – Scottish literature develops a highly complex aesthetic framework regarding national identity which is engaged in a multifaceted dialogue on the political, social and economic situation in Scotland during the period. This literature interacts on a number of levels with Scottish Enlightenment thought, and in particular the British historiographical revision enacted by theories of stadial development. However, the question remains whether literature of the period primarily helped to rescue a notion of Scottish identity from annihilation within the British state, or aided the transition from Scotland to 'North-Britain' in a political disarming of nationhood through romanticization and antiquarianism. This focus is an essential feature of an attempt in this study to identify the factors which distinguish Scottish Romanticism's approach to social and political dialogue within the wider British Romantic tradition.

In order to address this, a critical framework is developed, drawing upon the work of important scholars in this field, including: Murray Pittock, Ian Duncan, Cairns Craig, Susan Manning and Nigel Leask, and serves as an important departure point. This combines with a focus on the relationship between notions of the aesthetic and political or social engagement – what this study terms polemical material – in literature. Through this critical structure, an analysis of some key ideological features of Scottish Romanticism regarding literature's engagement with political and social debate is presented. Given the central importance of political and social issues – alongside the development of new aesthetic trends in literature – to not only Scottish Romanticism but the wider British and European Romantic literary canon, this focus facilitates an effective exploration of this literature.

A selection of works from key Scottish writers – Robert Burns, James Hogg, Walter Scott and John Galt – provides the main literary focus in an attempt to achieve an understanding of how the theoretical elements of the argument operate in a practical setting. In particular, an extended analysis of Hogg's lesser-studied *The Three Perils of Women* posits the work as a central text in elucidating some of the central ideological conflicts under investigation. The study also takes account of the relationship between Scottish literature and the wider British Romantic sphere, moving to contextualise this material in light of some canonically-pivotal English examples, while the textual relationships between Scottish Romanticism and the writing of the Scottish Enlightenment are also of keen interest. It is hoped that this project provides a fresh and original contribution to the body of Scottish Romantic studies, yet one which consciously builds upon the strong critical work currently appearing in this field.

Contents:

Introduction – p.4

Chapter One – Scotland: Enlightened Fictions and the Romantic Nation – p.38

Chapter Two – James Hogg and the Violence Passed – p.63

Chapter Three – Robert Burns and National Aesthetic – p.96

Conclusion – p.125

Bibliography – p.135

## Introduction

### I

The very notion of a 'Romantic' literature invokes an expanse of ideological background.<sup>1</sup> Canonical English Romanticism has come to be recognised as beginning in earnest with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*,<sup>2</sup> set against the background of the French Revolution; and ending roughly with the Reform Bill of 1832.<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the outset that political and social issues play a substantial role for this literature, dictating the limits of the literary period. This perhaps limiting periodicity is highly contestable, and a longer English Romantic period may well be more useful. However, it is clear that when we bring Scottish writing into the frame the period necessarily expands backwards, but can still be seen to be heavily influenced by political events. The Union of 1707 is a major theme in much of Scottish Romanticism, while the Jacobite Uprising of 1745 also becomes a key focus for this writing. The difficult task of clearly defining the historical position of Romanticism is a subject which this introduction addresses in more detail; however, both English and Scottish Romanticism operate upon a temporal framework strongly influenced by politics and social change, a factor which shines through in the arguably unmatched level of complexity in political and social engagement in literature during this period. Major historical

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Romantic' and 'Romanticism' are employed frequently throughout this study as convenient signifiers, though the exact meaning and scope of these terms is an issue which itself falls under considerable scrutiny.

<sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth & Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (London: Longman, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> This specific periodicity is presented in numerous historical works of reference, though more recent scholarship has consistently questioned it. See the article on 'Romantic revival', in *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, rev. C. E. Preston (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.771, for a succinct definition which takes note of these narrow markers.

developments such as: the Union of 1707; the Jacobite Uprising; the Scottish Enlightenment; the French Revolution; the Napoleonic Wars; agricultural improvement, industrial development and urbanization; all impact on the high level of political and social consciousness which Romanticism displays. In a manner which this study will show to be intimately connected to this dynamic, literature also develops radical new ways of representing itself in this period, and writers and critics develop a number of key notions about literature which remain influential today. This study uses this dual engagement in Romanticism, with both social and political issues, as well as notions of the aesthetic, as a foundation for critical analysis. These two strands are shown to be intimately linked, and often interacting in a highly complex manner. Crucially, a focus on Scottish writing addresses this literature's aesthetic treatment of notions of Scottish national identity, a feature which is in direct dialogue with the British cultural assimilation enacted in part by Scottish Enlightenment theory.

This relationship in Romanticism between literary aesthetics and political or social engagement (what this study terms as 'polemical' material) is a highly complex one. While some of this literature openly engages in social and political debate, almost all of it can be shown to at least reflect the charged historical circumstances of its creation. Indeed, it is crucial that we recognise the powerful polemic inherent in, for example, certain forms of sentimental and nature poetry which may have traditionally been received as apolitical. Alongside this engagement, writers of the period develop an important body of critical material which in many ways has self-defined the concept of a 'Romantic' literature. These ideological formulations, in particular notions of the

transcendental imagination, create an ahistorical context in which this literature can easily be read.<sup>4</sup> New Historicist critics such as Jerome McGann and Clifford Siskin have identified the failure in critical practice to refuse to allow this literature to define its own legacy in a severely limiting anti-historical manner; a task which is now being effectively undertaken on an important scale.<sup>5</sup> Rejecting a simplistic view that these two strains represent distinct and clearly defined dialogues, this study seeks to address the ways in which the polemical and the aesthetic in Romanticism are crucially interconnected.

In its textual focus, this project engages with the contemporary effort to achieve a better understanding of Scottish Romanticism, both to further our understanding of this literature itself, and to identify the role this literature plays within a wider British context. Engaging with the arguments of critics Murray Pittock, Ian Duncan, Susan Manning, Nigel Leask and Cairns Craig as a central critical framework, the work of several important Scottish writers is examined within the critical structure thus composed. Indeed, in one respect this study serves substantially as a consideration of recent criticism in the field, equally as interested in these critical developments as it is in primary investigation.

Scottish Romanticism is increasingly recognised as a distinct literary sphere

---

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'ideology' and 'ideological' are used throughout this study in the straightforward sense of referring to a body or system of ideas, normally contained within a discrete theoretical unit, and often directed towards some kind of active political, social or cultural purpose. Thus a particular text, movement or theorist may display recognizable 'ideologies', the expressions of which could be characterized as 'ideological' material of an identifiable sort.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) and Clifford Siskin's *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) are both strong examples of this movement in scholarship to address the historicity of Romantic literature.

requiring separate analysis – though one which is intimately in dialogue with a wider British model. Issues surrounding Scottish national identity, cultural tradition and language, historical revision, locality and national character all create a unique set of topical references for this literature, while the proximity of the Scottish Enlightenment impacts on the influence of its ideas. As a heteroglossic literary tradition operating – often problematically – in the midst of a number of conflicting political and cultural ideologies, this literature presents a fascinatingly multifaceted ideological constitution. The practical limitations of this study, alongside the strong focus on criticism, necessitates a certain brevity in primary analysis, yet studies of some of the more prominent figures in Scottish Romanticism should provide a relatively detailed summary in which to address the theoretical foci. Centrally, the nature of the Scottish aesthetic/polemical dynamic will be explored, examining the ways in which creative literature powerfully engaged in the struggle surrounding Scottish national identity in this period. Ideological deployments of language, interactions with Enlightenment theory and the relationship of Scottish writers to key conceptions of ‘Romantic’ literature are also of keen interest.

The complexity and often ambiguity of this writing’s treatment of political and cultural identities presents a whole spectrum of ideological possibilities. On one hand there are the importantly pro-British strains cited by critic Robert Crawford, who argues that Scots attempted to create a ‘British Literature’ in something of an entrepreneurial move towards a united cultural identity which

would include and dignify Scotland.<sup>6</sup> On the other are the more culturally-defensive nationalist strains cited by Murray Pittock in his *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, in which aspects of Scottish literature are seen reacting defensively against Anglocentric cultural homogenization – a homogenization enacted in crucial ways by Scots themselves.<sup>7</sup> The presence of such oppositional ideological possibilities within the oeuvre of Scottish writers of the period – even within individual works – is a central feature in making this literature lend itself so naturally to a politically and socially-orientated critical analysis.

At the heart of this conflicting ideological dialogue, the present study cites an important dynamic surrounding the ways in which the Scottish nation becomes highly romanticized during the period. This romanticization represents what this study terms a ‘polemic of the aesthetic’ – given its clearest exemplification in Scott’s *Waverley*, as explored in Chapter One. In this concept, a Scottish national politics is framed within the dictates of one particularly ‘Romantic’ understanding of aesthetics – indeed this polemical dialogue ultimately enshrines Scottish nationhood as a particular kind of ‘Romantic’ aesthetic – which in an elaborate manoeuvre may simultaneously facilitate its existence within the British state while undermining its potential for political realization. It is debatable whether this process, enacted by figures like Scott, primarily helped salvage a Scottish national identity from annihilation or undermined its claim to practical political reality. Importantly, in a conflict which this study traces, this ‘polemic of the aesthetic’ is encountered by an

---

<sup>6</sup> Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p45.

<sup>7</sup> See Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

aggressive strain in Scottish Romanticism which presents a strong focus on political and social specificity, denying an aesthetic distance from these dialogues and in some cases openly attacking such a position. This decisive ideological conflict is seen operating at the heart of the canon – with the complexity of Scottish Romanticism again resulting in divergences and ambiguities within individual authors and works.

With these conceptual notions in mind, Chapter One then sketches out some features of the Scottish literary scene during the period, focussing on the influence of Scottish Enlightenment ideas on literature, the process of romanticizing a Scottish national identity, and some of the key characteristics of this Scottish literature. The study addresses the influence of Walter Scott's *Waverley* on the question of Scottish national identity and history, examining the important role this novel played in contemporary representations of Scotland.<sup>8</sup> *Waverley* is a crucial work both in light of the pivotal role it played in the simultaneous assertion and (arguably) de-politicization of Scottish identity within a British context, and the influence it had on the direction of the wider literary movement. As Ian Duncan shows in *Scott's Shadow*, Scott exerted a powerful influence on the work of those around him, not least James Hogg and John Galt.<sup>9</sup> An analysis of Scott's novel leads in to a discussion of Galt, detailing his own literary approach, and how this is situated within the Scottish intellectual sphere. Galt's *Annals of the Parish* provides a fascinating commentary on social and political development in rural Scotland, employing a

---

<sup>8</sup> Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

highly 'Enlightened' empirical literary tone.<sup>10</sup> This novel sheds important light on the role of Scotland within Britain and Europe during our period, and its clear relationship with Scottish Enlightenment thought places it at the heart of some of the most important ideological foci of the study. Regarding the deep influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on Scottish Romanticism, the study touches upon Susan Manning's *Fragments of Union*, which provides keen insights into some of the potential connections between Enlightenment thought and literary production in the period.<sup>11</sup> Cairns Craig's work *Out of History* is also addressed in this context, particularly in terms of his focus on the literary reaction to the elision of Scotland from a historical narrative focussed developmentally on the British state.<sup>12</sup>

Individual chapters on both James Hogg and Robert Burns complete the survey of Scottish writing. Hogg's *The Three Perils of Women* serves as the central primary source in the analysis of his work.<sup>13</sup> An in-depth focus on this novel engages with a number of key issues: Hogg's aggressive defence of the Scots language and Scottish nationhood; the novel as a response to *Waverley*'s treatment of Culloden in re-asserting a contemporary primacy for problematic issues of Scottish nationhood; and the importance of Hogg's imagery and the extreme violence of the novel as central ideological features of a particularly Scottish literary mode. This novel is presented as potentially a central text in a

---

<sup>10</sup> John Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, in *Annals of the Parish & The Ayrshire Legatees* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994), pp.xvii-187.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Manning, *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Women*, eds. Douglas S. Mack and Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).

re-evaluation of Romanticism which seeks to more thoroughly understand the Scottish context. The study also addresses Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.<sup>14</sup> The tension between the supernatural and the rational in this work is explored as ultimately displaying Hogg's distrust of certain forms of 'ideology', as he juxtaposes and critiques conflicting viewpoints. Hogg is a figure who occupied a relatively marginal role in British Romanticism, never reaching the heights of Scott's literary fame, yet is in some ways the perfect embodiment of a form of 'Romantic' ideal in his role as the 'Ettrick Shepherd'. His complex relationship with the literary establishment and his focus on locality as a key conceptual issue, combined with his brilliant and often daring literary output, position Hogg as an inviting subject for any project wishing to illuminate Scottish writing over this period.

The richness of Burns's poetry presents any critic with a difficult task in selectivity. For the purposes of this study, a small selection of his poems come under analysis, chosen as exemplifying some key features in Burns's work, including: his shifting and multiple uses of register; his skilful process of 'self-fashioning'; his focus on Scottish national identity; song-collecting; and notions of antiquarianism as connected to Scottish historical revision. The prefatory material to both the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of Burns's work are also discussed regarding the interesting role they play in his sophisticated and complex self-presentation as a poet and a personality. Burns's importance to writing in this period is becoming increasingly (re)recognised, and Nigel Leask's recent work *Robert Burns and Pastoral* is touched upon frequently in this

---

<sup>14</sup> James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

chapter, alongside Pittock's *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*.<sup>15</sup> Using the arguments of Leask and Pittock as a critical foundation, Burns – both his work and legacy – is identified as central to Scottish Romanticism's engagement with questions of nationhood and national representations.

## II

William Hazlitt's collection of essays, *The Spirit of the Age*, famously argues that a specific intellectual mood surrounds his generation, in essence presenting ideological continuity in a historical period.<sup>16</sup> However, for many modern scholars, the specifics of this Romantic period are highly contestable. The major primary analysis in this project covers a period spanning from the publication of Burns' Kilmarnock Edition in 1786 to that of Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in 1824. However, it is worthwhile to briefly address this issue of defining the Romantic period, as periodicity has often played a crucial role in critical analysis of this literature, frequently in a negative or at least potentially restrictive manner. As has been mentioned, the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, alongside the French Revolution; and the Reform Bill, became common markers or bookends for a notion of a British literary Romantic period over the course of the twentieth century. However, the notable complications to this definition, in particular the consignment to 'proto-Romantic' of figures like Goldsmith, Macpherson and Burns identifies the essential problem in this attempt at defining periodicity: the Romantic period is

---

<sup>15</sup> Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> See William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), VII, pp.75-236.

an aesthetic and ideological concept, which will therefore inevitably be historically vague, given the organic nature of such developments.

Murray Pittock addresses this issue in some detail at the outset of his *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*. He describes 'Romanticism' as 'the doughtiest survivor, the "last of the race" if you like, of the use of historical eras as a stalking-horse for aesthetic assumptions in literary history' (Pittock, p.2). This aesthetically-orientated periodicity creates problems for any study attempting to focus on Scottish writing rather than the canonical English Romantics, as the basic literary framework is quite distinct.<sup>17</sup> Pittock argues, however, that rather than discarding an aesthetic notion of periodicity completely, revisionist critical strategy focussing on Scottish literature should instead try to 'encounter and incorporate the stress on the subjective and aesthetic dimensions of "Romanticism"' (Pittock, p.3). As has been mentioned, this inevitably involves an expansion of the Romantic period, back at least as far as to incorporate Burns, but in practice considerably further. James Macpherson and Robert Fergusson are both figures who conform to at least the majority of the criteria which define Scottish Romanticism: the focus on bardic tradition; questions of language and register; strongly local notions of the 'Gothic' and the 'Romantic'; and not least the simultaneous contemporary formation and historical revision of a cultural national identity. Yet if there is a single figure with whom we can identify if not the beginning of Scottish Romanticism, then at least the facilitating factors therein, it is Allan Ramsay. Pittock devotes a chapter to the importance of Ramsay's contribution, assessing both his role in the evolution of literary Scots,

---

<sup>17</sup> Though an aesthetically-centred periodicity may also be potentially constrictive for work addressing this English material.

and as a patron of the arts. For Pittock, Ramsay's work preserved a literary role for Scots in the face of standardization:

Ramsay's work began to liberate Scottish poetry from the risk of the tyranny of metropolitan interpretations of register, form, and their deployment in literary kinds, a tyranny which was to prove fatal to the status of English dialect poetry, and which ensured that Wordsworth's 'real language of men in a state of vivid sensation' could never be Cumbrian speech or any representation of it. (Pittock, p.37)

Pittock presents Ramsay as the figure upon whom the possibility of the strongly distinct Scottish Romantic literary scene rests. Without Ramsay's assertion of an 'altermentality' – defined by Pittock as 'a distinctly national agenda of selfhood' (Pittock, p.32) – in the face of British cultural standardization, the unique flavour of Scottish literature during our period may not have been achievable. For Pittock this process is focussed around language and dialect, with Ramsay's incorporation of the oral tradition into a new national literary register a crucial element: 'It was Ramsay who helped a distinctive Scottish literature to survive, and he did this in part by identifying the folk vernacular with the idea of a national literature in the present' (Pittock, p.48). The importance of Ramsay's role in carving out a strong literary presence for Scotland in the developing British sphere is effectively shown by Pittock. Crucially for this study, Ramsay is a figure at the beginning of a literary movement which engaged in issues of Scottish national cultural identity in the face of cultural homogenization following the Union of 1707. This movement, which at an indeterminate point became Scottish Romanticism, importantly interacted with Scottish Enlightenment stadial historiography over issues of Scottish identity, contesting the cultural, political and social status of Scottish nationhood. It seems likely that literary studies may have to be content with a somewhat vaguely defined

Romantic period, as any ideological phenomenon will have both preceding influences and proceeding echoes. However, certainly in the case of Scottish Romanticism – if not a wider British model – though the majority of the canonical texts are considerably later, it is crucial that we seek to understand the contribution of figures like Ramsay in facilitating this literary movement, suggesting the propriety of a ‘long eighteenth century’ model.

### III

Given that the arguments of certain key critics are to provide such crucial ideological background, introducing a selection of these critical arguments at this stage should help to contextualise the study. The comparative scope of this project means Pittock’s illuminating dual focus on both Scottish and Irish writing cannot be approached, while Robert Fergusson is another subject for a larger study, yet some of his key points should be useful to identify. As has been touched upon regarding Ramsay, Pittock presents the important role of language and register in the formulations of Scottish Romanticism. He comments upon the cultural construction of the peasant-poet which is so central to Romanticism, not least to the work of Burns, Fergusson and Hogg. For Pittock this ‘critical category conflates inability to write, or difficulty in writing, standard English with unwillingness to do so’ (Pittock, p.11). Pittock here identifies a crucial point which we must constantly seek to reinforce in analysis of Scottish Romanticism. Scottish writers are engaged in a subtle and extremely important process of balancing and contrasting separate voices. These are after all, essentially bilingual (at least) authors, and the choices they make in terms of language, combined with their reflections thereon, provide major insights into their work.

These authors are often highly proficient in at least two voices, with some ranging between a multiplicity including standard English, archaic English, vernacular Scots, forms of literary Scots, and Gaelic. For Pittock this literature can be seen to be performing a defiance against the colonization of standard English which is tied to a broader assertion of Scottish national identity:

In literature, particularly poetry in Scotland and prose in Ireland, the uses of native speech are deployed to challenge the hierarchy of heteroglossia: it is control, not lack of control, over the registers of speech which creates the space for the distinctive performance of self. (Pittock, p.23)

The subject of choice regarding language and register is frequently returned to in this study as a key literary feature employed in Scottish Romanticism.

Examining the reasons for switching between these voices provides a major critical path in exploring the ideological framework of this literature, particularly as regards attitudes towards nation and nationality. This critical practice is an important process in effectively analysing the aesthetic/polemical dynamic in this work.

Pittock's work also presents the complex relationship between history and literature played out in Scotland over the Romantic period. He argues that 'the historiography of the period by and large sought to establish the intellectual grounds for undermining the view "that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past"' (Pittock, p.59). Pittock argues that contemporary historians actively formulated a negative view of Scottish national history. Through focussing on brutality and notions of the primitive in an effort to present Scotland's dissolution into modern Britain as an almost evolutionary improvement (Pittock, pp.64-65), the Scottish Enlightenment suffocated Scottish nationalistic sentiment in mainstream factual historical discourse, forcing this dialogue into the fictional

sphere, where it flourished: 'this ancient historiographical tradition survived in literature, a taxonomy of glory displaced from politics into the imagination' (Pittock, p.61). Pittock elegantly displays the protection of a Scottish national identity within literature in the face of ideologies of British consolidation. This can be cited as responsible to some degree for the powerful presence of patriotic sentiment in Scottish literature of the period. However, this process was not nearly as simple as dividing historians from literary writers. Literature can also be seen to be heavily involved in the 'disarming' of Scottish culture to allow more comfortable incorporation into what became the Victorian British political model. The central role of Scott's *Waverley* in this process will be returned to in detail later. This process of incorporation was intimately connected to Scottish Enlightenment stadial theory, as addressed by Pittock:

Right at the beginning of the first book of his *History of Scotland*, Robertson wrote that 'Nations, as well as men, arrive at maturity by degrees, and the events, which happened during their infancy or early youth [...] deserve not to be remembered.' This sentiment was pregnant with the future absence of Scotland from British history, for it contained the idea of the infantilization of the national past. It could be a childhood tale, a story, a romance, but not modernity nor reality. (Pittock, p.65)

In accordance with Enlightenment theory, as presented by Robertson, Hume and others, it was a natural process for Scotland to 'mature' into its role as part of Britain. This simultaneously removed dialogue on the nation of Scotland into the child-like realm of fantasy or the 'romantic'. However, as Scotland was removed from the British historiographical narrative, becoming the area 'North Britain', a strong strain of cultural nationalism emerges in literature. The assertion of Scottish 'otherness' in literature by Burns, Hogg and others is a highly political dialogue carried out primarily in the literary sphere.

In *Out of History*, Cairns Craig also narrates this elision of the Scottish national past from the British historical narrative through the implications of stadial theory:

In the Enlightenment model, Scotland's sudden emergence into this modern, commercial world, out what those theorists saw as a dark and fanatic past, incorporates Scotland into a history whose shape no longer derives from the particularities of its own experience; rather, the past of its present is the evolution of English experience and Scotland's own past becomes the arena of local narrative no longer teleologically connected to its future [...] the Enlightenment philosophers and Scott reduced Scottish history to a series of isolated narratives which could not be integrated into the fundamental dynamic of history: in Scotland, therefore, narrative became part of the world that was framed by art, while the order of progress could only be narrated from somewhere else – it would be ungraspable in a Scottish environment. (Craig, *Out of History*, p.39)

In this context, removed from the progress of 'real' history, Craig presents Scotland as providing the political and cultural circumstances for a highly complex literary relationship with notions of history and anti-history. For Craig, 'The Scotland which had been divorced from history, and so became the place of romance, was also the place where history encountered those forces which could not be made to submit to historical amelioration' (Craig, *Out of History*, p.44).

Craig narrates Scottish literature as dealing with this issue of historical elision by repeatedly narrating the conflict between what history includes, and what is left out. This notion is returned to more expansively throughout this study.

Intriguingly, Craig argues that the repeated resurrection of the repressed Scottish past in literature is neatly represented through the canon of Scott's novels, with each work forced to re-address Scottish national history towards presenting British consolidation: 'In every novel, and *between* the novels (if we imagine them as an account of a continuous history), the forward movement of progressive history is continually undone' (Craig, *Out of History*, p.70). This

concept of the failure, or at least difficulty, stadial historiography encounters in sufficiently repressing the Scottish cultural narratives – those it demarcates as primitive – which undermine its own clear British progressive narrative is a key feature in the works under primary focus in this study. Indeed, it can be argued that stadial historiography, by its very nature, in presenting a progressive history, necessarily invokes what is progressed *from* and left behind.

Turning to Ian Duncan's *Scott's Shadow*, he too makes a number of crucial points which it should help to introduce at this stage. Duncan also touches upon the relationship between Scottish Enlightenment theory and the developing role of literature in the period. For Duncan the rise of the novel in this period, producing the unprecedented success of *Waverley*, was a direct result of Enlightenment theory, as 'Philosophical authority for the claim on fiction as the medium for reality, instead of its antithesis, was developed in Scottish Enlightenment empiricism' (Duncan, p.xii). Duncan argues this in relation to Hume's philosophy:

Hume's case, that all representation is a fiction, a *poesis*, since all experience is mediated through the imagination, provides a stronger and more comprehensive theoretical base for fiction than any that had appeared hitherto, delivering it from the sentence of inauthenticity, of categorical opposition to reality. (Duncan, p.133)

Duncan effectively highlights this link between the dialogues of Enlightenment theory and the success of *Waverley*. By presenting reality as a fiction, Hume's argument opens the path for the defence of the novel's, and indeed fictional literature as a whole's, relevance to 'real-life'; but also has implications for the role the Scottish nation begins to occupy as a form of 'fictional reality'. In this light Hume's philosophy can be seen having a direct influence on the potential

for, and efficacy of, an aestheticization of national politics – for if reality is itself a form of fiction, then consequently history and politics lose their epistemological authority over imaginative fictions. This notion is seen at its most bizarre with the visit of George IV to Scotland in 1822. As Duncan points out, this episode displays Scott effectively, and perhaps dubiously, merging the lines between truth and fiction: ‘Scott staged the Royal Visit as the reenactment of a fictional representation of a historical event, the Jacobite project of restoration he had already exposed as theatrical, “romantic,” and historically inauthentic, in *Waverley*’ (Duncan, p.7). This event shows the way in which Scott, among others, effectively transposed the idea of Scottish identity into a fictional, Romantic dialogue which could be safely re-packaged and presented to the British aristocracy. Drawing on the epistemological consequences of Hume’s theory, and combining this with his own ideological approach to nationhood, Scott recreates Scotland as a ‘fictional reality’ – a key feature within a larger process of national romanticization during the period. This presentation of Scotland is again a powerful example of Scott’s ‘polemic of the aesthetic’ on Scottish nationhood – powerfully shifting this discourse into a romanticized sphere.

Duncan’s study also paints a detailed and illuminating portrait of the literary scene in and around Edinburgh during our period. He explores the complex network of reviews and publishers which made up the literary community of the city. Edinburgh is shown as supporting a dynamic society of intellectuals involved in heated and influential ideological debate. With literary institutions such as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood’s*, Edinburgh was in many ways, albeit briefly, the central focus of the English-speaking literary

world: 'Scotch novels and Scotch reviewers were the most brilliant constellations in a northern literary galaxy which included – besides the historical romance and critical quarterly – a professionalized intellectual class, the entrepreneurial publisher, the nationalist ballad epic, and the monthly magazine' (Duncan, p.20). Edinburgh's role as the 'Modern Athens' (Duncan, p.14) displays the intellectual flowering in Scotland at this time, yet is also symptomatic of the romanticization of Scotland as a locale: 'Edinburgh's title to Athenian Glory was a topic of lively controversy. Descriptions and illustrations of "picturesque Edinburgh" formed an aesthetic hinge for the turn from a "Classical" to a "Romantic" city, secured by the accession of a sublime vocabulary' (Duncan, p.14). Duncan shows how Edinburgh became seen as a 'romantic' locale during our period. This shines through in civic architecture, tourism and literature. However, Edinburgh's role as a site of 'romantic reality' reflects Scotland's complex identity merging reality and fiction. This romanticization of Edinburgh is symptomatic of the broader experience of Scotland. Thanks to Macpherson, Scott, and others, the Highlands in particular became a prime Romantic locale for literature. The development of British attitudes towards the Highlands, from the suggestions of primitive brutality in Samuel Johnson's *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* in 1775, to the rugged and chivalrous Mac-Ivors in the hugely popular *Waverley* in 1814, is an intriguing topic.<sup>18</sup> However, as this study explores, this romanticization of Scotland, as both a nation and a locality, forms an ideological strand during the period which can be seen in direct, aggressive dialogue with a number of opposing forces.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland*, in *Travel Writing: 1700-1830*, eds. Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.149-163.

#### IV

Though the primary focus within this study is on Scottish writing, it is useful to contextualise that material within a wider British setting, recognizing the inevitable interrelations between conceptualized national traditions. This should allow some of the particularities of the Scottish material to be effectively identified. As a result of literary critical trends, English Romantic writing has (relatively recently) come to predominate in setting the literary benchmark for our period. Pittock identifies in detail the stark decline in critical studies of Burns during the Twentieth century (Pittock, p.144-147). In an English context, the construction of the core canon of six poets (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley) can be explained on a basic level as primarily an ideological phenomenon, with a strong critical emphasis on imaginative subjectivity naturally focussing study around a narrow selection of poets who display certain characteristics.<sup>19</sup> However, the exclusion of Scottish figures from this central Romantic canon, in particular Burns, appears to present a further issue. Pittock hints at the possibility of a hierarchical system regarding language and locality which acted during the twentieth century towards British cultural unification in the face of imperial decline (Pittock, p.164). However, in respect of the predominant importance of English writing to modern critical practice – a feature of Romantic studies which may finally be changing in a meaningful way – addressing a selection of this material should help in placing the study of Scottish

---

<sup>19</sup> Although, of course, there are a number of other English poets who display these same characteristics. See the footnote to p.6 for the working definition of 'ideological' being used here.

Romanticism's peculiarities within the context of some key historical Romantic literary-critical debates.<sup>20</sup>

In attempting to briefly summarise some aspects of one key Romantic aesthetic/polemical dynamic which can be effectively elucidated through central English writers, it seems appropriate to begin with a focus on Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As such a major figure in English Romanticism, his own intellectual and political development can be seen as representing some of the key developments in the wider literary period. With his increasingly conservative politics acting to qualify, if not reject, an earlier radicalism; and arguably a development towards a theoretical severance of aesthetics from direct polemical engagement; Coleridge's role is consistently central to one mainstream critical narrative of Romanticism.<sup>21</sup> His aesthetic theories are seen in many ways as a central ideological structure of Romanticism, not least his notions of the imagination and 'organic' form. In his *Associationism and the Literary Imagination* Craig describes the perceived importance of Coleridge's intellectual progression beyond eighteenth-century associationist aesthetics to the critical developmental view of Romanticism:<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> The publication of *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) marks an important milestone in the ongoing attempt to diversify the Romantic studies field.

<sup>21</sup> William Christie's article on 'Romanticism' states that 'For most literary scholars, S. T. Coleridge is effectively – though unwittingly – *the* spokesman for English Romantic theory', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.682.

<sup>22</sup> Although it should be noted that Craig argues at length that Coleridge's theories largely fail to expand effectively upon associationist aesthetics. See Cairns Craig, *Associationism and the Literary Imagination: From the Phantasmal Chaos* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.41-83.

Many versions of the development of romanticism in Britain take as its decisive turning point Coleridge's account, in *Biographia Literaria*, of how he put behind him the associationist psychology of Hartley, declaring it inadequate to explain the creative power of the mind. (Craig, *Associationism*, p.42)

Coleridge's incorporation of German philosophy – primarily through Kant and Schelling – to his theoretical structures is an important feature of what has become seen as a central Romantic idiom. This has major implications for a particular Romantic aesthetic/polemical dynamic, with Coleridge's conception of the transcendental imagination impacting on literature's perceived relationship to political and social debate. Coleridge's summarization of his theory of the imagination in Chapter Thirteen of the *Biographia Literaria* provides us with what is often seen as the crux of his thought on this subject:

The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.<sup>23</sup>

This famous passage raises many questions which criticism has grappled with since its publication. However, for the purposes of this study, the notion that the imagination is a direct link to a higher creative consciousness, 'the infinite I AM', is key. Coleridge's secondary imagination provides the active creative will with a direct relationship to the original act of creation, represented through the 'esemplastic power' (*Biographia*, p.295) of the imagination in its agency 'to

---

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.304.

idealize and to unify' – as opposed to the 'fancy' which merely orders 'fixities and definites' (*Biographia*, p.305) provided by the memory. Imagination provides human consciousness with a means for transcending an everyday worldview, and therefore (arguably) the creative imagination implicitly does so – though this 'transcendence' does not necessarily imply an evasion as much as a transformation of reality. This clearly raises an important question over the role of imagination, and consequently literature, in politics and social debate. Craig neatly states the role of this conception of the imagination: 'In the Kantian-Coleridgean conception, the imagination is the means by which we can gain insight into those transcendental truths that lie beyond the limits of our ordinary experience' (Craig, *Associationism*, pp.54-55). This definition of the creative imagination, a faculty providing knowledge only available *beyond* the scope of 'ordinary experience', thus has an interesting role as regards 'ordinary experience' itself. As I will argue with regards to Shelley's aesthetic theories, the implications of a transcendental conception of the imagination can provide a means for affecting the social and political world in an indirect but powerful way, yet Coleridge's conception seems to move less in this direction. Coleridge presents Shakespeare as his primary example of the transcendental imagination at work through his theorization of 'organic' form. The link Coleridge cites above between the human creative imagination and an 'eternal' creative force is reflected in describing Shakespeare's genius as 'a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.'<sup>24</sup> In this light Coleridge's conception of the imagination

---

<sup>24</sup> *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare: A Selection of the Essays, Notes and Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the Poems and Plays of Shakespeare*, ed.

could perhaps serve a directly polemical role in its 'directing' of 'implicit wisdom', yet there remains the underlying sense of a fundamental disconnection from the social world, with this 'wisdom' operating in a sphere 'deeper than consciousness'.

Craig presents Coleridge as developing his theory of the imagination as in some degree a support to his increasingly conservative politics, rejecting purely associational aesthetics as undermining important forms of hierarchy:

For Coleridge it was precisely the levelling effects of association which had to be overcome by a conception of the imagination – surmounting as it does the workings of fancy – which would reintroduce a psychological and aesthetic hierarchy that mirrored the social hierarchy to which his later politics were committed. (Craig, *Associationism*, p.63)

This attempt by Coleridge to re-establish a hierarchical philosophy can be seen in the *Biographia Literaria* as a direct response to a perceived radical refutation of innate psychological (and consequently philosophical, social, and religious) structures implicit in Enlightenment theories of associationism. David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* can be read as narrating the dissipation of a concrete personal individuality in the face of a purely associational theory - providing an example of a problem which transcendental philosophy can appear to remedy:<sup>25</sup> 'When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist.'<sup>26</sup> This philosophical speculation is representative of a danger cited by Coleridge in associationism (Hartley in this case) – the reduction of the self to merely a 'blind mechanism'

---

Terence Hawkes (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p.68.

<sup>25</sup> Craig argues that within the *Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume himself 'solves' this metaphysical problem by a turn to social interaction (Craig, *Associationism*, p18).

<sup>26</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.165.

(*Biographia*, p.116). Coleridge's conception of the imagination can then be seen as a conservative reaction to ideologies which potentially undermine political, social, religious, and aesthetic hierarchy.<sup>27</sup>

Crucially, as has been touched upon, Coleridge's theories move towards a disconnection of aesthetics from political and social agency. Nigel Leask states that 'the efficacy (and historical durability) of what I term Coleridge's "Promethean" theory of culture lay in its appeal to disinterestedness, its claim to political impotence and its transcendence of the realms of rhetoric and ideological coercion'.<sup>28</sup> Leask presents the remaining influence of this separation of imagination from politics on modern attitudes towards creative production: 'The high value which our culture places upon Imagination has been contingent upon its separation [...] from worldly interest' (Leask, *Politics*, pp.1-2). Leask argues that in separating aesthetics from politics, Coleridge creates a domain for the preservation of his earlier egalitarian theory of the 'One Life', while conservatively refusing this radical system a role in political reality: 'He sought [...] to preserve the cultural authority of the "One Life" in an inviolable sphere of culture, defined now in opposition to the political world as such' (Leask, *Politics*, p.5). This important ideology of 'transcendent aesthetics' sees Coleridge 'disarming' the radicalism of his earlier thought by transferring it into an aesthetic cultural sphere. This process has important analogues with the simultaneous romanticization and de-politicization of Scottish national identity

---

<sup>27</sup> This dynamic is often cited as part of a wider backlash against Enlightenment thought in the 1790s, as this philosophy became identified with the violent events unfolding in France. See Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Enlightenment', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp.299-311, (p.307).

<sup>28</sup> Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p.5.

that this study explores. If Coleridge's theorization of the imagination in *Biographia Literaria* can be cited as one central ideological foundation in Romanticism, then this is indicative of a separation of aesthetics from direct social and political engagement. Peter Otto presents the typicality of this dynamic: '[the] juxtaposition of aesthetics with questions of subjectivity and politics is characteristic of literary theory in our period'.<sup>29</sup> However, it is debatable whether this transcendent conception of the aesthetics verges on wholeheartedly apolitical – if indeed such a position is possible – or is merely powerfully conservative.

John Keats is also a central figure in the modern critical view of Romanticism. As a result of his importance to much of this criticism, a brief engagement with his work should help in allowing this study to draw on central critical foci.<sup>30</sup> However, besides his importance to mainstream critical practice, Keats's particular ideological approach, and his in-depth theorizations, make his work a highly appropriate focus for this attempt to address an element of an important Romantic aesthetic/polemical dynamic.

The canonical English Romantic poets are often, perhaps too neatly, labeled as displaying various forms of escapism in their poetry. This idea is often then linked socio-culturally to political and ideological disenchantment experienced by radicals during this period, with events in Revolutionary France

---

<sup>29</sup> Peter Otto, 'Literary Theory', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp.378-385, (p.378).

<sup>30</sup> Though this study cannot explore it in detail, Keats's theorization of the imagination in his letters reinforces the divine nature of English Romantic creativity. In particular Keats's notion of 'Adam's dream' interacts with Coleridge's theory, presenting a 'productive rather than merely reproductive faculty' of the imagination. See Peter Otto's article on 'Imagination' in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, p.553.

and the social fallout of industrializing Europe cited as key factors. Jerome

McGann touches upon this idea in his seminal study, *The Romantic Ideology*:

Shelley's idealism, Byron's sensationalism, and Keats's aesthetic poetry are all displaced yet fundamental vehicles of cultural analysis and critique: a poetry of extremity and escapism which is the reflex of the circumstances in which their work, their lives, and their culture were all forced to develop. (McGann, *Romantic Ideology*, p.117)

McGann develops this idea regarding Keats's 'aesthetic poetry' in his essay 'Poetry'.<sup>31</sup> Alongside the traditional view of Keats as a poet with a rich, often erotic texture to his work, McGann presents him as operating in a poetic space of absolute aestheticism, where 'descriptions are driven by desire and structured as an order of pure language' (McGann, 'Poetry', p.276). This idea in one sense verges on the formulation of poetry given by Jean-Paul Sartre in his thesis from *Literature and Existentialism*. Sartre presents poets as using words in an essentially different manner from their primary role in language as signifiers: 'the poetic attitude, which considers words as things and not as signs'.<sup>32</sup> This notion of 'words as things', or McGann's 'pure language', implies poetry verging on the condition of visual art, the absolute aesthetic. Importantly, for Sartre, this condition of poetry is linked to a clear disconnection from polemical discourse:

How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out? (Sartre, p.19)

---

<sup>31</sup> Jerome J. McGann, 'Poetry', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp.270-279.

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1994), p.12.

Sartre's conception of poetry as inherently non-polemical is a theory which this study absolutely refutes; however, this notion of pure aestheticism does have important implications for one reading of Keats. McGann continues his argument, stating that 'What he [Keats] wants to display is not an objective order but the power of art to mount an independent world in the sphere of pure language' (McGann, 'Poetry', p.276). Indeed, Keats himself enunciates a fundamental detachment from society which he feels his poetical practice enacts: 'The faint conception I have of Poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead – All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs'.<sup>33</sup> Keats's self-representation here is a feature of what has become a major cultural trope surrounding the Romantic poet. The definition of 'Romanticism' found in *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature* states that 'The Romantic hero is either a solitary dreamer, or an egocentric plagued by guilt and remorse but, in either case, a figure who has kicked the world away from beneath his feet.'<sup>34</sup> This conventional definition reinforces this sense of detachment from worldly affairs which has become synonymous with certain features of Romanticism.

In his opening to his first major work, *Endymion*, Keats's characteristic poetic style is very much present. His very first line immediately imposes the focus on the aesthetic, and the aggrandisement of notions of the aesthetic which plays such a major role for much of his work:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never

---

<sup>33</sup> John Keats, 'To Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818', in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings, rev. John Mee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.147-149, (p.148).

<sup>34</sup> See 'Romanticism', in *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature*, ed. Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.851-852, (p.851).

Pass into nothingness.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout the poem Keats builds a topical framework based around notions of the aesthetic. The character Endymion appears to serve in many respects as an avatar for Keats himself in his poetic capacity, with his move into a world of pure imagination mirroring Keats's aestheticized poetic practice. Endymion abandons his royal role among 'his brothers of the mountain chase' (*Endymion*, I. 192) – we are told of 'his shepherd throne' (*Endymion*, II. 889) – in pursuit of what appears often to be a purely fantastical love. This appears as an intriguing example of a rejection of the practical world in favour of the imagination. Throughout the poem there are suggestions of Endymion's struggle between his active life and his fantasy centered around the moon goddess Cynthia. Endymion's love for the moon, which he is at times lucidly aware of as a fantasy – 'Yet it was but a dream' (*Endymion*, I. 574) – has become so overwhelming as to reduce him from his former glory as a sportsman and hunter:

I, who, for very sport of heart, would race  
 With my steed from Araby; pluck down  
 A vulture from his towery perching; frown  
 A lion into growling, loth retire-  
 To lose, at once, all my toil-breathing fire,  
 And sink thus low! (*Endymion*, I. 533-538)

This notion of complete, almost helpless indulgence in a fantasy is a powerful poetic image of absolute aestheticism. Keats's language in *Endymion* displays his characteristically rich poetical style. At times the imagery becomes almost saturated with exoticism:

---

<sup>35</sup> John Keats, *Endymion*, in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp.106-216, I. 1-3.

Poured into shapes of curtained canopies,  
 Spangled, and rich with liquid broideries  
 Of flowers, peacocks, swans, and naiads fair.  
 Swifter than lightning went these wonders rare. (*Endymion*, II. 618-621)

Through this powerfully descriptive language Keats creates the luxurious poetic voice which McGann sees as 'pure language'. The final lines of *Endymion* beautifully mirror the close of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: 'Peona went | Home through the wood in wonderment' (*Endymion*, IV. 1002-1003).<sup>36</sup> With this conclusion Keats's thematic focus on the aesthetic throughout the poem reaches its climax, emphasised by the literary reflectivity of the allusion to Milton. The character of Endymion finally evaporates into the air with Cynthia, leaving his sister Peona alone; and more significantly alone given the obvious allusion to Milton's Adam and Eve. Endymion finally completes his movement towards absolute indulgence in the aesthetic by leaving the world behind and physically disappearing into his fantasy.

Keats's famously summarises his ideological focus on the aesthetic in a far more elegant manner than perhaps any critical analysis can achieve: 'What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth.'<sup>37</sup> Keats's poetry operates around a highly complex ideological framework and stands as a powerful example of the Romantic aggrandisement of the aesthetic through its ideological formulations; its use of language; and its topical foci. The ideological structures of his work can in a certain light suggest a kind of pure aestheticism which is inherently removed from any polemical dialogue.

---

<sup>36</sup> 'They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow, | Through Eden took their solitary way.' John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), XII. 648-649.

<sup>37</sup> John Keats, 'To Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817' in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, pp.35-38, (p.36).

In Percy Bysshe Shelley, however, a conception of transcendent aesthetics is given an overtly radical political role. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, he makes some extremely interesting remarks regarding his ideological approach. For Shelley literature has a central role to play in a social and political revolution which he feels is imminent:

The great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring, or is about to be restored.<sup>38</sup>

To propose that great literature engages in, or at least influences, social and political debate is perhaps not a particularly radical position. Indeed, Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare provide an extensive contemporary viewpoint of the importance of literature to politics, sociology, morality and psychology.<sup>39</sup> However, for the focus of this study, the key feature of Shelley's view is that it is specifically through the aesthetic beauty of literature that it can achieve this agency. This is expanded on throughout Shelley's work, but is displayed in detail as he continues in his Preface:

It is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust. (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p.207)

---

<sup>38</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*', in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.229-232, (p.231).

<sup>39</sup> See *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare*.

For Shelley it is fundamentally important that poetry not be didactic in its role as a social and political tool. By presenting 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence' Shelley hopes that poetry can improve the reader to a point where social and political amelioration is possible. This argument of the power of art to enact social and political change in an *indirect* manner, through its presentation of aesthetic beauty and moral good, is fundamental to Shelley's ideological structure. McGann argues that in Shelley's poetry 'a poetic language of images aspires to the condition of music' (McGann, 'Poetry', p.277), suggesting a sense of this indirect, transcendent quality of the aesthetic in a manner which has clear analogues with the 'pure' aestheticism cited in Keats.

In what is seen as his major ideological manifesto, *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley makes a number of points which should be briefly touched upon regarding this issue. As in his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, again Shelley presents the power of poetry to bring about universal good through its impact on humanity:<sup>40</sup> 'The great instrument of moral good is the imagination: and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.'<sup>41</sup> Yet again he disdains directly didactic work, in this case as a result of the historical limits this necessarily imposes on the universality of creative expression: 'A Poet, therefore, would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither' (*A Defence*, p.682). This again presents the aesthetic features of poetry

---

<sup>40</sup> Shelley's definition of the term 'poetry' as encompassing all creative endeavour should be noted, though the focus here is on poetry in its conventional sense.

<sup>41</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, pp.674-701, (p.682).

as the agent through which it can effect reform. Shelley's dialectic opposition of 'poetry' against what he terms 'reason' is the most important theoretical dynamic of the *Defence*. As Shelley compares the relative importance of the social and moral philosophers of his day to the role of poets, he finds that poetry plays a far more indispensable role in social and political development – presenting the precedence of creative literature as a political and social agent (*A Defence*, pp.695-696). Through his focus on this practical agency of the aesthetic, Shelley presents the predominant role of the aesthetics of poetry as a tool for social and political reform. Fascinatingly, it is through the ability of the aesthetic beauty of poetry to *indirectly* communicate moral improvement, rather than any directly didactic role, that Shelley presents its practical agency (It should however be noted that Shelley's poetry often appears to transgress his own proposals in engaging directly with contemporary politics).

Taken together in this brief summary, these features of the work of Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, through varied and complex (and indeed only representing a particular segment of these writers' thought), begin to present a unified ideological vision. From Coleridge's theorization of the transcendental imagination; through Keats's 'absolute aestheticism'; to Shelley's distinctly indirect aesthetic notion of poetic agency; these writers presents a focus on imaginative subjectivity and a rejection of overtly polemical or didactic material. Both Coleridge's and Shelley's focus on aesthetics has a clear political direction, but there is a conscious attempt to remove poetry from what could be termed a 'degrading' involvement in open social and political debate, while Keats's work presents itself as operating in a highly self-reflexive domain of aesthetics. This

view of Romanticism presents literature as transcending historical time and place, therefore disconnecting it from active polemical engagement in a conventional sense. Literature *is* shown (overtly by Shelley) as playing an important, even primary, role in a polemical strategy; yet this is one which is fundamentally indirect, working through moral amelioration rather than rhetorical persuasion. Indeed, it can be argued that it is through the fundamental detachment of the imagination from worldly affairs that this literature claims its real polemical agency: as a universal, quasi-supernatural power. However, this notion of the personal, transcendent nature of literature – focussed on a ‘subjectivity [...] divorced from everyday experience’ (Otto, ‘Literary Theory’, pp.384-385) – is important to one critical view of English Romanticism, and consequently of British Romanticism as a whole. In many ways this is the characterisation of Romanticism which the ‘New Historicism’ has sought to debunk, or at least complicate, yet it remains influential, and serves a useful comparative purpose for this study. This view by no means does justice to the richness of this literature, and indeed fails to include a massive body of directly polemical creative output in this period. In particular critic James Chandler has explored in detail oppositional strands in English Romanticism which are openly and directly engaged with contemporary politics.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, this view of literature is one which is arguably a practical impossibility given the inevitably historical nature of art, and indeed taking the line of the ‘New Historicist’ critical school, this apolitical, ahistorical theorization must itself be seen as a product of a particular historical moment. Yet as has

---

<sup>42</sup> See James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

been seen, regardless of the degree to which such theorizations are seen as practicable in modern critical practice, the important strain in Romanticism which self-theorizes along these lines cannot be ignored. This partial conception of one Romantic ideology – with a focus on the aggrandisement of the aesthetic, the notion of a transcendent aesthetics and an apparent desire to remove literature from the dirty-work of everyday politics provides an interesting model. As the proceeding chapters will explore, features of Scottish Romanticism can be seen operating around similar ideological positions, both employing and subverting them in a significant manner.

Chapter One – ‘Scotland: Enlightened Fictions and the Romantic Nation’

I

Scottish Romantic writing can only be fully understood as the product of a variety of highly complex social, political, and aesthetic relationships. Indeed, this writing is almost never even neatly Scottish or ‘Romantic’ in a straightforward manner. Following the Union of 1707 Scotland was itself a complicated idea; with a dualistic identity reflecting the uncomfortable relations of a strong national tradition with an absence of political independence. The question of Scotland’s political identity was given a further pressing immediacy by the Jacobite Uprising of 1745. This political uncertainty is surely reflected in the rich vein of literature engaging with notions of national identity which emerges during the long eighteenth century. Scottish writing of this period presents a unique polemical voice which this chapter will begin to address.

Scottish Romanticism deals with the relationship between literary aesthetics and polemical material in complex and often subtle ways. The ‘transcendent aesthetic’ which has been identified as a key feature of one particular Romantic ideology – with literature seen to transcend the realm of direct political and social engagement – can be found operating in some respects in this Scottish literature. Indeed, the Scottish model can be seen in some regards as mobilizing a similar ideology of aesthetic transcendence to remove the notion of Scottish national identity into a romanticized, apolitical and ahistorical domain. As we will see, certain elements in Scottish Romanticism attempt to remove Scotland from a position of immediate political antagonism

through the 'transcendent' role the nation gains as an object of Romantic aesthetic value – a process here termed as a 'polemic of the aesthetic'. In the context of a political transition towards nineteenth-century Britain the role of cultural discourse in the shaping of social and national identities is extremely important. This chapter, in part, explores this process of national romanticization; a dynamic with contrasting potential roles as either a form of cultural defence against British hegemony, or a kind of political 'disarming' towards a more comfortable accommodation into the British political model. This 'polemic of the aesthetic', however, operates both alongside and in opposition to an aggressive strain in Scottish Romanticism which seems to reject the notion of aesthetic transcendence, presenting a strong focus on locality, contemporary politics and social specificity. The role of this material within the canon is a pertinent issue, operating in a manner quite different from key conceptions of Romanticism, yet perhaps also importantly 'Romantic' in its ideological approach.

Crucially for Scottish literary history, the Scottish Romantic movement emerges in dialogue with the Scottish Enlightenment, both ideologically and temporally. As the introduction to *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* points out, the Scottish literary-developmental narrative fails to comply with a standardized English model, perhaps a key feature in explaining why this writing can comparatively appear so nonconformist:

This Scottish literary history describes models of continuity, change, and disjunction quite different from the English model to which it has been subordinated. Against that English model, Scotland could only loom as an intermittent, shadowy anachronism, a temporal as well a spatial border of Romanticism. In Scotland, 'Classical' and 'Romantic' cultural forms

occupy the same historical moment and institutional base, rather than defining successive stages or periods.<sup>43</sup>

Lacking the neat progressive development of Romanticism from Enlightenment ideology, (however debatable this also is for English literature) this excerpt suggests that Scottish Romanticism bucks the standardized trend and has therefore been resigned to a marginal role in mainstream criticism. Certainly Scottish Romanticism is involved in an intimate, and ongoing, reciprocal relationship with Enlightenment thought, and addressing some characteristics of this relationship can provide important insight into the literature under analysis.

As current criticism continues to explore the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on both British and European intellectual development, the enormous importance of this movement becomes ever clearer.<sup>44</sup> However, for the purposes of this study, the role of language and linguistics in Enlightenment theory is key. Susan Manning identifies the intimate connection between the structure and usage of language, and Enlightenment philosophy (Manning, p.12). This focus goes some way to explaining the strong Enlightenment focus on the role of literature, with major figures such as Hugh Blair among the first to address literature in a manner resembling modern criticism.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Blair's lectures were influential on many Romantic writers, providing a strong example of the immediacy between Enlightenment thought and Romanticism.<sup>46</sup> However,

---

<sup>43</sup> Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorenson, Introduction to *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, eds. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.3.

<sup>44</sup> For a summary of some key aspects of the Enlightenment, both in Scotland and more generally in Britain, see Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Enlightenment', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp.299-311.

<sup>45</sup> See Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London: Baynes, 1824).

<sup>46</sup> See Liam McIlvanney, 'Hugh Blair, Robert Burns, and the Invention of Scottish Literature', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 29, II (Spring, 2005), pp.25-46, (p.31).

in the specific case of the Scottish Enlightenment, the issue of language has a further level of complexity, seen in the desire among Enlightenment thinkers to de-localize their own spoken and written language towards a standardized English model. Susan Manning addresses this issue in *Fragments of Union*:

To put it crudely, these 'North Britons' (as they came to be called) were identifiable, and identified, by their distinctive non-English use of the language: in inflection, in 'Scotticisms' (locally-specific words), and in embedded syntactical differences. They all went to great lengths to remove the linguistic evidence of their pre-Union national origins from the surface of their writing, but there was always a danger that traces of their personal and national origins lurked, resistant, like a virus in the deep structures of their language-use, a form of self-definition that refused to be tamed to conscious homogenising purposes of national or individual self-construction. (Manning, p.20)

Manning refers to the aspiration towards linguistic standardization exemplified by the Scottish Enlightenment, but also identifies the residual 'Scottishness' in their very use of language, presenting this linguistic particularity as a form of national identity which refuses to succumb completely to British cultural assimilation. This can be seen as a subtle, inadvertent form of Scottish national cultural defence through language, a defence which is expanded on throughout this study.

For Robert Crawford the drive among the eighteenth-century Scottish literati towards linguistic Anglicization goes hand-in-hand with the *Scottish* invention of the modern university subject 'English Literature' – citing, among other issues, the important economic motivation behind these Scots' desire for inclusion within a linguistically-standardized state (Crawford, pp.16-44). However, as Crawford identifies, this was in an important way a means towards furthering a specifically Scottish interest within a British state, and indeed it is overly simplistic to assume that Scottish Enlightenment figures *purely* aspired to

complete 'Britishness' either linguistically or culturally. As Martin Fitzpatrick identifies, this movement displays a strong sense of its Scottish location:

Yet if the Scots aspired to be British, and especially to purge their language of the stigma of provinciality by eliminating 'Scoticisms', they were also proud to be Scottish. Enlightened accounts of cosmopolitanism drew on the classical notion of spreading circles of affections so that true citizens of the world would necessarily retain strong affections for their own community. (Fitzpatrick, p.300)

The dynamic which Fitzpatrick identifies, with Scottish Enlightenment figures defining themselves primarily *as Scottish*, but Scottish within a British context, is one which has important implications for Scottish literature. The tension surrounding what it could mean to be Scottish in the political context of 'North Britain', and whether this identity *could* be subsumed within a British 'hierarchy of affiliation' is explored in detail by literature of the period.

Susan Manning traces a dynamic involving the notions of union and fragmentation which she reads as implicit within Scottish Enlightenment writing and Scottish literature, as a result of an overwhelming, perhaps at times subconscious, politically-inspired cultural focus on these notions. For Manning, Hume in particular develops a dialogue strongly focussed around this tension, displayed both linguistically and ideologically:

There is, then – to put it no more strongly – an embedded political analogy within the vocabulary of union and fragmentation which structures the expression of Hume's ideas about personal identity. I will go on to argue, further, that from a literary point of view the laws of association which underpin his 'system' are predicated on grammatical and syntactic relationships as much as philosophical principles. Hume's influential version of the nature of human experience emerges from the *Treatise's* dynamic play between political, epistemological and grammatical frames of reference. (Manning, pp.34-35)

For this study, however, it is the implications of Manning's identification of this tension between union and fragmentation in the Enlightenment project of stadal

historiography which are most pertinent.<sup>47</sup> Manning reads Hume's influential *History of England* as displaying a desire towards union on a basic programmatic level: 'Literally "telling a single story", Union is a principle of historiographic composition in response to political events' (Manning, p.46).<sup>48</sup> For Manning, Scottish Enlightenment theory displays a desire for union on multiple levels. Yet the difficulties these literati encounter in attempting to eradicate their linguistic 'otherness' have an equivalent which plagues the project of stadial historiography, and the desire for union (in various forms) which it represents. This developmental theory is seen as in constant tension with a resurgent fragmenting oppositional force: 'In these sophisticated fictions of development, the process of personal consciousness and the aggregation of nationhood remain mutually in play' (Manning, p.64).

This notion of a fragmenting cultural force operating in the context of a politically incorporated 'North Britain' is addressed insightfully by Cairns Craig. As discussed in the introduction, Craig presents Scottish literature as presenting the relationship between standardized historical narrative and what it fails to include. This results, for Craig, in a strong strain in Scottish literature which

---

<sup>47</sup> This theory of stadial history was developed by a number of important Enlightenment theorists, perhaps most notably William Robertson in his *The History of Scotland during the reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI till his accession to the crown of England: with a review of the Scottish History previous to that period*, 2 vols (London: Jones, 1827). It posits that all societies go through the same discrete developmental stages from barbarism through to a commercial modernity, a concept which understandably had dramatic consequences when applied to the contemporary world, allowing the Highlands, for example, to be seen as developmentally backward and requiring to be 'civilized'. The application of this theory normalized the cementing of British political hegemony as a developmental inevitability.

<sup>48</sup> David Hume, *The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983).

refuses to accept the historical elision enacted by stadial theory, and disrupts the conventional historical narrative. Indeed, arguably the project of stadial historiography itself inherently invokes the material it seeks to reject by constantly having to narrate a development *from* these supposedly more primal cultural states. Craig's analysis of Scotland as 'out of history' identifies the nation as providing the ideological and cultural circumstances for a particular tension between historical and cultural authority in Scottish literature. For Craig, if Scotland 'became the place of romance', this consequently created a bizarre, shadowy cultural situation in which 'history encountered those forces which could not be made to submit to historical amelioration' (Craig, *Out of History*, p.44). This sense of the problems encountered by stadial theory in Scottish literature, if not its failure – alongside work which rejects this project outright – forms a key feature of Scottish Romanticism.

Before beginning to address these theoretical structures directly in the context of literary works, it is worth briefly expanding on the relationship between Enlightenment thought and Romanticism in Scotland, partially displayed in the Edinburgh literary scene by the dynamic interplay between the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The relationship between these two periodicals can be read as exemplifying the divide between Enlightenment rationality and what became a central Scottish Romantic idiom. Indeed, *Blackwood's* can be credited with instituting much of the ideological framework which both supports and possibly obscures Scottish Romanticism. As Ian Duncan comments:

*Blackwood's* momentous achievement was the construction of a 'Romantic ideology' to oppose the neo-Enlightenment liberalism of the

*Edinburgh Review*, which it denounced for Jacobin tendencies of skepticism and materialism. *Blackwood's* equipped Tory politics with a counter-Enlightenment aesthetic ideology of cultural nationalism shaped by the magazine's innovative mixture of literary forms and discourses, among them fiction. (Duncan, p.27)

The Blackwoodian style – characteristically merging truth and fiction, literary forms, and playfully toying with reader expectations – became a central part of a Scottish Romantic idiom. The direct influence of *Blackwood's* on Scottish literary production is best represented by Hogg's intimate relationship with the magazine, as is touched upon in Chapter Two. Contrasting against the relatively detached rational approach of the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's* presented a distinctly 'Romantic' ideology, with a strong focus on subjectivity and aesthetics. As Duncan analyses, this focus fed into a redefinition of epistemological hierarchies, inspired by German philosophy, to place more importance on issues of aesthetics as determinants of cultural, social and political value:

The very first number of Blackwood's *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* [...] featured a series of articles ('On the Sculpture of the Greeks,' 'On Greek Tragedy') that rehearse a Schillerian argument for substituting aesthetics for politics as the modern discipline of national virtue. (Duncan, p.56)

This process, enacted by major figures such as John Gibson Lockhart, drew on European examples to assert an aesthetically-driven ideology against Enlightened rational scepticism. This led particularly into a focus on cultural nationalism:

Lockhart found an answer in the cultural nationalism promoted in Germany by Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel argued at the beginning of his *History of Literature* that the transformation of literary culture at the end of the eighteenth century brought the recovery of an integrated national character out of the abyss of skepticism opened by the philosophical reasoning of Hume, Rousseau, and Voltaire. (Duncan, p.57)

Through this focus, *Blackwood's* also played a major role in the romanticization of Scotland with which this study is partly concerned. In its promotion of the

aesthetic into a newly important role in the public sphere, this dynamic arguably paves the way for the de-politicization of nationalism through its rendering as primarily a form of 'Romantic' aesthetic issue – a process at the heart of the present study's investigation. John Gibson Lockhart's work (a key figure at *Blackwood's*) can be seen as simultaneously the ideological support and critical justification for this project of romanticization – which is typified by Scott's *Waverley*. Lockhart's apotheosis of Scott both justified the importance of his fiction, and helped to normalize the cultural project it enacts, thereby aiding the potency of Scott's 'polemic of the aesthetic' as a culturally defining manoeuvre.<sup>49</sup>

## II

Turning to *Waverley* itself, this novel plays a central role in the process of cultural romanticization under analysis. For Robert Crawford Scott's ideological drive in the work is in 'attempting to ensure and articulate Scotland's distinctive place in Britain' (Crawford, p.15). Yet on a political level it remains debatable whether this process served primarily to aid British consolidation through a cultural 'disarming' of what can be considered still a highly volatile political situation given the recent memory of 1745; or served to rescue a Scottish cultural 'altermentality' (to borrow Pittcock's terminology) within the British imperial structure. The story of *Waverley's* romanticizing of Scottish culture through its treatment of Jacobitism is now a well-documented dynamic in

---

<sup>49</sup> Francis R. Hart describes Lockhart's tone as Scott's biographer as 'closer to the elegiac than the judicial. It is the tone of the lone survivor, the last of the retainers'. See Francis R. Hart, *Lockhart as Romantic Biographer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), p.252.

modern criticism; however, surveying some key aspects of this will aid this study's theoretical aim.

Pittock identifies the central ideological dynamic at the heart of the novel:

In making Jacobitism both a synecdoche for old Scottish patriotism and also emasculating its politics through association with 'childlike [...] loyalties, resentment, and violence' with no rational goal, Scott adopts Jacobite rhetoric as a flavour of old romance while divorcing that rhetoric very firmly from reality. Jacobitism is a childhood story, Britishness is a matter of adult responsibility. (Pittock, p.187)

Through this central infantilization of Jacobitism, Scott (certainly on the surface) romanticizes the Jacobites as the final remnant of a dying Scottish past which should therefore be celebrated, but consigned to history. Jacobitism is a glorious memory, but nothing more; especially not a potential political reality. Scott's rich narrative technique in *Waverley* is littered with textual examples to back up the theory presented by Pittock. Scott aligns Romance, the Jacobites, childhood, and fantasy, over and over again throughout the novel, with this feature becoming arguably the central theme in what is essentially a coming-of-age Bildungsroman (though perhaps for nation as much as protagonist). Edward's youthful infatuation with Romance sets the scene for his fantastical adventure with the Jacobites, the propensity in his character for imaginative indulgence making him a prime candidate for getting carried away by the intoxicating (yet clearly both immature and unworkable) Jacobite cause:

Through these scenes it was that Edward loved to 'chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancy,' and, like a child amongst his toys, culled and arranged, from the splendid yet useless imagery and emblems with which his imagination was stored, visions as brilliant and as fading as those of an evening sky. (*Waverley*, p.18)

Edward, the 'child among his toys' is caught up in the 'romantic' hysteria of the '45, but ultimately matures into his role as a British subject. The connection

between Romance and politics is asserted early on when Scott indicates that Edward's analysis of political factions is based upon his reading of French

Romance:

The splendid pages of Froissart, with his heart-stirring and eye-dazzling descriptions of war and of tournaments, were among his chief favourites; and from those of Brantome and De la Noue he learned to compare the wild and loose, yet superstitious character of the nobles of the League, with the stern, rigid, and sometimes turbulent disposition of the Huguenot party. (*Waverley*, p.14)

This 'romantic' understanding of politics leads to Edward's actions in the Uprising, prefiguring his more mature and moderate mindset at the end of the novel. The failure of the '45 is presented by Scott as an inevitability in a number of ways simultaneously. He draws on the dramatic tropes of tragedy through the figure of Fergus MacIvor, whose fiery and archaic temperament dooms him to the role of tragic protagonist in Scottean Romance.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Enlightenment stadial theory pervades throughout the novel: in the alignment of Jacobitism with Romance, and therefore Edward's youth, Edward's personal development spells disaster for the cause – signalling Scotland's own maturation; while the inevitability of this national maturation into the next developmental stage as a comfortable part of modern Britain is emphasised throughout. As Flora MacIvor states on the defeat of the Jacobites, 'it was impossible it could end otherwise than thus' (*Waverley*, p.323). Her words certainly ring with more than simply a sense of tragic despondency, alerting us to an underlying ideological framework of stadial inevitability. This process of maturation is completed by the famous painting scene, in which Edward's

---

<sup>50</sup> Edgar Ravenswood is another strong example of this character type in Scott's fiction. See Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, ed. Fiona Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

adventures are immortalised in a portrait of Fergus and himself. This image perfectly encapsulates the wider project of the novel – Scott’s construction of a ‘polemic of the aesthetic’ – with the romanticization of history resulting in its comfortable incorporation in a British present. Apparently divested of its political agency through its artistic immortalization, the Jacobite Uprising can now be observed from a comfortable, and rational, aesthetic distance: ‘Beside this painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was generally admired’ (*Waverley*, p.338). Even Edward’s weapons themselves, in active use merely pages earlier, are now resigned to the status of cultural artefacts, to be ‘generally admired’. The Uprising was ‘unfortunate’, but luckily only a blip on the developmental British map, and one now to be appreciated from a detached aesthetic perspective.

The latter stages of the novel are famously notable for passing over the massacre at Culloden, perhaps in an attempt to more smoothly achieve the novel’s narrative goals. This omission is returned to in the analysis of Hogg’s *The Three Perils of Women*, which in part responds directly to this. Interestingly, Pittock suggests that the differing status of fiction from other genres in the period contributed to make this feature of *Waverley*, arguably the most overt example of imperial apologetic in Scott’s novel, less openly contentious:

The muffling of Culloden in *Waverley* (1814) was (at least at the time) less controversial, perhaps because poetry and the role of the bard had developed much further in Scotland than had prose fiction towards a literature of national self-definition, altermentality, resistance, and combat, and so the wholesale importation of British sentiment into it offended more than in the novel. (Pittock, p.188)

The question of genre is clearly an important one on the subject of literature engaging in questions of national identity, and the relative roles of poetry and

prose are more directly discussed in the forthcoming chapters on Burns and Hogg. However, Scott's use of the Bildungsroman, itself a developmental fiction, clearly aids the ideological elements of his narrative which engage with stadial theory. In this sense even the generic expectations of the novel underpin Scott's apparent ideological aims.

Through this process of romanticization Scott can appear to mirror the Coleridgean ideology of transcendent aesthetics in an intriguing way, using a perceived separation of aesthetics from direct social or political engagement to remove a notion of Scottish nationhood from a genuine political battlefield. In short, mobilizing an ideology which dictates that art transcends the social and political world – or at least only influences it in a distinctly indirect manner – then by making Scottish national history an object of Romantic art, by 'romanticizing' it, Scott moves the idea of Scottish nationhood into an apparently apolitical domain. This works hand-in-hand with the infantilization of Jacobitism Scott achieves through his stadial-developmental narrative. Scotland is disarmed as a disruptive political force both through the process of romanticization and by having its political agency consigned to the irretrievable domain of an earlier developmental period. Having summarised this in brief, it is now appropriate to identify some of the considerable ways in which this simplistic reading is complicated and undermined.

The efficacy of this de-politicizing narrative in *Waverley* (and consequently the implications this has for the role of both Scottish history and national identity) is called into question by a number of features implicit within

the novel itself. Pittock identifies the differing reception of Scott's work outside Britain, and the manner in which he was therefore regarded:

Scott presents the spectacle of a literature of combat repressed by the very historiography used to display it; but remove that historiography from its British context, and his European readers saw in him the most intensely political Anglophone writer of his age. (Pittock, pp.189-190)

It is a significant observation that, taken out of the immediate context of its British reception, *Waverley's* apparent imperial apologetic strain lost its cultural currency, leaving the romanticization of Jacobitism as a raw political statement for Scott's European readership. Lacking the insight into the social, cultural and political subtleties which dictate the ideological framework of Scott's novel, in this foreign context *Waverley* became a powerfully radical celebration of political opposition. This reading certainly has no less validity in a critical context, though the imperial apologetic can be hard to ignore in light of a domestic viewpoint. Indeed, it should be remembered that *Waverley* does celebrate, at least to some degree, an oppositional politics which had directly threatened the existing power structure within living memory of the novel's publication; a dynamic which is certainly radical when viewed in isolation. However, the fact that Scott's novel morphed ideologically in this manner when read in a foreign context is testament to the complexity and tension surrounding its political dynamic, and an interesting manner in which its apparent ideological project is problematized.

Pittock also highlights the potentially problematic role Scott's use of language serves in the novel:

Thus in his fiction Scott's use of language breaks into paradoxes spared from his poetry: in its dialogues and hybridities, it moves far beyond his

earlier literary strategies to a world where what is being said is both confirmed and challenged by the manner of saying it [...] The dialogic presence of Scots is unruly beyond the limits assigned by the text or colligated for the employment of its historical basis. (Pittock, p.202)

For Pittock the political implications of the Scots language – perhaps the ultimate expression of an ‘altermentality’ – are too powerful to succumb to the ideological direction of the text. In this light the use of Scots in *Waverley* can be seen as creating a political mood, an assertion of cultural ‘otherness’ which escapes Scott’s authorial control, moving into a realm of cultural signification over which he has no grip. Whether or not Scott truly intends *Waverley* as a piece of British developmental propaganda, or a more straight-forward celebration of Scottish cultural heritage, the presence of modes of expression which are immediately and historically entwined with a distinct Scottish national identity reaches beyond the ideological focus of the text, touching a deeper political note. At the risk of overstating the point: using languages which belong to a stateless nation subsumed within a culturally-homogenizing empire carries a political significance regardless of authorial intention.

Returning to the often-cited portrait scene, there is a complication to the ideological project implicit even within this apparently clear-cut visual metaphor. Clearly, on a simple level, the painting, while it may consign Jacobitism to the world of art and Romance, does also at least preserve this memory in some manner – a retaining of Scotland’s cultural heritage, if not a contemporary political assertion of national autonomy. More interestingly, though, as the portrait does in a sense lay the Scottish past to rest through its romanticization and commodification, simultaneously this process invokes – as does stadial theory itself – the disruptive nature of the abandoned past in *having*

to enact this process. As we saw in the introductory chapter, Cairns Craig reads Scott's entire canon as reaffirming the continued power of Scottish cultural heritage to disrupt the British developmental project, simply in the fact that it must repeat the act of burying this heritage over and over again (Craig, *Out of History*, p.70). In this sense the portrait in *Waverley* serves, by its very existence, as testament to the cultural resistance of Scottish national identity within a British state. This metaphorical 'framing' of Jacobitism is significant in displaying the ongoing power of a disruptive Scottish 'altermentality' which *must* be framed in order to be controlled. Therefore, by the very nature of what appears its ideological project, Scott's work asserts the radicalism of Scottish national culture, which, as Craig states, is constantly 'waiting to erupt back into the present and disrupt the progressive narrative of the historical' (Craig, *Out of History*, p.71). Interestingly, some of these ideological complexities in Scott's novel are displayed within the wider project of a Romantic ideology. The Romantic fascination with ruins, for example, exemplifies a focus on a human element in nature which is inherently past, or 'progressed from'. In Romantic literature and art this element is celebrated as picturesque, giving a colouring political significance to a landscape or locale, yet a political significance which is supposedly sterilised. However, the image of a ruin displays a disruptive human political element which, while it may be celebrated merely as a relic, nevertheless retains the implicit potential for ideological significance, the inherent possibility that it will escape the aesthetic frame. As is further explored Chapter Two, the Gothic narrates the more active disruptive power of this relic element, yet it is a role which this feature also serves less overtly in more traditionally Romantic art.

This brief exploration of the ideological significance of *Waverley*'s cultural project has identified some of the incongruities and complications created by the aesthetic and polemical dynamic within the text. Scott's national 'polemic of the aesthetic' is powerfully stated in this novel, leading towards the romanticized celebration of Scottish culture exemplified in Scott's 1822 pageant for George IV. Yet even within this work, Scottish national identity seems, to a degree, to refuse to be 'contained' in this manner. The ultimate political significance of such a potentially ideologically duplicitous text must be finally a subjective question, yet Scott's novel surely displays the complexities inherent in any attempt to approach the topic of Scottish national identity over the long eighteenth century.

### III

Moving on for the final section of this chapter to the novel-writing of John Galt, his work also displays some key features of an aesthetic/polemical dynamic operating within Scottish Romanticism. As Ian Duncan suggests, Galt presents his work in direct opposition to the form of fiction typified by Scott, making this sequential link between a focus on Scott to one on Galt particularly appropriate:

Galt sets his work apart from 'novels or romances,' in particular 'the historical novel,' by laying claim to an alternative discourse he calls 'theoretical history.' Reasserting the traditional antithesis between romance and history, Galt refuses to acknowledge the dialectical and deconstructive play between them in the *Waverley* novels, which are thus reduced to the inauthentic pole of romance. (Duncan, p.216)

Setting aside the question of whether Galt unfairly undersells the achievement of Scott's *Waverley* novels, it is crucial to our analysis of his work that he actively opposes his own literary endeavour to that of 'Romance', invoking a discourse of Enlightenment empiricism to justify the validity of his own work. This

'theoretical history' seeks to reject the fantastical and the 'romantic', focussing instead on a form of fictional realism firmly grounded in the everyday. This statement of intent by Galt serves as possibly the most explicit rejection in Scottish Romanticism of transcendent aesthetics. Galt's work instead draws on Enlightened notions of empirical analysis to engage directly with contemporary social and political developments. Indeed, in the context of this study, though he rarely (if at all) makes overtly polemical authorial comment, his work can at times be seen a highly polemical example of Scottish literature, in its refusal to gloss local social and political reality. His *Annals of the Parish* enacts a highly formal literary procedure, using a focus on a small Scottish parish to simultaneously depict changing manners, customs and the impact of globalization on a local scale, and implicitly the same developments on a national, even international scale. Over the course of the novel, the social, cultural and political world of Michael Balwhidder, the narrator, becomes increasingly redefined to incorporate a growing geographical focus. As Duncan states:

The historical process of modernization – the imperialist expansion of trade, industrial revolution – have changed the very terms of space and time by which locality is constituted [...] Province and world are inextricably enmeshed together in a total system, a 'great web' – the image stays close here to its source in the industrial work of weaving. The web is also the original figure of textuality (*textere*, 'to weave'), and thus of Galt's own project of representation: by means of an intense scrutiny of the local to register the patterns of a global process of change. (Duncan, p.228)

The project of *Annals of the Parish* is elegantly reflected in its narrative, focussed around the metaphorical image of expanding circles of influence. Galt's narrative uses this technique to approach its thematic foci, which deal in turn with this

idea itself. Locality is used by Galt in a different way from its employment in *Waverley*, in which Scottish localities become ideologically loaded political metaphors: 'The Highlands of Perthshire [...] frowned defiance over the more level country that lay beneath them' (*Waverley*, p.32). In contrast to Scott's approach, dividing Scotland geographically into politically-significant components, Galt uses locality as representative of a larger whole, simultaneously imposing the importance of local society to the wider picture, and presenting a kind of ubiquity among the individual components. This feature has clear correspondence with the Enlightenment concept of circles of influence, identified earlier by Martin Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick, p.300), where an individual is placed within a network of expanding localities for which they have decreasing emotional affection. Thus society is envisioned as operating through this system of interlinked affective bonds.

The link between developments in Balwhidder's parish and those on a national political scale is asserted immediately by Galt in the very first sentence of his novel, wasting no time in displaying the analytical technique of this fiction: 'In the same year, and on the same day of the month, that his Sacred Majesty King George, the third of the name, came to his crown and kingdom, I was placed and settled as the minister of Dalmalling' (*Annals of the Parish*, p.1). Frequently throughout the novel Galt appears to make ironic jibes at his own narrative project, continuing the overt self-consciousness of the fiction, seen in this conspicuous link made in the first sentence. Balwhidder's humble statement of his limited scope as a narrator reads as a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the project of the novel:

It belongs to the chroniclers of the realm, to describe the damage and detriment which fell on the power and prosperity of the kingdom, by reason of the rebellion that was fired into open war against the name and authority of the king in the plantations of America; for my task is to describe what happened within the narrow bound of the pasturage of the Lord's flock, of which, in His bounty and mercy, He made me the humble, willing, but alas! the weak and ineffectual shepherd. (*Annals of the Parish*, p.75)

Galt employs this narrative procedure, linking developments on a local to an international scale (a move which not only displays a mirroring, but emphasises the interdependent relationship between the two) to construct a depiction of the complex relationships throughout the various sections of a society which formulate the notion of cultural identity. Duncan claims that '*Annals of the Parish* initiates [...] the topic of Galt's finest work in its representation of the imaginary relation to social history and cultural systems that we call ideology' (Duncan, p.226). Galt's novel achieves a picture of how the abstraction 'ideology' comes into being, through the identification of individuals and isolated cultural or social groups with a wider cultural narrative. Essentially, this work depicts the meshing together of individuals and localities into an overarching ideology which facilitates the existence of concepts such as 'nation' or 'national culture'. This kind of formulation of social networks has important analogues with a number of notions propagated by the Scottish Enlightenment, most famously Adam Smith's conception of 'sympathy' as the basis for emotional relations between individuals and therefore the structuring of social order – again reinforcing the link between Enlightenment ideology and Galt's fiction.<sup>51</sup>

Galt's writing touches upon a number of key issues surrounding Scottish identity which deserve a brief mention, as they play a key role in the larger case

---

<sup>51</sup> See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

studies of Burns and Hogg. In one key passage of *Annals*, in discussing a younger minister's sermon, Balwidder touches upon multiple points central to the discussion of Scotland in the period:

His sermon assuredly was well put together, and there was nothing to object to in his doctrine; but the elderly people thought his language rather too Englified, which I thought likewise, for I never could abide that the plain auld Kirk of Scotland, with her sober Presbyterian simplicity, should borrow, either in word or in deed, from the language of the prelatie hierarchy of England. (*Annals of the Parish*, p.122)

This section initially identifies the crucial issue of language which pervades the ideological framework of so much of Scottish literature over the long eighteenth century. Balwidder has no problem with the content of the young minister's sermon, but picks him up on the question of his 'Englified' language. This question has already been discussed regarding the Scottish Enlightenment, but clearly has important implications for Galt's own work, with *Annals* itself written almost entirely in a highly 'Englified' manner. Whether Galt is again characteristically self-mocking here, or intends a more serious critique of linguistic adaptation, he at least makes a point of raising this issue. Language is then tied directly to an assertion of Scottish national identity, centred around the Presbyterian Church. This focus on Scotland – with the Presbyterian Church a central convergence, indicative of simplicity of manners and sound morality, alongside the assertive 'otherness' contained within the issue of language – forms a pivotal point in the treatment of Scottish identity by authors of the period. In both Burns and Hogg, these central defining notions of 'Scottishness', alongside others, are used as key themes, whether it be in building a thematic foci based upon these, or in actively subverting them. In the final section of this except from *Annals*, Galt completes this view of Scottish national identity in

asserting the defensive viewpoint: 'Scottishness' defined as specifically *not* English, with the English associated with sophistication, refinement and sinfulness. Balwhidder's reflections comment, however sarcastically, upon a central ideological strand in the Scottish national self-definition often displayed in literature of the period, in which this kind of oppositional mentality is often present. The tension on display here in Balwhidder's appraisal of the young minister is also reflective of the ideological schism within Scottish Presbyterian society between the 'Moderate' and the 'Popular' party during the period – the moderates associated with (supposedly) progressive Enlightenment thought and in considerable control of systems of patronage, and the popular party representing a stricter Evangelical ideology. This tension is seen earlier with the initial reluctance of the Dalmalling community to accept the unknown Balwhidder's placing through patronage, with Balwhidder then representative of an Enlightenment ideology associated with the 'Moderates' (particularly in light of the 'Enlightened' literary project of the novel itself, which he authors). Balwhidder's critique of the younger minister draws on some of the same scepticisms which the community initially seems to feel towards him, as a representative of an 'Enlightened' modernity. In this sense Galt further represents the specifics of an overarching ideological framework operating on a local scale, while perhaps also critiquing the flexible nature of this ideological divide and the factions which it creates.

Galt's narrative in *Annals* also picks up on a point which should be introduced here as it has major implications on the study of Burns, and to a lesser degree Hogg. As we will see, Burns's roles as local, regional and national

poet are tied to a contemporary perception of the importance of literary achievement to social and geographical importance, linked to the Romantic 'aggrandisement of the aesthetic' touched upon in my introduction; while Hogg's status as the 'Ettrick Shepherd' also links to this focus but in a more restrictive manner. With the growing phenomenon of literary celebrity across the period, exemplified in the enormous popularity of Byron, there is a sense of the importance of artistic accomplishment in the process of building social identities, whether they be local or national.<sup>52</sup> Balwhidder displays this mood in his claim that the parish of Dalmalling has achieved modernity as a result of the literary achievement of a local named Colin Mavis: 'Thus has our parish walked sidy for sidy with all the national improvements, having an author of its own, and getting a literary character in the ancient and famous republic of letters' (*Annals of the Parish*, p.159). Though a relatively minor point in Galt's own novel, the importance of this feature as regards the following analyses suggests its mention.

*Annals of the Parish*, and Galt's work in general, is an example of a Scottish literature which subverts many of the conventional expectations of novelistic writing in the Romantic period. This is a fictional mode which draws heavily on Enlightenment notions of empirical analysis and social structures, emphasising the network of interconnected relationships which construct larger social and cultural ideological frameworks. Galt's novel is in many ways a direct parody of, or at least response to, the *Statistical Account* project of the period which sought to achieve a detailed sociological account of developing societies through the

---

<sup>52</sup> See Christopher W. Hart, 'Byron', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp.441-442, (p.441).

relation of parish ministers.<sup>53</sup> The *Account* is increasingly seen as an archetypal Enlightenment project of classification, going hand-in-hand with developments in mapping, the publication of dictionaries, and other knowledge-gathering activities.<sup>54</sup> Balwhidder's narration of social, political, economic and moral developments in his parish openly reflects the endeavour of the *Statistical Account*. Seen in this light Galt's novel perhaps comments on the ideological implications of collection and classification – as a means for controlling, or preserving culture, or both? – the significances of which are manifold as regards Scottish national culture. This topic is returned to in more detail in the discussion of antiquarianism in Chapter Three. Certainly *Annals* can be seen as in direct dialogue with a characteristically 'Enlightened' intellectual project. Indeed, Galt himself comments in a later piece on the work that he 'had no idea it would ever have been received as a novel'.<sup>55</sup> Instead he describes it as a 'treatise on the history of society' (Galt, 'Annals of the Parish', p.302), compounding the notion of this work's 'Enlightened' fictional approach.

In its politics Galt's novel could hardly be said to aggressively assert an independent Scottish national identity, yet it nevertheless touches upon some of

---

<sup>53</sup> See Maisie Steven, *Parish Life in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: A Review of the Old Statistical Account* (Dalkeith: Scottish Cultural Press, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Penny Fielding has recently published a study which explores in depth the ideological significances of mapping, geography, and projects such as the *Statistical Account*. Her illuminating depiction of the significances of space, processes of regulation and their limitations would ideally compliment much of the ideological direction of this study, and a larger project would certainly include a detailed consideration of her arguments. See Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> John Galt, 'Annals of the Parish', in *Annals of the Parish and the Ayrshire Legatees, with Memoir of the Author* (London: Maclaren, n.d.), pp.301-304, (pp.302-303).

the key issues surrounding this debate over the long eighteenth century. Crucially, this is a fiction which appears to reject outright a transcendent aesthetic, instead emphatically focussing on the everyday workings of social, political and moral development. In this sense it is a highly polemical form of fiction. Galt's novelistic approach stands in stark contrast to that of Scott, who he defines himself against, and a study of the two represents the diversity of Scottish fiction in the period. If Galt's work can be said to be ideologically 'Romantic', then it is in a distinctly Scottish manner, drawing on the highly inter-related discourses of Romanticism and Enlightenment in Scotland during the period. While Scott's 'polemic of the aesthetic' represents a key ideological development in Scottish Romanticism, regardless of its efficacy or congruity, the kind of 'empirical' narrative found in Galt – focussing around the everyday implications of overarching ideologies, and the contribution of the everyday to their construction – also represents an important stylistic position in Scottish writing of the period. In the following chapters the further investigation of Scottish Romanticism explores in more detail this stylistic variety displayed by the canon, expanding the viewpoint to incorporate more of the complexities of Scottish literature.

## Chapter Two – 'James Hogg and the Violence Passed'

### I

Much of James Hogg's fiction defies easy genre-classification, presenting instead a mélange of tonal, structural and topical approaches. The two examples of his writing under focus in this chapter, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and *The Three Perils of Women*, are both strong representations of this characteristic in Hogg's work, with neither novel operating along a conventional narrative line, much to the delight of the modern critical establishment. Indeed, it is through his unique appropriation of the novelistic form that Hogg constructs many of the ideological and topical frameworks which are of interest to this study, which due to practical constraints is sadly forced to exclude analysis of his poetical endeavour. The vast possibilities presented by the novel are clearly exploited by Hogg, who experiments to a great degree with many aspects of the form. Through these complex and often duplicitous fictions he touches upon a number of the key theoretical issues which have been addressed in the previous chapters.

Hogg's work serves as a central feature of the Scottish Romantic idiom regarding the use of the aesthetic and the polemical which this study explores. At the heart of this analysis is his exploration of social, political and moral tensions implicit in the situation of Scotland during the long eighteenth century. Hogg's fiction approaches these issues in a number of highly sophisticated ways, yet in a sense these centre around a focus on the relationship between modernity and tradition. This is exemplified in struggles between continuities in

Scottish cultural history and the ruptures of British modernity, between superstition and science, between religious extremism and extreme scepticism, and between Enlightenment rationality and a modern yet backward-looking Romantic sensibility.

The Gothic elements in his fiction can be seen as one of the clearest ways in which Hogg narrates the tension between modernity and tradition, with the supernatural eruptions in these texts acting as challenges to the modern establishment; whether it be the Enlightenment project of stadial historiography, British imperial apologetic or rational scepticism. This challenge is itself latent within the project of supernatural literature, after all, as Murray Pittock observes, the 'uncanny is the past that refuses to be lost' (Pittock, p.212). Drawing on this feature of the Gothic, the recurring focus on certain elements of the Scottish past in Hogg's work can be seen as enacting the refusal of Scottish culture to be easily subsumed within a coherent British modernity, including the historical revision this programme entails. This feature aligns with Cairns Craig's notion of a Scottish literature which defies the stadial historical narrative, repeatedly enacting the eruption of the repressed (Craig, *Out of History*, p.44). In this sense Hogg's fiction can be read as responding directly to an imperial project which would seek to de-radicalize Scotland within the British state. Hogg submits a refusal on the part of Scottish culture to succumb to the politically-transcendent romanticized nationhood which was identified in *Waverley* in Chapter One, and instead presents a problematic, resistant and politicized national identity. Pittock identifies these two political motivations operating in Scottish literature of the period:

Just as those dimensions of Scottish culture incompatible with Britishness were aestheticized as picturesque in the generation after they had been defeated or dismissed as barbaric, so their survival in terms of threat rather than regret is a feature of Scottish Gothic, the violation of the expected in British space by remaining traces of the lost national other. (Pittock, p.215)

For Pittock, the Gothic presents the potential 'threat' of the Scottish past in a British context; a past which can violently return to haunt the present. This can be read as in direct opposition to a project of romanticization which lays the past to rest through the political transcendence it achieves as a Romantic object of aesthetic value. However, if on one level Hogg's fiction rejects the presentation of Scotland in this romanticized aesthetic manner, re-imposing political relevance, clearly it does so in a highly aesthetic domain, which problematically may itself contribute to a further de-politicization of Scottish nationhood. Furthermore, the complexity of Hogg's fiction leaves any clear reading of his ideological aims inevitably speculative, and his work does seem at times less confident about this project of historical defence.

Alongside the use of the Gothic, Hogg's fiction asserts a strongly Scottish cultural identity – Pittock's 'altermentality' – through its focus on language, locality and tradition. This chapter explores in detail the nature of this project, reading the specifics of Hogg's focus on Scottish identity, particularly through language, as a key feature of the relationship between literary aesthetics and polemical aims in Scottish Romanticism. As has already been discussed in the previous chapters, usage of languages outside of standardized English have a powerful and inherent political significance for Scottish writing of this period, and the specifics of this usage provide important insight into the way aesthetics

are mobilized towards polemical ends in this material. Alongside this, the chapter also reads Hogg's focus on physicality and the grotesque as part of a wider opposition to a transcendent aesthetic mode. Hogg's fiction is cited as challenging this ideology on a number of levels, instead imposing a fiercely polemical fictional approach firmly grounded in political and social reality, despite its use of the supernatural.

## II

Before mounting an analysis of Hogg's fiction, it is worth analysing briefly some of the intriguing features of Hogg's personal role within the Scottish literary establishment, as these are symptomatic of some important features of a Scottish Romantic idiom. Although the primary focus of this study stretches only as far as Hogg's novelistic fiction, in his authorial persona – which ideologically draws primarily on his poetic role – some of the key features of this dynamic are to be found; features which have important implications both for our reading of his fiction, and our understanding of some of the key social and political structures operating within Scottish Romanticism. Hogg's persona as the 'Ettrick Shepherd' creates an intricate ideological framework which pervades much of his work and its reception. The identification of the poet with locality – drawing on bardic tradition and the emerging Blackwoodian focus on a highly aesthetic cultural nationalism<sup>56</sup> – is a strong feature of Scottish Romanticism, arguably given its most dramatic representation in Burns. However, while Burns can be seen to be skilfully mobilising this notion of localized poetic identity to project himself

---

<sup>56</sup> See Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, pp.56-57.

progressively from the role of Ayrshire poet to that of national bard (as will be explored in Chapter Three), for Hogg this feature seems more restrictive, though the conflict it arouses certainly contributes to the interest of his work.

Valentina Bold has explored in considerable detail Hogg's role as an 'autodidact', and his complex characterization, both in his own work and that of his peers. Bold cites the complexities and difficulties inherent in Hogg's poetic identity: 'The role of British poet sits uncomfortably alongside that of the autodidactic, Scottish patriot.'<sup>57</sup> Hogg's identity as the 'Ettrick Shepherd', with the immediate implications this carries regarding both class and locality, acts as a constant factor in his literary approach to political and social issues. Writing under the shadow of this identity, Hogg is able to hide behind a false naïveté in his approach to contestable subjects, and invoke both a rural and working-class subjectivity which provides a specific kind of commonplace authority and subsequent credibility to his work – touching upon the early English Romantic focus on the egalitarian poet, Wordsworth's 'man speaking to men'.<sup>58</sup> However, this label simultaneously undermines Hogg's status within the Edinburgh literary hierarchy, leading to the frequent cruel ridicule he was subjected to by his contemporaries.<sup>59</sup> For Bold, Hogg's geographical identity creates a tension within his work which perhaps explains, to a degree, the strong and dynamic focus within his fiction on local and national identities: 'Hogg faced a dilemma, in attempting to resolve his (perhaps inherently incompatible) allegiances as a

---

<sup>57</sup> Valentina Bold, *James Hogg: A Bard of Nature's Making* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p.145.

<sup>58</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' (1802), in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp.56-87, (p.71).

<sup>59</sup> See Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh: The Ramsay Head Press, 1976), pp.25-27.

Borders, Scottish and nominally British poet. This could lead to unsettling pieces' (Bold, p.144). The notion of 'unsettling pieces' certainly rings true in the context of Hogg's highly complex and ideologically aggressive fiction. However, as identified by Ian Duncan, Hogg's role as the 'Ettrick Shepherd' has a further potential ideological significance:

The affixing of a literary career to the bardic figure of the Ettrick Shepherd clarified the crux as one of cultural origins, already schematized in a historiography which at once valorized the poet as voice of a primordial stage of society close to nature and depreciated him as an uncouth relic doomed to extinction by the logic of economic and cultural improvement. (Duncan, p.149)

As Duncan suggests, the identity of the 'Ettrick Shepherd' aligns Hogg's persona itself with the Scottish cultural past. Through the bardic origins and local signification of this identity, Hogg himself becomes a representative of the kind of traditional Scottish identity which literature of the period is so active in engaging with. In this sense, Hogg's personal role, as well as some of the ideological foci of his work, can be seen as features of the Scottish past resigned to the label of primitive in British stadial historiography – and therefore a feature of that resistant cultural identity which his literature depicts erupting back into the modern world. Indeed, Duncan identifies the role that Hogg played as a representative of features of the Scottish nation in the Blackwoodian literary circle: 'Hogg's body - the avatar of that national body, the people ("a swinish multitude") - would be readmitted to the convivial table of the Blackwoodian boys' club, but under strict conditions of patronage and supervision' (Duncan, p.182). Characterised as an 'avatar' for certain features of Scottish nationhood, Hogg's identity *outside* of his own fiction is already one centred around tensions of local and national identity. Hogg as representative of the Scottish people, in a

role strongly defined by class and distasteful physicality, is a concept which has powerful implications for our reading of his fiction, in particular *The Three Perils of Women*. The factors cited above, combined with many more, all contribute to the fascinating ideological framework upon which Hogg's fictional narratives operate.

### III

*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* has enjoyed a perhaps unjustified predominance in much previous criticism. Combined with the more acute relevancy of *The Three Perils of Women* to the theoretical aims of this study, this allows for the survey of *Confessions* undertaken here to remain relatively brief. Hogg's notable experimentation with the novel has already been mentioned, and *Confessions* displays this to a considerable degree. As Ian Duncan explains, this work is an example of a strongly radical approach to literature, even in the context of its origins in a highly experimental literary movement:

The novel presents us with a combination of effects that seems unprecedented even in the era of radical literary innovation and experimentation we call Romanticism. Here is a work of fiction that goes to unusual lengths to reproduce authenticating devices in the form of documentary evidence - the manuscript facsimile, the letter in *Blackwood's* - and at the same time to conceal the identity of its author, who then appears as a character in his own book, only to announce his refusal to have anything to do with the business of literary production. (Duncan, pp.273-274)

Duncan mentions the complex and playful strategies employed in the lead-up to the publication of *Confessions*, with Hogg using *Blackwood's* to create a false justification for the factuality of this work. This ploy, characteristic of the *Blackwood's* literary circle in its intertextuality and its subversion of conventions

of authenticity, is reflected within the structure of the work itself, working upon a premise of a supposedly genuine historical artefact. This toying with notions of reality is given a further twist, as Duncan cites, when Hogg places himself in the novel, yet a version of himself (surely a parodic image of the character the 'Ettrick Shepherd', rather than the real-life author James Hogg) who rejects the project of the work outright. Hogg's experimentation with hierarchies of factuality in the work also communicates into the main narratives, with the novel consistently presenting ambiguities and uncertainties. This is certainly one of the ways in which *Confessions* has retained its appeal to a modern generation, seeming to pre-figure certain idiomatic strains in modern literature by denying the reader the possibility of empirical absolutes. Duncan comments upon this feature:

In Hogg's most striking technique, analogous to twentieth-century magical realism, natural and supernatural effects occupy the same narrative dimension, the same ontological register - neither is more real than the other. In contrast to the nation-forming genre of the historical novel, magical realism is a 'postcolonial' romance genre, autoethnography's epic mode; it represents the synchronous interpenetration of different cultural systems without ordering them in an epistemic hierarchy. (Duncan, p.202)

As this quote from Duncan suggests, this technique carries with it a certain weight of ideological implication. Directly opposed to the programme of the historical novel – essentially a progressive form of fiction, usually centred around a developmental story which metaphorically represents a 'national tale', and given its Romantic archetype in Scott – this fictional mode subverts the concepts of truth and reality, denying both a simple progressive narrative reality and the possibility of resolution. In this sense *Confessions* can be seen as ideologically subverting not just the political developmental elements of works

like *Waverley*, but indeed the programmatic concept of the developmental novel itself.

Perhaps the most-discussed feature of *Confessions* is the structural, thematic, and character-based doubling which pervades throughout the narrative. To avoid merely re-tracing old ground on this point, this study will move directly to the theoretical subtext of this dynamic, upon which a number of critics claim the crux of the narrative rests. For Duncan, the divisions in the novel represent the influence of Enlightenment thought, suggesting that the inspiration for this schismatic structuring of the work came from Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Duncan summarises a key aspect of Smith's theory: 'The imaginative labor that appropriates other to self at the same time converts self to other. Social formation takes place through this strenuous, morally salutary and indeed necessary work of alienation and self-division' (Duncan, p.265). This notion of the process of moral analysis requiring a certain internal division has clear analogues with the structural division in the novel. Whether or not Hogg directly constructed his narrative upon a reading of Smith's work, the link made by Duncan seems highly plausible, and indeed Enlightenment ideology seems to serve a deeper purpose at the ideological heart of the work.

For Cairns Craig the divisions of *Confessions* are in essence representative of an ideological divide between the mindsets of an 'Enlightened' rationality and a religious extremism:

It is not Robert and George who represent the real division of the novel, but Robert and the Editor, for they are both writers trying to narrate the events of the past and make them conform to a pre-ordained pattern

which *underwrites* their whole perception of the universe. (Craig, *Out of History*, p.75)

Craig sees the Editor and Robert as presenting the true ideological divide in this fiction, one attempting to force the events of the narrative to conform to a scientific analysis, the other completely lost in a fantasy of religious mania. This division between rationality and superstition (for want of a better term) pervades throughout the novel, given its most visual representation in the scene upon Arthur's Seat. In this episode Hogg masterfully juxtaposes Enlightenment science against a traditional superstition. In the face of primal fear, the 'Enlightened' explanation for the phenomena gives way to George's ancient inherited cultural belief in the supernatural. For Craig this is representative of a wider triumph of a native historical culture over its modern antithesis:

The world of the Enlightenment to which George looks forward suddenly turns into its opposite, and the 'scientific' consciousness which can understand the causes of beauty is impaled on a reversion to belief in spirits in order to account for the horror that it confronts. By projecting his own rationalist consciousness backwards upon George in order to create a sense of history's progressive continuity, the Editor has in fact constructed an image in which progressive history is undone, and finds itself confronted by all that it has believed to have left securely in the past. (Craig, *Out of History*, pp.74-75)

Craig reads this episode as an example of the Scottish cultural past 'erupting' into the 'Enlightened' present, disrupting the continuity of a progressive historical narrative. Certainly, if this scene stages an ideological battle, which this study concurs upon, this is a battle in which (albeit temporarily) a native 'superstitious' mindset is comprehensively victorious: 'George conceived it to be a spirit. He could conceive it to be nothing else' (*Confessions*, p.41). Not only *does* George 'regress' into believing he is witnessing a supernatural occurrence, but Hogg's words are clear in stating that he 'could' *only* do so, suggesting the

inevitability of this eruption of native culture into the 'Enlightened' reality of both George and the Editor. For Craig this episode is symptomatic of the wider statement the novel makes:

The satire of the *Confessions* is directed not at heretical versions of Calvinism, but at a debased Enlightenment ideology of progress that cannot accept any but a mechanical and secular explanation of reality, one which would entirely deny those spiritual interventions which Hogg, as a good Calvinist Christian, believed in as the founding reality of his religious faith. (Craig, *Out of History*, pp.76-77)

While Craig's argument on the importance of this critique of a narrow 'Enlightened' mindset is highly useful for a reading of this novel, this study would, however, have to suggest that this element does operate alongside a scathing critique of extremist Calvinism, given its most distasteful apparition in the form of the debased and demonic Rev. Wringhim. Yet this divide within the work – between 'Enlightened' rationalism and forms of native 'superstition' – seems to hinge upon a deeper schism.

For this study, the ideological divide can be traced to a further theoretical position, becoming essentially a conflict between Enlightenment ideology and Romanticism. Hogg stages the ideological face-off between these schools of thought in his contemporary society, with the novel sketching various oppositional elements of this divide. The supernatural reality (as and when it is presented as such) of the work hinges upon a Romantic denial of the totality of an Enlightenment rational interpretation of experience; a conflict central to the structural as well as thematic programme of the novel. Key to this ideological divide is Wringhim's religious fanaticism. If we read a central Romantic idiom as encompassing a powerful focus on individual subjectivity, then this fanaticism is arguably a form of 'Romantic' extremism – in its over-investment in a highly

subjective reality – the kind of over-investment which the aggressively enigmatic approach of this fiction denies to its reader. Alongside this, the Editor and George's wish for constant rational explanation is also shown to be an insufficient interpretive approach. Hogg also employs the Editor's role as an antiquarian to attack certain elements of a Romantic ideology. These extremes lead to Hogg's presentation of the importance of moderation, which aligns itself with his defence of a native Scottish culture, as identified by Pittock:

The more closely the characters of the book are aligned with a native oral Scottishness, the better their judgement between appearance and reality, the less willing they are to impose ideological boundaries between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, or to admit the latter's dissolution into the marvellous. (Pittock, p.218)

As Pittock suggests, the most apparently genuine native Scots of the novel are those who are able to judge among the various realities presented by the fiction. This is given probably its best example in Mrs Logan and Mrs Calvert, who are able to see through the mystery surrounding Robert by the exercise of their basic reason, unspoiled by dangerous ideological extremism: 'Whose word, or whose reasoning can convince us against our own senses?' (*Confessions*, p.85). These characters are, however, trapped in a modern Scotland which Hogg writes as a battleground between opposing and dangerous extremist ideologies. For Duncan, Hogg's depiction of this divide suggests an inevitability, a cause-and-effect relationship between the two:

Hogg represents fanaticism as the radical consequence of a modern anomie, or loss of a world in which belief can be natural, and thus as the monstrous double - profoundly impious - of an alienated skepticism. It is the epistemic surplus that corresponds to skepticism's deficit. (Duncan, p.251)

This ideologically divided Scotland is trapped in a self-replicating pattern of ideological extremism, one which only a selection of characters in the novel have the power to escape.

Hogg's conclusion to this novel, the grave scene, in many ways touches upon the key thematic issues which have been identified so far. In this section Hogg appears to turn simultaneously upon an Enlightenment rationality *and* a certain Romantic mindset, ending the work on a powerfully pessimistic note. The Romantic obsession with cultural artefacts, clearly pervading the structural composition with the novel, is viciously undermined as the party of antiquaries are seen engaged in a gruesome and meaningless degradation of human remains: 'All the limbs, from the loins to the toes, seemed perfect and entire, but they could not bear handling. Before we got them returned again into the grave, they were all shaken to pieces' (*Confessions*, p.251). Through the haunting image of Robert's limbs, 'shaken to pieces', Hogg seems to suggest the fruitlessness of any attempt to evaluate or even understand the significance of the cultural artefact represented by both the remains and the manuscript. This sense surely reflects on Hogg's reluctance to ascribe any absolute authority to the events of the narrative, with the lack of hierarchical meaning given its final desperate example in the downbeat destruction of Robert's body. As Duncan suggests, 'Here, in grisly burlesque, antiquarian research cannot animate the dead body it unearths – only despoil it in a necrophiliac traffic of "curiosities"' (Duncan, p.213). This episode also signals the climax of the fruitless attempt on the part of the Editor to rationalize the events of the story, his 'Enlightened' mindset given its final insurmountable challenge by the inexplicable preservation of these human

remains. For Duncan this conclusion represents a final denial of an overarching Romantic ideology:

The end of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* brings a more drastic de-sublimation of the scenario of revival. Instead of the raising of a national body or spirit, we witness (through the Editor's pruriently literal gaze) a noisome regurgitation of ransacked, half-rotten fragments [...] Organic unity, Romantic Ideology's powerful theme of a transhistorical continuity, is reduced to the slime of decomposition. (Duncan, p.214)

Duncan's analysis seems to strike true, with Hogg finally subverting the Romantic projects of transcendent significance, national tale and antiquarian interpretation. However, more generally this conclusion seems to round on the divided thematic structure of the novel in a vicious and sarcastic mood, finally denying any justification to the competing ideological strains which it has pitted against each-other. Neither a Romantic ideology nor an Enlightenment rationality is shown to have the tools to make sense of the gruesome and decaying Scottish cultural past.

#### IV

Turning to *The Three Perils of Women*, this novel provides textual basis for a selection of the most important theoretical foci of this study. The critical history of this work is extremely varied, ranging from outright dismissal to ebullient praise. In his 1976 study of Hogg, Douglas Gifford has no hesitation in attacking *Three Perils of Women*, describing it as one of Hogg's 'complete failures' (Gifford, p.8), before mounting an impassioned – and for this study, wholly misguided – diatribe against this complex and unconventional fiction. For Gifford the 'failure' of *Three Perils of Women* is partly located in the text's structuring, which he reads as falling well short of its programmatic aim. Gifford is disappointed that

the three 'perils' into which the novel is sectioned seem to have only an arbitrary connection to the narrative: 'the link between "peril" and story is often vague and artificial' (Gifford, p.126). This is best displayed in the final 'peril', 'Jealousy', against which Gifford rails, stating that 'Here are cheap laughs at lecherous ministers, oddly adjacent to Highland atrocities [...] Its episodes are arbitrary in number, and at the end characters and mysteries are forgotten and unexplained' (Gifford, p.132). Oddly enough, the exact criticisms which Gifford here believes undermine this novel beyond redemption, are, despite this study's reluctance to make any value judgements, at least part of what makes this work so critically interesting. Here we find Hogg taking his structural and thematic experimentation to new extremes, and far from 'failing' to produce a logical or coherent novel, he constructs a fascinatingly fragmented and disrupted work, which in this sense structurally reflects the complexities, ambiguities and difficulties inherent in its subject material.

In a more recent study, John Barrell approaches the same glaring textual issues in *Three Perils of Women* in a more appreciative light. Barrell suggests that the work 'pretends to consist of three novellas', whereas, as Barrell identifies, in reality the novel essentially consists of two stories spread relatively arbitrarily over the three 'novellas'.<sup>60</sup> However, Barrell's notion of the fiction 'pretending' to a particular structural form raises the issue which overarches the formal complexities of this work; the colossal extent of self-conscious fictionality and playful subversion of convention in this novel. Barrell addresses the less-than clear sectioning of the work: 'each story is a compendium of all three perils'

---

<sup>60</sup> John Barrell, 'Putting Down the Rising', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, pp.130-138, (p.130).

(Barrell, pp.130-131), but identifies the coherent literary purpose of this: 'Both stories are generically diverse, self-consciously impure' (Barrell, p.131). It is in the 'impurity' of this novel that Hogg elegantly transfers his thematic focus and narrative mood into its formal presentation. This chaotic structural experimentation, alongside the highly disrupted narrative and thematic flow, becomes a key aesthetic device through which Hogg constructs the polemical drive of this novel, reflecting a breakdown in the possibilities of proper comprehension or lucid communication of the issues the novel addresses. Indeed, Hogg highlights this fact himself within the narrative, drawing the link between his formal approach in this work and its thematic focus:

I like that way of telling a story exceedingly. Just to go always round and round my hero, in the same way as the moon keeps moving round the sun; thus darkening my plot on the one side of him, and enlightening it on the other, thereby displaying both the *lights* and *shadows* of Scottish life. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.25)

This idea of 'circling' the protagonist is barely kept up by Hogg (regardless of who we might identify as the main 'hero') beyond the first section, yet the idea it proposes of some form of panoramic view of his story is arguably achieved in the diversity and tangential form of the work. As Hogg here identifies, the structural form of the novel is constructed to reflect the complexities, 'both the *lights* and *shadows*' of the Scottish situation which he approaches. This alerts us to one of the many formal modes and literary genres which compete for dominance within the text, the 'national tale'.

Barrell provides us with a concise summary of the key developmental programme of this form: 'a genre that imagines the coming-together of opposed communities, usually in Ireland or Scotland, and thus the constitution of a new

national unity' (Barrell, p.131). However, regarding the treatment of this genre in *Three Perils of Women*, Barrell identifies conflicting possibilities resulting from the narrative's temporality:

The order in which the stories appear is important here. Gatty's tale is set in Hogg's own time; Sally's story is about a few months either side of the Battle of Culloden. In terms of historical time, therefore, the happy ending of Gatty's tale – the survival of the child, the recovery of Gatty after her apparent death and years of mental illness – seems to repair the tragedy of Sally, who dies along with her daughter, as if the divisions of North and South, Tory and Whig, Catholic and Protestant, which had been reopened in 1745, could be healed in the early nineteenth century. In the order of reading, however, Sally's tragedy seems to reopen the wounds which Gatty's tale had closed, as if questioning the tidy optimism of the national tale, or suggesting that the history of Scotland is a history of divisions which can never finally be repaired. (Barrell, p.131)

Barrell's acute analysis of the temporal question in the novel's treatment of a national resolution or 'healing' is representative of Hogg's ambiguous polemical stance in this work. However, whether this work approaches a conventional 'national tale' in a playfully dislocated manner, or intends a rejection of the possibilities such a narrative suggests (or, perhaps most probably, a simultaneous statement of both), this thematic device forms a major framework upon which the novel rests. Hogg uses this developmental narrative to mount an exploration of Scottish national identity, history and political reality.

Previous chapters have already identified the inherently political role language serves within Scottish writing over the long eighteenth century. Hogg appears to mobilise this politicization in a number of interesting ways, using language as a key polemical tool in the novel. Throughout the work characters comment upon their own, and others', usage of language, constructing a highly self-conscious fiction. Sally's suggestive comment regarding the owner of the Spanish rifle with which Peter Gow has killed Henning reflects the frequent

allusions throughout the work to the role of language beyond mere communication: 'I hae a wee inkling o' the *Spanish language*' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.293). Sally's throwaway quip on the importance of language to her comprehension of the narrative plot alerts us to the role language plays as a key signifier throughout the work. It would be impossible to discuss effectively the usage of language in this text without addressing the character of Daniel Bell, through whose fascinating dialogue and comments upon language Hogg constructs some of the most interesting linguistic features of the novel. Daniel's defence of a Border vernacular Scots is used by Hogg (at least on the surface) as light relief within some of the more sentimental aspects of the work, centred around Gatty's developmental narrative. However, drawing on Pittock's notion of the Scots language as 'unruly beyond the limits assigned by the text' (Pittock, p.202), these statements of cultural assertion produce a highly polemical dynamic within the text, whether or not Hogg intends them as merely comedic. Daniel's forceful defence of the propriety of his choice of language regarding the naming of a ram is a strong example of both this vernacular defence and the rich textual dynamic of the novel:

'But might you not as easily denominate the animal a ram, as he is called in scripture, and then every body would understand you?' 'A Ram! a snuff o' tobacco! Na, na, it's an unco ramstamphish name that for sic a bonny douce-looking animal as Duff.' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.7)

Of course, Daniel's defence of his vernacular Border Scots is not primarily against the intrusions of a Biblical language, as much as a standardized imperial English. His advice to Gatty on her departure for Edinburgh continues this polemical mood:

But dinna be ower the matter punctual about catching the snappy English pronunciation, in preference to our own good, full, *doric tongue*, as the minister ca's it. It looks rather affected in a country girl to be always snap snapping at the English, and at the same time popping in an auld Scots phrase [...] for it is impossible to get quit o' them. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.11)

The common identification of Scots as a '*doric tongue*', therefore linguistically suited to the aesthetic purposes of Pastoral poetry,<sup>61</sup> forms a key link between language and a particularly aesthetic cultural nationalism. Daniel's advice to avoid the 'snappy English pronunciation' is qualified interestingly here by the reminder that Scots serves an inescapable role within Gatty's cultural heritage. Any effort to rid her speech completely of the presence of Scots will be ultimately fruitless, much like the problems identified in the Scottish Enlightenment in Chapter One, with Susan Manning describing the resilience of Scots as like a 'virus' (Manning, p.20). Scots is 'impossible to get quit o'', serving as a central focus in a cultural heritage which stubbornly refuses to bow to a British standardization. For Daniel the major advantage of Scots is the lack of standardized spellings, providing a kind of aesthetic freedom to the writer which allows a more personal self-expression:

Now, if ye daur haud me, ye maun mind that I write Scots, my ain naiteve tongue; and there never was any reule for that. Every man writes it as he speaks it, and that's the great advantage of our language ower a' others. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.42)

This freedom, leaving each individual to more directly communicate their oral speech in textual form, identifies Scots as a more personal, emotional and expressive tongue. In this sense the written language, in relating directly the specific psychology of the Scottish people, becomes a true cultural representative. Through this Daniel's words seem to figure the role of language

---

<sup>61</sup> See Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p.76.

more widely within the text as highly political, representing more than a learned rule, but the organic cultural makeup of the Scottish nation. This stretches beyond the use of what is admittedly a Anglicized pseudo-Scots by characters such as Daniel, to the highly hybridized Highland speech of characters such as Peter M'Turk, with Hogg attempting to communicate a highly Gaelicised pronunciation: "Nho; dhamn me if I dhoo," said Peter' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.69). This style, prevalent throughout the novel, asserts a forcefully non-standard usage of English, consistently serving as a reminder of cultural difference through heteroglossia, and an important aspect of the Scottish national cultural defence presented (at least partially) in the work.

Perhaps the most interesting episode of the novel regarding Hogg's usage of language takes place towards the end of the first 'peril'. As Richard Rickleton writes to Joseph Bell the novel displays a highly self-conscious textuality. The textual argument which takes place between Rickleton and his scribe stages a fascinating battle over the language of the letter. Rickleton's orality erupts into the polished English rhetorical prose of his scribe: "'Then write it and spell it as that one delivers it to you," says I, "and be cworsed to thee for a dwomonie, although thou calls thyself measter of the academy!"' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.228). The following exchanges, modulating between the contrasting registers of the two men – with both interjecting to apologise for, or criticise, the other's use of language – displays Hogg's textual approach at its most extreme in this work. Hogg clearly delights in the possibilities presented by this episode, using it to tangentially approach a number of topics, not least a sarcastic attack on a

conventional Romantic literary approach to aesthetics, and its underpinning ideology, drawing on a Burkean programme of aesthetic appreciation:<sup>62</sup>

‘Many a morning dawned in the eastern heaven, yea many a sun rose brilliant from the ocean that circumvolves our island, and mounted the highest peaks of the blue Cheviots, and still found me lying on my lonely and sleepless pillow.’ [‘My patron compels me to put down, that the above elegant sentence is d-d nonsense. A.T.’] (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.231)

This episode is taken even further by Hogg with Rickleton replacing his scribe with ‘an amanuensis’, who presents a further stylistic tone, using a highly archaic biblical form of prose (*The Three Perils of Women*, pp.242-243). This textual playfulness is characteristic of the wider tone of the novel, with Hogg rapidly replacing and adjusting various structural approaches and stylistic moods. Throughout the text, however, language forms a key feature of the polemical engagement with Scottish nationhood, with Hogg repeatedly highlighting the importance of these issues. Over and over again the novel presents characters engaged in conflict over the usage of language, with this becoming in a sense the primary battleground for the cultural contest over national identity which this study reads the novel as in part staging.

There are a number of other key features through which Hogg builds up a specific representation of Scottish culture, features which represent important facets of his polemical approach. It is crucial to point out that Hogg’s portrayal of Scotland in this novel is by no means that of a unified, coherent cultural whole. Indeed, the Scotland of *Three Perils of Women* is a nation dramatically and divisively fragmented, primarily between the three major locations of the novel:

---

<sup>62</sup> See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

the Borders locale of the Bell family; Edinburgh; and the Highland locations of the later episodes. As has been touched upon regarding language, Hogg uses the character of Daniel Bell as a touchstone for a specifically Borders version of vernacular rural culture. This goes hand-in-hand with a move by Hogg to associate rural Borders culture with a pragmatic, common-sense mindset, exemplified in Daniel's colourful, comic, yet distinctly pragmatic relationship advice to his daughter: 'Od, yer no gaun to leive yer lane a' yer days, and stand like a turnip runt, up amang the barley and grein claver; a thing by itsel, sittin up its yallow daft-like heide whan a' the rests gane' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.41). Daniel's practical wisdom is presented as the rural antidote to the potentially disruptive urbanity of Edinburgh. Indeed, Gatty's tragedy in the novel can be traced thematically on one level as the result of her social contamination in the fast-paced and morally questionable realm of the city. This conventional opposition of wholesome rural simplicity against a sophisticated and morally bankrupt urbanity is clearly suggested by Hogg. Perhaps more dramatic, however, is the cultural difference drawn between the Highlands and the Lowlands in the novel. The comments made upon Highland culture in the work approach their subject very much in the tone of 'other', producing a sociological analysis of an alien culture, rather than a reflection on a feature of a wider nationhood. These sections often read as encyclopaedic descriptions of a little-known cultural group: 'The Highlanders are very liberal of their titles, so much so, that these would be rendered despicable in the eyes of any other people but themselves' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.98). Scotland is presented in this fragmented way in much of the novel, reading as a sceptical reflection upon national cultural cohesion. However, interestingly the violence of the novel –

suffered most immediately by the cultural grouping of the Highlanders – becomes a means through which Hogg depicts the coming together of such a cohesion. This is suggested by the involvement of Lowland and Highland characters alike within the tragedies of the work, and the inevitability with which these horrendous events are shown to impact on a wider national experience. In this sense Scotland attains a kind of cultural unity through collective suffering, in the same moment as a form of partially-national political ascendancy (through the Jacobite cause) is neutralised.

As with *Confessions*, Scottish culture is again presented as experiencing problematic expressions of religious extremism, centred in this novel around Gatty. Her rejection of the various offerings of both conventional religion and medicine (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.182) seems part of the wider psychological mania which (when taken on a secular rather than spiritual level) seems to cause her tragedy to some degree. Again, Scottish culture is presented as nursing this dangerous propensity for extremism, a propensity which leads to violence if allowed to operate unchecked. Hogg's portrayal of Gatty's experience of the after-life seems interestingly problematic, as Gatty describes how she 'wandered away darkling among strange people, of different languages' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.217). This bizarre description seems to hint at a non-Christian spiritual framework in the novel, with Hogg challenging conventional metaphysical thought. However, regarding the portrayal of Scottish culture, this depiction of a sinister after-life awaiting the fanatical Gatty seems to further question her religious extremism, continuing Hogg's polemic for moderation. Finally, it should be noted that the Scotland of *Three Perils of Women* is also

occasionally presented as an overtly 'romantic' locale. The polytonal approach of the novel gives narrative place to a number of literary stylistics, yet in some senses Scotland is very much portrayed as a site of 'romantic reality', populated by figures of a distinctly Scottish Romance, such as 'Aeneas MacPherson' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.404). Though this romanticizing element conflicts against the major polemical aim which this study cites in Hogg's novel, it nonetheless cannot be ignored. This inconsistency and ambiguity is characteristic of Hogg's approach in the novel, seeming to question and undermine the polemical possibilities of the narrative at every turn.

Arguably the central episode of the novel is the bizarre 'resurrection' of Gatty's corpse, followed by her subsequent recovery. John Barrell cites some key critical readings of this section:

The image of Gatty's horrifying resurrection and relapse is so powerful that it has inevitably come to dominate critical accounts of the novella. It has been read as an instance of the danger of imposing, as the national tale does, the task of national reconstruction on the female body which, in the sentimental novel, is so often represented as frail in proportion to the virtue of the soul that inhabits it. The resurrection has been explained by invoking contemporary interest in galvinism, in animal magnetism; it has equally been suggested that to explain it is to miss the point, which is, precisely, that it is an instance of the uncanny, or of Hogg's canny determination to resist the rationality of the Scottish Enlightenment with images which, like the popular superstitions he refuses to renounce, resist explanation. (Barrell, p.132)

The various critical viewpoints Barrell here sketches all have currency for this study, in particular the final suggestion that it is simply an 'uncanny' rejection of conventional logic, introducing a Romantic element of the supernatural which refuses to conform to rational explanation. However, there is a further element to this episode which this study sees as crucial to the ideological position of Hogg's literary approach in the work. The image of Gatty's re-animated, yet

seemingly spiritually-devoid corpse is an important one for Hogg's polemical style. For this study the independent animation of the physical body is part of a wider focus on physicality (primarily through the extreme violence of the work), which rejects a programme of transcendent aesthetics – and the supersession of physicality which this can entail – instead asserting a grotesque focus on physicality and visceral experience. Hogg maintains an aggressive focus in the novel on corporeality, exemplified by Gatty's physical form in independent revolt. Ideologically, this has important congruities with the national polemic in the novel, which refuses to gloss the violent realities of Scottish national history. Hogg's consistently enforces a focus on physical experiential immediacy, both in the grotesque elements and the 'ground-level' historical relation, creating a forcefully 'anti-transcendent' aesthetic mode.

For Barrell this episode leads into a wider theme of the 'upright corpse' in the 'Highland' second narrative of the work, becoming a representative of the painful national past which refuses to go away:

The figure of the upright corpse, of the resurrection of what we think – even wish – safely consigned to the past, becomes the main means by which the novella conducts its ambiguous meditations on how modern Scotland should regard its violent history. (Barrell, p.135)

This image of disruptive physicality is insightfully linked by Barrell to the problematic Scottish past. In this sense the 'upright corpses' of the work, a number of examples of which are identified by Barrell (Barrell, pp.133-134), become a key means by which the Scottish cultural past 'erupts' into the British stadial historical narrative, staging what Pittock above called the 'the violation of the expected in British space by remaining traces of the lost national other' (Pittock, p.215).

The treatment of the battle of Culloden and its aftermath in the novel is also a key means through which Hogg constructs the central polemical drive of the work. The treatment of violence in these sections is in many ways closely ideologically linked to the notion of the corpses in the work as anti-transcendent, disruptive forces acting to undermine the ease with which a British historiographical narrative could incorporate the Scottish past. As was mentioned in passing in the previous chapter, it is highly tempting to read a direct dialogue between Hogg's treatment of this subject and Scott's relative 'passing-over' of Culloden in *Waverley*. Hogg playfully comments upon his own engagement with the subject, while reinforcing the gravity of this terrible historical episode:

There were many things happened to the valiant conquerors of the Highlands in 1746 that were fairly hushed up, there being none afterwards that dared to publish or avow them. But there is no reason why these should die. For my part, I like to rake them up whenever I can get a story that lies within twenty miles of them, and, for all my incidents, I appeal to the records of families, and the truth of history. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.332)

It is easy to read Hogg as suggesting that these incidents have been 'hushed up' in more than just the historical annals, perhaps directly implicating Scott's fictional treatment. The subsequent lines display Hogg almost gleefully asserting his own defiant focus on these tragic events. He will 'rake them up' if it is at all justifiable in his narrative context, presenting his polemical focus on this national tragedy as bordering on a compulsion. There are a number of passages in the novel in which Hogg appears to make sarcastic jibes aimed, if not at Scott directly, then more generally at an ideological position which would smooth-over the events of 1746:

He found himself little more than half way about sun-rising, after a tedious journey over guns, bayonets, pistols, and holsters, for several miles: And, more-over a number of wounded and maimed men interrupted his journey by their unavailing requests of assistance. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.337)

This horrendous description of a journey through the Scottish countryside, littered with corpses and the dying wounded, is notably presented as 'tedious'. This certainly ties into a wider presentation of de-sensitization to violence in face of the events in the narrative, yet there is also a sense that Hogg is sarcastically attacking those who would prefer that such graphic explorations of the painful Scottish past were avoided. In this sense Hogg's focus is only perhaps 'tedious' to those ideologically opposed to such a project. Closing in on his conclusion to the second 'peril', Hogg continues this subtle sense of sarcastic attack, while enacting the same 'passing-over' of Culloden seen in *Waverley*:

I am now compelled, both from want of room, and want of inclination to the task, to desist from the description of some dreadful scenes that followed the events above narrated. But, as they are they disgrace of the British annals, it is perhaps as well that I am obliged to pass over them, although it makes a breach in the tale that has always been one of the deepest interest to me. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.357)

The tonal complexity of this fiction make it impossible to comprehensively pinpoint Hogg's ideological position. However, the extended descriptions of horrific violence which occur throughout the third section give this passage a decided irony. In this context, it is an interesting suggestion that the events of Culloden are not merely the 'disgrace of the British annals' in terms of the regrettable violence committed in practical terms, but also in a more ideological sense. Perhaps Hogg hints that Culloden is also the 'disgrace' of the *project* of the 'British annals', attacking the historiographical revision which would seek to forget this tragedy. The close of the second 'peril', with Hogg hastily tying up his

narrative – the downbeat marriages seemingly overshadowed by the spectre of Culloden – seems to reflect the idea that Hogg is ‘compelled’ to pass over Culloden, perhaps from an external pressure. The third ‘peril’ clearly displays that, though he does not narrate the battle itself, he is hardly lacking in ‘inclination’ to explore this tragedy, leaving this sequence seeming to stage an incursion on Hogg’s narrative from some sort of external censorship – perhaps an intricate textual means through which Hogg protests such a move.

Central to Hogg’s violent exploration of the aftermath of Culloden in the final ‘peril’ is the character of Davie Duff, through whose actions and relations the key polemical exploration of the events is primarily conducted.<sup>63</sup> Davie takes Sally and her guide through the wasted land of the Frazers, the extremity of Hogg’s depictions of violence in the work is powerfully exemplified:

It was not long till he came to the bodies of a woman and two boys, half roasted. She seemed to have been their mother, and to have been endeavouring to cover them with her own body to preserve them from the flames. The two journeyers were horrified at the sight, but David took it very deliberately, assuring them, that ‘the reid-coats nefer suffered a poy to mhake his way, for tat tey always put a paygonet trou his pody pefore tey fired te house, or else pound up te toor. I was myself in Keppoch’s country,’ said he, ‘when tey were purning her, and I heard a captain say to his mhan, “Cot tamn you, Nett, fat you pe turking all te poor pairns? Cannot her lhet them alhone to pe purn in peace?” “Ooh, tamn him’s plood!” said he. “I like to see how tem Scots puddocks sprawl and funk. Lhook! Lhort, lhook, sir!” cried he, putting te turk on te nhose of him’s gun trow a poy, and into te grhound, “Lhort, lhook, sir, fat a lhife is in te tevil; how him girns, and struggles, and faughts, ha, ha, ha!”’ (*The Three Perils of Women*, pp.365-366)

---

<sup>63</sup> The issue of class regarding the character of Davie Duff is a fascinating issue, though one which would require a longer thesis. Though perhaps a character who can be read as mirroring Scott’s Davie Gellatly in *Waverley*, the juxtaposition of Davie as partial protagonist against the aristocratic Edward Waverley is another key point of tension between the two works. Hogg’s focus on the working-class Davie certainly aids his novel’s refusal to gloss over violent reality – with poverty providing a practical barrier which prevents an escape from the violence.

Such uncompromising depictions of the horrendous violence meted out to the inhabitants of the Scottish Highlands in 1746 are found throughout the final section of Hogg's novel. This graphic passage displays Hogg's refusal to gloss over in any way the historical events of this episode. Through this primary focus on the extreme violence 'at ground level', Hogg's anti-transcendent polemical focus is reinforced, as he patiently explores these events in their full horror. The Highlands of the novel descend into nightmarish madness, as Davie plies his trade of collecting ears for the Duke of Cumberland's reward, taking them from living children, and even content to claim the payment for his own:

Davie went away cursing, to the burn in the corrie, where he washed his mutilated ears and bound them up; and, taking the severed parts, he rolled them up carefully with the rest, deeming the trick played on him, upon the whole, not a very bad speculation. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.395)

Through this kind of chaotic narration Hogg presents the tragedy of 1746 in a harshly uncompromising fashion. The polemic of the novel refuses to hold back, viciously attacking the actions of Cumberland's soldier's, who 'had been accustomed for three months bygone to regard the lives of Highlanders merely as those of noxious animals' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.402). While, as was mentioned earlier, the Scotland of the fiction is presented as severely divided, both socially and politically, the shared suffering of these episodes by Highland and Lowland characters alike seems to draw the nation together, presenting Culloden as a genuine national tragedy, rather than one inflicted only on the Highlands. Hogg interestingly presents the tragedy as perhaps the result of a Holy 'curse' on the Stuarts, as a result of their treatment of the Covenanters:

These sufferers [the Covenanters] cried incessantly to the Almighty for aid, until at last he sent out his angel, who pronounced the exterminating

curse on the guilty race of Stuart, and a triple woe on all that should support their throne. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.389)

However, regardless of the specific political or even divine cause of the violent events surrounding Culloden – in this case suggestive of Scottish national division – Hogg’s narrative does seem to present this as a shared national tragedy. The narration of Culloden erupts into a sentimental novel set in the Borders, written by an author seemingly compelled towards relating these episodes, with this tragedy becoming an unavoidable and defining event for Scottish national history and culture.

Before leaving *The Three Perils of Women*, one of the many minor tangential narratives in the novel helps to summarise in a sense the ideological programme identified in this work. Coming in the first ‘peril’, the story of a young British naval gunner’s actions in the heat of battle strikes a powerful note regarding Hogg’s treatment of the violent Scottish past:

The man continued for a while quite unsettled and insensible; but at length, in the utmost desperation, he seized a paint-pot, clapped it on his head for a helmet, and under this ideal safeguard, all fear vanished in one moment. There was no man on board who behaved with more spirit during the whole of the engagement; for he not only exerted himself to the utmost, but encouraged those about him to do the same. The paint ran in streams off at his heels, covering all his body with long stripes; yet there was he flying about on the deck, like a hero, with his paint-pot on his head. That man afterwards rose to distinction for his undeviating course of steadiness and bravery. (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.97)

Hogg’s description of a young Brit, obliged to blind himself to a violent reality in order to successfully face his task, has a keen significance in light of the preceding analysis of this novel. It is understandable that a British historiographical-revisionist narrative might attempt to pass over the violent reality of certain features of the Scottish past, clapping a ‘paint-pot’ over its

readers' heads. It is clear that the horror of events such as those surrounding Culloden would have the potential to play a disruptive role in attempts to construct a comfortable and politically-cohesive British imperial modernity. Yet Hogg's fiction consistently refuses to blind itself to the realities of Scottish history, denying the 'paint-pot' to his reader, and narrating Scotland in all its political and social complexities. Though it could be argued that in the very act of narrating these events in the context of fiction, Hogg contributes to the further aestheticization (and consequently de-politicization) of the Scottish past, the novel's treatment of Culloden seems committed primarily to an uncompromising and graphic focus on the specifics of these events on an immediate level, rather than removing them to a comfortable aesthetic distance. Through this Hogg's fiction presents a polemical mode which denies these episodes a Romantic transcendence of political relevance; this feature operating alongside and interconnectedly with the various other defensive (whether intended as so or not) ideological approaches to Scottish culture displayed in the novel.

## V

The exuberance of Hogg's fiction increasingly cements his place at the core of the Scottish literary canon. His deployment of language is part of a wider destabilization of polite literary convention in his work – seen particularly explicitly in *The Three Perils of Women*, with its focus on a vernacular heteroglossia, its subversion of generical expectations and its resistance to a circumlocution of the politico-historical tragedy in its subject material. For this study Hogg's fiction provides a strong example of one characteristically Scottish Romantic approach to aesthetics and polemical engagement. In his focus on

physicality, experiential immediacy and the grotesque, Hogg's fiction contrasts against an ideology of transcendent aesthetics, asserting his characteristically powerful polemical approach 'from the ground up'. Of course, this distinction is on one level attributable to the formal differences between poetry and the novel, yet this study reads it as an ideological divide operating above and beyond the dictates of genre – seen most explicitly in a comparison between *The Three Perils of Women* and *Waverley*. Hogg's fiction is difficult to accurately pin-point on an ideological level, yet there is certainly a tangible strain running through these narratives which appears to narrate a refusal on the part of Scottish culture to succumb to a romanticized and de-politicized nationhood, characterized by the 'polemic of the aesthetic' seen in *Waverley*. In contrast to Scott's stadial-developmental narrative – which confidently seals Scottish oppositional politics into an aestheticized historical vacuum – Hogg's fiction, in particular *The Three Perils of Women*, insists on exploring these issues with a powerful urgency. While refusing to put Jacobitism – and thus a militant form of Scottish nationhood – safely to bed, Hogg ultimately seems aware of the deeply problematic nature of the Scottish past in both political and social contexts, and can be seen engaging in a dialogue through his fiction on how best to approach these issues. He seems critical of both 'Romantic' and 'Enlightened' ideologies – and the literary fashions in which they operate – perhaps displaying a general mistrust of overt modern ideology *en masse*, and instead seeking solace in a native, rural, cultural base.

The question remains as to whether a literary engagement with national culture can indeed coherently provide a form of political 'preservation' against this de-politicizing agency of romanticization. Duncan asks: 'Does a modern

romance raise the past in order to mourn it, confirming its death, or in order to bring it back to life, defying the sentence of death?' (Duncan, p.199). Clearly there is a problematic aestheticizing agency implicit within art. Yet if such a move is truly possible, then Hogg's fiction does seem to provide a powerful cultural defence of elements of the Scottish cultural heritage which perhaps does act in 'defying the sentence of death', re-asserting its immediate relevance within a modern British context.

### Chapter Three - 'Robert Burns and National Aesthetic'

#### I

Recent criticism has increasingly worked to emphasise the importance of Burns to many features of the wider Romantic literary landscape, re-instating his centrality to study of this period. This revival in Burns studies is acting to rectify what Nigel Leask terms Burns's 'academic eclipse in university departments over the last fifty years' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.2). Restoring Burns to his place among the most influential, and indeed problematic poets of the eighteenth century, this movement is both welcome and necessary. This chapter draws heavily on Leask's study, *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, alongside Pittock's chapter on the poet in his *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*. Both critics' approaches to Burns are particularly useful in light of the topical aims of this study, by seeking to move beyond the restrictive assumptions often made about Burns, re-evaluate his complex textual approaches, and assess his intimate relationship to eighteenth-century cultural formations. To achieve a comprehensive analysis of the poetry, it is important that we avoid the temptation to allow Burns's work to transcend its own historicity, a move perhaps encouraged by his role as Scotland's national poet. This danger goes hand-in-hand with the risk of allowing Burns's own slippery self-characterizations to dictate our readings of his poetry; and indeed both Leask and Pittock go to some length to display Burns's capacity as a master-tactician in the game of personal myth-making.

Leask's study in particular focuses on the reality of Burns's role in Scottish society, rejecting a simplistic acceptance of his pastoral persona: 'The

pastoral myth of the “Heav’n taught ploughman” has occluded Burns’s proximity to this branch of the “rural professional class”, effective executors of the social and economic transformation of late eighteenth-century rural Scotland’ (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.32). Underlining the failure of this characterization to capture the complexities of Burns's life and career, Leask explores the realities faced by Burns in both his roles as a poet and an active participant in the cultural and social developments of late-eighteenth century Scotland; alongside his highly sophisticated mobilization of literary genre, patronage structures, and textual allusion. Citing the influence of the Enlightenment culture of 'improvement' on Burns's social sphere and his own ideological makeup, Leask places Burns firmly within eighteenth-century Scottish culture, allowing him to usefully elucidate the poetry. Pittock's study, though shorter, is also at pains to illuminate Burns's often duplicitous self-presentations; his sophisticated control of language and register; and the intricate intertexts between his poetry and features of eighteenth-century culture, in particular the complex dialogue with notions of antiquarianism conducted in *Tam o' Shanter* [K 321].<sup>64</sup> In restoring Burns to his historical reality, and identifying the ideological complexities at play in his work, these developments in Burns criticism facilitate a better understanding of the poetry, while grasping, and moving beyond, the cultural developments which have allowed important dimensions of the Burns story to be so frequently occluded.

---

<sup>64</sup> The texts used for the poems in the present study are taken from the single volume edition of James Kinsley’s 1968 edition of the works, given with references to Kinsley’s numbering system. See *Robert Burns: Poems and Songs*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Burns's importance to this study's attempt at defining a particularly Scottish Romantic approach to literary aesthetics and polemical engagement is demonstrated by his key role in the ideological developments in criticism and culture which must inevitably impact on such a project. His astute mobilization (and indeed formation) of key elements in literary aesthetics place Burns firmly at the centre of both the canonical and critical tradition. This chapter explores the nature of Burns's use of literary aesthetics towards polemical ends, engaging with some of the ideological frameworks operating in a selection of his work. To attempt to cover in sufficient detail how Burns engages with the major ideological issues under examination, the chapter tackles a number of textual examples, with each analysis remaining necessarily concise. Initially, attending to the prefatory material to both his Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions, Burns's self-fashioning is addressed, exploring the sophisticated manner in which he presents his persona to the reading public – a brief note on *The Vision* [K 62] provides an example from the poetry of this same process. *The Epistle to J. Lapraik*, [K 57] serves as an illustration of Burns's key mobilization, and polemical defence, of the Scots language. *The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer* [K 81] and *The Cotter's Saturday Night* [K 72] are both examined in terms of Burns's characterizations of Scottish nationhood, with the focus on the latter particular interested in his deployment of a highly romanticized ideal. A cursory look at Burns's song-collecting leads into a discussion of *Tam o' Shanter* [K 321], in which the poet's cryptic engagement with antiquarianism and issues surrounding cultural authority are discussed. This survey of some of the key issues and works in Burns's oeuvre sketches how he figures within the contentious cultural concerns outlined in the previous chapters. Burns's

personal status as Scotland's 'national bard' positions him at the core of one of the key questions which this study tackles: the nature of the treatment of Scottish nationhood in literature over the long eighteenth century. It is of keen interest how Burns's legacy is involved in the conflicting ideological debates and cultural procedures surrounding Scottish national identity.

## II

Beginning with the self-fashioning Burns enacts in the prefatory material to both the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of his works, we can see the subtleties operating in both his understanding of literary vogue and social structures. The epigraph to the Kilmarnock volume immediately sets out the key feature of this self-presentation:

The Simple Bard, unbroke by rules of Art,  
He pours the wild effusions of the heart:  
And if inspir'd, 'tis Nature's pow'rs inspire;  
Her's all the melting thrill, and her's the kindling fire.<sup>65</sup>

This focus on his 'natural' poetic abilities, coming from a rural intimacy with Nature, rather than a cultivated scholarly/literary approach, has become one of the absolutely central tropes of Romanticism, with Burns announcing himself as a prime example of an autodidact. The notion that Burns is 'unbroke' by literary erudition (clearly false on a cursory glance through the textual allusions and use of poetic form in the works) seems to carry an interesting double-meaning, as if a more sophisticated poet would not only be 'broken-in' in terms of literary

---

<sup>65</sup> Robert Burns, 'Epigraph to the Kilmarnock Edition' (1786), in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), III, p.970.

knowledge, but actually 'broken' - indicating the precedence of this 'Simple' condition. This suggestion that simplicity is actually a poetic benefit later receives its most celebrated Romantic enunciation in Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. This characteristic Burnsean approach, denying himself any real scholarly knowledge, and modestly disclaiming responsibility for any genius his work may display, is a highly conscious form of self-publication which expertly plays on reader expectations. Leask points out the double-appeal implicit in the epigraph to the literary vogue of Burns's time: 'Burns astutely played to the taste for poetic primitivism in the epigraph to the Kilmarnock volume, tactically dropping Scots (despite the volume's title *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*) for the fashionable idiom of sensibility' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, pp.3-4).

The two couplets of the epigraph hit upon both the fashion for 'poetic primitivism' in their content (a fashion which had reached international proportions in the wake of Mapherson's *Ossian*) and the popular 'idiom of sensibility' in their language; displaying Burns's ability to employ literary trends to his own self-publishing ends at its neatest.<sup>66</sup> Much of the same sentiment is continued in the Kilmarnock Preface, as Burns continues to enforce his own supposed lack of scholarly learning. Burns's poetic endeavour is summarised thus:

THE following trifles are not the production of the Poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and perhaps amid the elegancies and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocrites or Virgil [...] Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners, he felt

---

<sup>66</sup> Jon Mee describes the 'cult status' of the Ossian poems, popular 'both in Britain and on the continent, where the poems were highly valued'. See John Mee, 'Ossianism', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, p.630.

and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language.<sup>67</sup>

Again Burns states his lack of literary education, undermined of course by the obvious allusion to, through disavowal of, classical example. This time the focus turns specifically on the language of the volume, written in the 'native' tongue spoken among his 'rustic compeers'; presented as a means through which a genuine representation of rural life can be achieved, as Leask identifies: 'his literary *ignorance* authenticates the poet's portrayal of the world of his "rustic compeers" in "his and their native language"' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.77). Pittock focuses in on the implications of this move to employ 'native language', claiming that although Burns's poetry moves through a number of registers – with varying levels of authenticity regarding genuine vernacular Scots (Pittock, p.148) – this position makes a powerful ideological statement on the linguistic hierarchy:

Burns's defence of his native tongue in both prefaces, delivered as it is in standard English, is a defence of 'the very language of men'; yet Shenstone too, he says, writes for 'our language, our nation, and our species'. Burns seeks to make Scots and English tongues on a level, both human, both equal: it is Ramsay's claim, the right to use either or both. (Pittock, p.150)

Burns's insistence on his right to employ the Scots tongue – and indeed the indication inherent in the Kilmarnock preface that this move is conducive to the production of better, more emotionally genuine poetry – becomes a distinctly national inflection of a pastoral ideology, which certainly positions this work from the outset as asserting an 'altermentality', a defence of the cultural 'other'. In aligning himself with a rural cultural base, Burns sets the groundwork for his ultimate adoption as the Scottish 'national bard', setting out his stall as a poet

---

<sup>67</sup> Robert Burns, 'Preface to the Kilmarnock Edition' (1786), in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, III, p.971.

providing an expression of 'natural' Scotland. If in the Edinburgh dedication we see Burns mobilising what Leask calls 'the patrician discourse of civic humanism and Scottish patriotism' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.95) in a quest for lucrative national patronage, this original identification with a 'natural' rural Scotland surely provides the ideological framework upon which Burns can mount an appeal to a more national base. The tone of the Edinburgh dedication displays Burns fully engaging with a form of Scottish nationalistic sentiment:

I come to claim the common Scottish name with you, my illustrious Countrymen; and to tell the world that I glory in the title. — I come to congratulate my Country, that the blood of her ancient heroes still runs uncontaminated.<sup>68</sup>

Burns's passionate insistence that he 'glor[ies] in the title' of Scotsman reads in this excerpt as a responsive gesture, reflexively indicating that this identity might be considered by some as less than 'glorified'. In this (though perhaps over-stated) gesture towards the Scottish landed class, Burns seems to subtly reject the shame perhaps felt by some 'North-Britons' over their supposedly provincial status. The offence some may feel at a perceived betrayal of Burns's egalitarian values in his appeal to 'the illustrious Names of his native Land' ('Dedication' (1787), p.977) is surely balanced, to a degree, by his insistence on 'claim[ing] the common Scottish name' with them. However, importantly, the progression between the Kilmarnock and Edinburgh prefaces displays what for this study is the crucial ideological tactic employed by Burns in his self-fashioning: initially identifying his Bardic roots in a 'natural' local base which can then be projected towards a national role. Indeed, the statement of his 'natural' bardic role is still strongly present in the Edinburgh dedication, as Burns talks of

---

<sup>68</sup> Robert Burns, 'Dedication: To the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt' (1787), in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, III, p.978.

his 'wild, artless notes' ('Dedication' (1787), p.978), directly underpinning this call for national patronage. This effective employment by Burns of cultural structures and literary fashion is in direct opposition to the (arguably) more restrictive local role affixed to Hogg as the 'Ettrick Shepherd', as discussed in Chapter Two.

This self-projection from the local and the 'natural' to the national is a tactic which Leask cites Burns as employing on a more immediate textual level in *The Vision* [K 62]. The claim for national bardic status enacted in the Edinburgh dedication through Burns's national muse, who 'bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of my natal Soil, in my native tongue' ('Dedication', (1787), p.978) is closely mirrored in this poem. Leask identifies the significance of the device of 'Coila's mantle' as a symbolic tool for Burns's own self-projection. Initially, the identification of the mantle with the Ayrshire countryside firmly locates his bardic status in the province of the rural and the 'natural', as Leask states: 'Importantly, the local muse Coila consecrates Burns's pastoral identity as a "rustic bard"' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.98). The images of the Doon river and the towns of Irvine and Ayr expand visually into a panorama of Scotland, symbolically representing this ability to project from the regional to the national – an ability which is finally metaphorically gifted to the poet himself in the form of the mantle at the poem's end. The geographical transcendence represented by this 'rural crown' is gifted to Burns in this daring ideological statement of intent: 'The device of Coila's mantle embodies Burns's claims as a "rustic poet" to both inhabit and transcend his "humble sphere", via his regional self-identification as a poet of Ayrshire first, and of Scotland second' (Leask,

*Robert Burns*, p.106). In a performance given its final completion by the addition of the extra stanzas concentrating on the Edinburgh gentry (and therefore adding another level to this stadial progression from the local to the national), Burns enacts in poetic form in *The Vision* the ideological directive seen in his prefatory material. Drawing on the literary vogue for 'rustic' poets, Burns creates a popular persona which he then projects from its local sphere into the national one with considerable aplomb.

### III

As this study has frequently articulated, the usage of language in Scottish writing over the long eighteenth century must be read as a particularly important signifier, with the employment of language and register a key ideological tool (or even weapon) utilized by these writers. As the previous chapters have explored, language can serve as a powerful assertion of cultural difference – and therefore arguably a defensive statement of nationhood – regardless of authorial intention. Burns's deployment of language and register is particularly complex, providing us with a key insight into the ideological frameworks of his poetry. As Pittock points out, moving away from a viewpoint which would take Burns's language at face value (one which goes hand-in-hand with buying fully into the notion of his 'rusticity'), we must constantly assess the conscious decisions behind his deployment of language, 'Because Burns is a sophisticated writer, writing in Scots is always a poetic option for him, not an educational certainty' (Pittock, p.147). In political terms Burns's heteroglossia has multiple possible ideological interpretations. In line with the way this study has primarily read the use of non-standard language, drawing on Pittock's work, we can view this as a

culturally-defensive manoeuvre undermining the linguistic primacy of standardized English. However, it is certainly worth mentioning an important contrasting view – that delivered by Robert Crawford, who sees Burns's heteroglossia as emphatically 'British': 'Burns often writes as if the political Union of 1707 has affected a linguistic union, giving him an enlarged territory in which to operate. Linguistically, he is the most brilliantly distinguished eighteenth-century example of a British poet' (Crawford, p.106). From this perspective the co-presence of Scots and English on the page in Burns's poetry itself mirrors the political union. Though this study is more inclined towards the first viewpoint, this interesting formulation is nonetheless significant – further testament to the ideological complexities in Scottish writing over the long eighteenth century.

Alongside the important polemical signification of Burns's linguistic shifts, he also frequently moves to openly celebrate and defend the Scots language. A key illustration of this comes in the *Epistle to J. Lapraik, An Old Scotch Bard* [K 57]. This poem, an example of the epistolary form through which some of Burns's most celebrated work is achieved, provides some of the most openly nationalistic sentiment regarding language and literature. Interestingly, Leask cites the importance of Burns's epistolary network in the self-fashioning previously discussed, elucidating the crucial social and cultural foundation this community provided him in mounting his literary career: 'Despite the sentimentalized image of worldly incapacity, Burns's poetic self-fashioning depended on identification with the social networks of his native country as well as the new opportunities afforded him by eighteenth-century Ayrshire's

provincial enlightenment' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.84). Given this sense of camaraderie pervading through the epistolary work, it is perhaps no surprise that here we find Burns passionately celebrating both the language and the historical figures of Scots poetry; an appropriate mood in addressing a fellow-practitioner of this art. The famous lines: 'Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire, | That's a' the learning I desire' [K 57, XIII. 73-74] strike the same tone of unlearned 'rusticity' seen in the prefatory material, presented here as not only a modest reality, but as an advantageous situation, with Burns 'desiring' no more education towards his poetic endeavour. Burns uses this address to a fellow 'Scotch Bard' to turn his sights directly on the academic establishment, mounting a scathing critique of educational sophistication (a sentiment again complicated by Burns's own learning), as opposed to the 'spark' provided by 'Nature':

What's a' your jargon o' your Schools,  
 Your Latin names for horns an' stools;  
 If honest Nature made you *fools*,  
   What sairs your Grammars?  
 Ye'd better taen up *spades* and *shools*,  
   Or *knappin-hammers*. [K 57, XI. 61-66]

Again the sentiment here goes beyond merely a celebration of the rural 'rusticity' – which is specifically aligned here with usage of the Scots language – to reflectively attack what Burns presents as the folly of academic erudition. The double-sense in this passage is cleverly mounted, not only suggesting that those not fit for literature would be better suited to manual labour, but also that hard physical work could actively help in producing better literature. In this sense 'rusticity' is here presented as a positive requirement for the poetry which Burns celebrates. The notion that sophistication (here signified by a knowledge of Latin) serves only to provide an excess, useless vocabulary is posited against the

true worldly sentiments to be gained from hard work. The Romantic notion of the 'simple bard' is here promoted by Burns as a pre-requisite for effective art – and one which is directly aligned with a Scots sensibility. In the fourteenth stanza, Burns locates this poetic ability firmly within the Scots tradition, drawing a successive line of Scottish poets towards which he aspires:

O for a spunk o' ALLAN's glee,  
 Or FERGUSON's, the bauld an' slee,  
 Or bright L\*\*\*\*K's, my friend to be,  
     If I can hit it!  
 That would be *lear* enough for me,  
     If I could get it. [K 57, XIV. 79-84]

Though the suggestion of his limited ambition rings somewhat falsely here, in drawing this line of succession from Ramsay through to himself, Burns asserts the importance of the Scots tradition which the poem has already ideologically aggrandised. As Pittock points out, quoting from the Edinburgh dedication, Burns's saw his control of Scots as a key feature of his poetic ambition: 'Language, and his control of it, was part of Burns's aim to be "a Scotch bard... my highest pride"' (Pittock, p.148). This important ideological drive is one directly in opposition to the anglicizing ambitions displayed by many of Burns's 'Enlightened' contemporaries. In the *Epistle to J. Lapraik*, regardless of whether this is merely an expression of common solidarity, the celebration of the Scots language – tied inextricably to the notion of poetic 'rusticity' – goes beyond a means towards achieving a 'national bardship', and becomes itself the representation of what Burns polemicizes as the very foundation of good literature.

IV

Turning to a quite different engagement with Scottish nationhood, in *The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer, to the Right Honorable and Honorable, the Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons* [K 81] Burns deploys his aesthetic arsenal in a highly aggressive engagement with contemporary politics. Dealing with the political controversy over the taxation of alcohol, Burns gives himself a platform to directly assault government policy. Leask neatly summarises the polemical message of the poem:

Here's the deal, Billy Pitt [William Pitt the Younger], the poem is saying: give us back our cheap whisky, and in return you'll get a plentiful supply of brave Scottish soldiers to fight your wars; but just try reneging on your promises, enshrined in the terms of the 1707 Union, and an equivalent violence will be unleashed on the Excise officers of the British state. (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.133)

The poem is littered with highly hostile threats, ranging from the obvious violence represented by the female 'auld Scotland' [K 81, XV. 86] – armed and ready to cause havoc – to the more subtle insinuations of rebellion perhaps indicated in referring to the government ministers as 'ye chosen FIVE-AND-FORTY' [K 81, XXIII. 133], given the still recent memory of the Jacobite Uprising, or '45'. Burns's rural persona is still present in this bold poem dealing with national politics, as he drops in agricultural references which provide the 'rustic' basis for his aesthetic approach to the topical issues of the work. Through lines such as 'Or Faith! I'll wad my new pleugh-pettle' [K 81, XV. 87], Burns mobilises this highly Romantic poetic persona towards his polemical end. The work, operating upon the typically Burnsean identification of Scottish nationhood with alcohol – in particular whisky – culminates with the toast: 'FREEDOM and WHISKY gang

together, | 'Tak aff your whither' [K 81, XXXI. 185-186]. This final sentiment, reinforcing the simultaneously political and cultural linking of Scotland with the consumption and sale of whisky, does however strike perhaps a darker note on a closer examination. Referring back to Leask's summarization of the basic argument of the poem, the suggestion that Burns is theoretically offering up the lives of young Scotsman to military service in return for economic leniency seems, certainly from a modern perspective, far from a proposal of 'Freedom'. However, the *Cry and Prayer* displays one of Burns's most directly polemical poetic modes, engaging not only in a discourse of Scottish patriotism, but in the specific contemporary political challenges facing the nation.

The mood of the *Cry and Prayer* is in direct contrast to that pervading largely throughout another of Burns's best-known works, *The Cotter's Saturday Night* [K 72]. The portrayal of a rural Scottish household in this work strikes, for the majority of the poem, a sombre note of domestic, pastoral bliss. Burns focuses on familial solidarity, religious piety and modest satisfaction in his depiction of the Scottish rural working-class manners displayed by the Cotter's household:

His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty *Wifie's* smile,  
The *lispin' infant*, prattling on his knee,  
Does a' his weary kjaugh and care beguile,  
And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil. [K 72, III. 24-27]

The peaceful oasis provided by the manual labourer's home life serves as a foil to his tiring exertions during the day, presenting a contented rural existence. This image is highly important for the wider cultural issues under focus in this study. Leask points out the enormous influence of this one poem, combined with its (at least partially false) identification with the poet's own early life, in establishing

Burns's national bardic status: 'For an urban, industrialized, and increasingly provincialized Scottish nation, both the birthplace cottage and its poetic epitome, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, more than any other of Burns's poems, underwrote his claims to "national bardship"' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, pp.210-211). Leask's portrayal of the importance of this sentimental image of Scottish rural manners to Burns's adoption as national poet raises a number of highly problematic questions. This image was by no means a genuine representation of late-eighteenth century Scotland, with the rapid disappearance of the 'Cotter-class' in the little-known social upheaval of the 'Lowland clearances' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.220). Therefore the picture presented in *Cotter's Saturday Night* is a highly aestheticized, 'Romantic' one, upon which Leask expands: 'Burns's cotters have joined the ranks of other Arcadians [...] who have come to exist purely as a literary or moral idea of innocence rather than a contemporary social fact, however much the poem's conclusion strongly disavows the fact' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.225). This romanticized notion of Scottish national identity played a fundamental role in Burns's election to the status of national poet – and is therefore at the heart of a major strand in Scottish cultural nationalism both historically and contemporarily. This problematically places a 'Romantic', highly aestheticized ideal at the very centre of Scottish cultural politics over the long eighteenth century and beyond. If Burns the bardic figure becomes a central focus for a nation attempting to find cultural self-definition within the politically-complex dynamic resulting from the conflict between Scotland and 'North-Britain', then the role of *The Cotter's Saturday Night* in this posits an overtly romanticized cultural model firmly within this dynamic.

Burns shifts from the sentimental tone of the poem for his conclusion, switching into the aggressive polemical register apparent in the *Cry and Prayer*. Here we see Burns mobilizing the romanticized image of Scottish rural life he has constructed to mount an impassioned patriotic speech:

O THOU! who pour'd the *patriotic tide*,  
 That stream'd thro' great, unhappy WALLACE' heart;  
 Who dar'd to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,  
 Or *nobly die*, the second glorious part:  
 (The Patriot's GOD, peculiarly thou art,  
 His *friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward!*)  
 O never, never, SCOTIA'S realm desert;  
 But still the *Patriot*, and the *Patriot-bard*,  
 In bright succession raise, her *Ornament and Guard!* [K 72, XXI. 181-189]

This polemical turn at the close of the work moves from the sentimentalized image through which Burns builds a picture of why Scotland deserves defending, to then launch this heated conclusion. The introduction of Wallace immediately asserts a military notion of Scottish nationhood specifically in opposition to English 'tyrannic pride', through which Burns strikes a highly defensive political note. Using the romanticized image of domestic bliss in the cottage as a departure-point, Burns's assertion of national pride, of 'altermentality', strikes a significantly aggressive military position, closing the poem which played such an important role in his literary success-story on this note. This assertive nationalistic mood is seen elsewhere, as in *Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn* [K 425], or the *Lament of Mary Queen of Scots on the Approach of Spring* [K 316], in which Burns has Mary predicting a gory death for her English antagonist, Elizabeth I:

But as for thee, thou false woman,  
 My sister and my fae,  
 Grim vengeance yet shall whet a sword  
 That thro' thy soul shall gae. [K 316, V. 33-36]

However, in the case of the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, the expression of violent nationalism is particularly significant – for the focus of this study – given the romanticized ideological basis upon which it is built. The Scotland which Burns moves to defend at the close of *Cotter's Saturday Night* is one built upon a pastoral ideal, an explicitly and highly Romantic aestheticized idea of nationhood.

## V

Burns's cultural role, and his relationship with Romantic aesthetics, goes well beyond the margins of his poetic career. In his capacity as an enthusiast, collector, and editor of Scottish folk songs his contribution to Scottish cultural development during the period is also highly significant. Unfortunately the scale of this study hinders an investigation into the specifics of Burns's song-collecting; yet this process itself on a more general level raises some interesting questions. The practice of collecting folk-songs, and popular antiquarianism more widely, is a cultural procedure which is clearly highly significant regarding the formation, and consequent political status, of national culture. Across the two major collections which Burns contributed to in his antiquarian role, we find conflicting political ideologies at play, as Leask discusses:

Both Johnson and Thomson were important pioneers in transforming 'popular' into 'national' song, but the latter term has a slightly different inflection in each case. Compared to Johnson's 'patriotic inclusivity', Thomson's collection was in its very conception an 'act of union' presenting alternative Scottish and English lyrics to each of its elaborate set melodies. (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.254)

Though both collections, as Leask cites, acted to produce a 'national' canon of song by the act of *collecting*, they nevertheless present highly contrasting

political aspirations. This divide – between the at least nominally Scottish patriotic implications of Johnson's approach, in his focus on authenticity and his move to gather subscriptions, besides dedicating his collection to the 'Society of Antiquaries of Scotland' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, pp.252-253), and the overtly British ideological statement made in the translation-based format of Thomson's – is representative of a tension inherent within the process of collecting itself. Does the act of collection intrinsically involve the process of corporation, or safe-packaging, engaging in a cultural classification which ideologically contributes towards the potential de-politicization of cultural material? In this light the affixing of a national label to cultural material could be seen as exerting a homogenizing agency upon regional diversity. Or alternatively can this process make a statement of cultural 'altermentality' in presenting a coherent national-cultural unit? Both of these alternatives seem entirely defensible, yet as Leask illuminates, in the specific cultural conditions of eighteenth-century Scotland, the practice of popular antiquarianism took on a particular political significance: 'In Scotland [...] this often translated into a patriot discourse critical of the cultural homogenization that followed the 1707 union' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.257). Leask draws upon Susan Manning's theories of 'union' and 'fragmentation', discussed in Chapter One, to identify an inherently 'fragmenting' principle in the procedure of antiquarianism – by its essence a 'collection' or heterogenous 'list' of cultural artefacts, rather than a 'narrative whole':

In Scotland, as elsewhere in Europe, antiquarianism was considered as *marginal* to mainstream discourses of scholarship and taste, representing in Susan Manning's words 'the "other" of Enlightenment historiography, the double agent on its boundaries [...] the taxonomic and fragmented language of things offered by antiquarians lacked the connecting parts of articulated speech that made a single coherent narrative possible, and the

“progression” into the Anglophone homogeneity of Civil Society inevitable’. (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.257)

This fascinating argument sheds an entirely different light on the political significance of Burns's role as an antiquary. Tying the process of antiquarianism into a cultural dialogue opposed to narrative-continuity presents it as therefore conflicting against both the project of Enlightenment stadial historiography, and British cultural homogenization. In a cultural situation where this dialogue itself was considered an anti-establishment form of intellectual procedure, and given the expression of cultural 'otherness' identified here as ideologically inherent within the format of an antiquarian's collecting, Burns's role becomes visible as a highly significant assertion of Scottish cultural difference. The earlier point made regarding a possible safe-packaging and de-politicizing agency implicit within this dialogue cannot be completely overlooked, however Leask's argument, building upon Manning's work, seems to grasp a fundamental ideological drive within this cultural activity. In his recording of vernacular language and oral culture, besides his explicit politically-oppositional ideology, Leask presents the celebrated antiquary, Francis Grose (for whom Burns wrote *Tam o' Shanter*), as a strong example of the way in which antiquarian discourse during the period could be an explicitly anti-establishment practice: “The hegemony of metropolitan culture and historiography (affirmed by scholars such as Johnson, Warton, Blair, and Percy) was here quite literally “challenged from the margins” (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.263). In this light, the tradition of popular antiquarianism in eighteenth-century culture – and Burns's own significant involvement in it – can be seen as a highly radical discourse engaging directly in the dialogue on Scottish cultural politics and national representations, and one

certainly equipped with the means to 'challenge hegemony', both in terms of cultural procedure and historiographical ideology.

## VI

Having discussed both Burns's role as an antiquary, and briefly touched upon the figure of Grose, it seems appropriate to mount a (necessarily limited) analysis of the poem which ties these two together – *Tam o' Shanter. A Tale* [K 321]. This poem plays with notions of antiquarianism in a highly sophisticated manner, which both Leask and Pittock go to considerable lengths to identify, though the two critics affix differing ideological significance to this focus – Leask focussing on antiquarianism as an anti-establishment dialogue, Pittock on the poem as satirizing a collecting, perhaps even controlling motivation behind antiquarianism – both of which have important currency for this study. From the poem's form of publication, to its structural and topical approach, the ideological complexities here are among Burns's most nuanced.

Leask cites the significance of the poem's original publication as a footnote to Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*: 'Even in its paratextual apparition on the page, the poem underlines and plays with the marginality of antiquarian discourse' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.265). Hidden in a footnote, which as Leask points out nevertheless dominates the pages its features on (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.265), *Tam o' Shanter's* original visual form itself comments upon the notions of marginality and cultural authority. Continuing this sense of the poem's topical framing, Pittock identifies the perhaps sarcastic reflection of the antiquarian procedure in the poem's affected conclusion, 'Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare'

[K 321, 224]: 'The extraction of a commonplace moral from a supernatural encounter is precisely the collecting act: the reduction of the individuated self and intensely realized locality to a humorous anecdote with a generally applicable moral' (Pittock, p.157). Pittock's notion of the conclusion's significance – enacting the process of collecting in providing a glib summarising moral – is backed up by the highly suggestive, forced tone of the last few lines, with the sentimental mood of the final 'anecdote' barging into the text. Through these framing features we begin to get a notion of the extent to which this work engages with antiquarian ideology, and cultural frameworks more generally. Most significantly for this study, *Tam o' Shanter* has become – in a manner not a little ironic considering the target of its satire – a key artefact of Scottish national culture. As an example of this, the inclusion of the poem in a recent publication entitled *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales from Burns to Buchan*, confidently places this poem right at the centre of a particular Scottish canonical paradigm, a status which the poem itself displays a highly dubious attitude towards.<sup>69</sup> Despite the biting satire operating on many levels throughout the work, which certainly in some respects ridicules the process of antiquarian collection, seeming to reject the possibility of cultural possession or comprehensive classification, has the poem ultimately served as a highly 'classified' piece of Scottish culture, acting to further a romanticized formulation of Scottish national identity?

Beginning with the language of the work, Burns's switches through a number of literary registers, ranging from the highly vernacular Scots sections such as 'And drouthy neebors, neebors meet' [K 321, 2], to the standardized

---

<sup>69</sup> *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales from Burns to Buchan*, ed. Gordon Jarvie (London: Penguin Classics, 2008).

literary English of 'But pleasures are like poppies spread- | You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed' [K 321, 59-60]. Throughout Burns employs these switches in register as a key device dictating the pace of the work, and allowing him to effortlessly shift the mood - with the standardized English sections tending to provide a more sentimental reflective tone. However, Pittock poses the major usage of Scots as a significant form of 'defence', protecting the poem's rural subject material from mainstream academic analysis:

When Burns came to write the poem, most of it was in Scots, drawing a deliberate if partial veil over the tale for Grose as a non-Scots reader, and arguably protecting the tale from the full rigours of forensic standardization - which of course extended to language. (Pittock, p.156)

This notion combines with Pittock's general conception of the usage of Scots as a powerful statement of 'altermentality', to present Burns's language in the work as adopting a highly defensive cultural position - though the distance of Grose himself from mainstream linguistic directives suggests he would not be directly, or intentionally, the perpetrator of such standardization - unless of course we view the collecting act as itself a part of the process. This 'veiling' sees Burns as taking up a fascinating position in authoring this work: simultaneously presenting a (self-consciously untrustworthy) sample of Scottish culture, while hiding some of the subtleties of this behind the 'veil' of its cryptic vernacular. The sense that Burns is intentionally withholding aspects of his cultural subject matter from his non-Scots readership, through the very manner of its exposure, highlights the duplicitous ideological drive apparent here.

Perhaps the most dramatic employment of language in the work comes with Tam's only spoken line, the famous "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" [K 321, 189].

For Pittock this line provides an important assertion of orality into the work:

By publicly bawling out his direct appreciation of the erotic dance he is witnessing, Tam for one moment wrests the narrative from the narrator, returning it to oral immediacy: he is Tam the Chanter (the pipe part of the bagpipes), calling out his appreciation of the dance played before the Deil, likewise excited and piping on Scotland's native instrument. Just as the unfettered imagination of Blake's Milton and Shelley's poetic conceptions are more powerful than what appears in print, so the residue of writing's record of orality is inflamed, if only for a moment, by the intervention of Tam's delighted and abandoned contact with the hidden world revealed by his ride. (Pittock, p.162)

Breaking momentarily away from the sophisticated (and often perhaps sarcastic) treatments of antiquarian discourse, in this singular example of oral language Burns provides a glimpse, albeit briefly, of 'genuine' Scottish native culture invading through the highly complex textual fabric of the work. The oral tradition – which Burns poses throughout the poem as eluding the process of antiquarianism (an ironic statement by Burns given popular antiquarianism's particular interest in the oral tradition) – rears its head for a moment through Tam's drunken outburst. Perhaps by its limitation, the solitary example of orality in the work serves as a further comment on the intangibility of certain forms of native culture. Combining with the defensive cultural position posed by Burns's usage of Scots, the ideological significance of this invasion of orality, in many ways a fine example of Cairns Craig's notion of native culture 'erupt[ing] back into the present' (Craig, *Out of History*, p.71), stages a cultural contest over both the status and the possibility of containing Scottish culture. There is perhaps a risk of too neatly identifying orality with a 'genuine' nativity, particularly in the context of a society with such high literacy rates; yet the poem

itself seems to stage this dynamic, using this 'eruption' as the divisive break in the duplicitous ideological ruminations of the narrative.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately the language of the poem seems to reject the notion that a native culture can be classified or controlled, therefore on one level rejecting the potential for cultural de-politicization inherent within such a process. In this sense *Tam o' Shanter* – though a key artefact of the Romantic period, and perhaps one which ironically contributes towards a romanticized image of Scottish culture in its canonical centrality – seems in its language to reject, even attack, the aestheticizing and de-politicizing agency which this study cites as a central feature of a particular Romantic ideology.

Returning to the direct engagement in the poem with antiquarian procedure, Leask cites the importance of Burns's description of 'Kirk-Alloway' to this dialogue: 'The dismembered body parts of criminals or murder victims, and the murder instruments themselves [...] are here represented not so much as devotional objects in a Satanic mass (their literal function), but rather as antiquarian *collectibles*' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.270). For Leask the selection of gruesome objects with which Burns decorates his church is explicitly a 'collection' in the style of antiquarian research. Given the overt treatment of these concepts throughout the poem, this suggestion harmonizes with the overall thematic drive of the work. In this light, the presentation of the 'Satanic' collection becomes a means through which Burns casts aspersions on the

---

<sup>70</sup> Ian Britain's essay on 'Education' states that 'in Scotland existed the only comprehensive network of schools in the nation. These were under the aegis of the Church of Scotland, whose Calvinist allegiances committed it to the growth of literacy as a means of spreading the word of God through the Scriptures. Nearly every parish boasted at least one of these schools'. See Ian Britain, 'Education', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp.161-170, (pp.163-164).

antiquarian process itself (a cultural process used in this circumstance for a 'Satanic' ritual). However, returning to the notion of antiquarianism as a procedure which disrupts the narrative-based cultural strategies of the Enlightenment – and in contrast to the notion of 'collecting' as a controlling and de-politicizing act – Leask cites this section as key to Burns's assertion of this alternative discourse, as the poem 'rejects the distancing teleology of Scottish enlightenment historiography [...] insisting that these relics of violence be displayed, inventorized, and acknowledged' (Leask, *Robert Burns*, p.270). In an ideological move similar to that of the narrator in Hogg's *The Three Perils of Women*, who 'like[s] to rake [...] up' (*The Three Perils of Women*, p.332) the violent past, Burns's use of this antiquarian discourse becomes a rejection of the narrative procedures of Enlightenment stadial historiography, and an assertion of the cultural immediacy of the dark history represented through these objects. Although the objects themselves represent an international discourse which goes above and beyond merely an assertion of Scottish national history, the ideological statement made in this section can be brought to bear on the specific status of Scottish native culture; here asserting an 'otherness' through the implicit ideological implications of the antiquarian process in the context of eighteenth-century Scotland; staging the 'collection' as a defensive statement of a cultural 'altermentality'. Placed at the heart of the dramatically-pivotal sequence of the work, this descriptive passage can therefore be read as a key means through which Burns communicates a 'defensive' cultural statement.

*Tam o' Shanter*, then, is a poem which deals with notions of cultural authority and procedure on a number of levels. Burns is clearly highly aware of

the conflicting cultural ideologies represented in mainstream Enlightenment thought and popular antiquarianism. He uses this work to both satirize and mobilize the antiquarian process, celebrating the cultural marginality which this procedure can assert, while showing a distrust of the process and possibilities of collection. The poem is engaged throughout in a highly complex and self-reflexive dialogue on this discourse. The local Scottish culture represented in the work simultaneously stages its own elusiveness to antiquarian collection, while ironically delivering a version of itself over to this dialogue as a means towards a statement of its currency as both a 'fragmented' and 'fragmenting' cultural sphere. Burns's polemical bearing in the work also turns towards a rejection of the homogenizing agency represented by the cultural authority of Enlightenment ideology, mobilizing both the agency implied in the usage of language in the work, and the ideological marginality of antiquarian discourse, to mount a critique of mainstream cultural authority. However, if on a number of levels *Tam o' Shanter* is a poem which mounts a critique of cultural ordering, this critique is perhaps rendered somewhat ironic in light of the reception of the work, and its status at the heart of the Scottish canon, in that 'it has to some extent been adopted by the tradition it satirizes, that of the reduction of orality's hidden and elusive nature to the dimensions of cultural codification and collection' (Pittock, p.155). As a key text in Burns's output, this poem represents a wider dynamic in his adoption at the heart of Scottish culture; a process rendered highly problematic in light of some of the ideological frameworks present in the poetry: which as we can see can be overtly critical of such processes of cultural ordering or containment.

VII

The complexity of Burns's poetic approach, his ideological frameworks, and his self-representations, render any attempt to simply classify either his work or his legacy highly problematic, if not impossible. However, this short study has sought to identify a selection of key features which impact upon Burns's role within Scottish, and British Romanticism. Burns mobilizes what have become central elements of Romantic aesthetics – such as the notion of pastoral 'rusticity'; a focus on the vernacular; and on individual subjectivity – to create his unique poetic stylistics. His work is in direct dialogue with a number of influential ideologies, not least those surrounding the historical-revisionist strategies of the Scottish Enlightenment. As with Hogg, there is a definite focus in Burns's work on presenting Scottish culture in its vernacular immediacy, and to this extent Burns's can be read as making a statement of 'altermentality'. His engagement with antiquarian discourse can also be seen as an important statement of a cultural 'other', rejecting the mainstream ideological directives of the Enlightenment, and presenting a rich and 'fragmenting' Scottish culture. Pittock summarizes Burns as presenting a 'literature of combat' in opposition to British cultural hegemony, and one powerful enough to have ultimately impacted negatively on its status in the British cultural canon:

Burns provided a 'literature of combat' on a number of levels, from explicit radicalism through extraordinarily sophisticated use of register to achieve effects impossible in standard English, to the recovery and improvement of a large part of Scottish song tradition. Like Moore in Ireland, he brought the songs of a literature which engaged critically with England into English drawing-rooms. Victorian imperial power could cope with localized nationalities who expressed their cultural independence while remaining politically impotent; in the twentieth century, as that empire shrank and dissolved, not least through Irish

independence, an inclusive attitude towards Scots song has been less in evidence. (Pittock, p.164)

This highly 'defensive' literary mode is a key example of a direct and powerful Scottish mobilization of literary aesthetics towards polemical ends, with Burns communicating a politically significant assertion of Scottish national identity through his deployment of literary aesthetics.

It cannot however be denied that occasionally Burns's poetic ideology aligns itself somewhat closer with a transcendent conception of literary aesthetics. *The Brigs of Ayr, A Poem* [K 120] provides an interesting example of this notion. In its main body the poem provides a keen example of a highly polemical poetical mode, as Burns uses the work to directly stage a dramatic face-off between contrasting social and political ideologies. The conservative views posited by the 'Auld Brig' conflict with the modern Whig ideology of the 'improved' 'New Brig'. Burns mobilizes this polemical framework to explore in absorbing detail some of the key debates of his day, setting the discussion of controversial issues such as aesthetics and religion across a generational divide. This format facilitates a remarkably direct approach to these issues, as Burns voices the opposing views, largely avoiding taking sides in his own 'personal' narrative voice. However, the resulting stalemate is trumped in an intriguing manner. The invasion of the 'fairy train' [K 120, 195] can be read as presenting a highly stylized Romantic aesthetic as a transcendent agency which renders polemical discussion obsolete. The bitter debate between the Brigs is overwhelmed by the sudden onslaught of this overtly aestheticized mood, as florid as anything found in the most ornate works of Romanticism. This invasion causes the Brigs to forget 'their kindling wrath' [K 120, 234] and abandon the

polemical discussion, providing an example of Burns seeming to align himself with the notion of a particular Romantic poetic idiom as opposed to, or transcending, polemical debate.

Both Burns's poetry and his poetic self-fashioning are based on a sophisticated understanding of both literary taste and cultural structures, through which Burns expertly projected himself to his central status as the Scottish national bard. However, problematically, this process, in both the poetry and its prefatory material, seems to operate upon a core identification with highly romanticized notions of both the nation and the poet. Combined with his two-dimensional cultish adoption as a key focus for Scottish cultural nationalism, in this sense Burns's legacy can be seen as key to the romanticization (and consequent de-politicization) of Scottish culture. This notion is in direct opposition to the sentiment which Burns's can often be seen attempting to communicate: that of the essentially uncontainable nature of culture itself; yet it is no less significant despite this incongruity. Burns's work, and his personal status, then, may be engaged in a simultaneous assertion of Scottish cultural 'altermentality' and rejection of British homogenization; and the de-politicization of this Scottish culture through its romanticization. This complication is testament to the ideological complexities of both Burns's work and the discourses surrounding Scottish cultural politics during the long eighteenth century and beyond.

## Conclusion

### I

Scottish writing over the long eighteenth century represents a vital body of literature, the complexities of which continue to be unearthed by the close attentions of the modern critical establishment. The richness of this material is well displayed in light of the general focus of this study on the relationship between literary aesthetics and polemical engagement. This critical angle uncovers some of the central ideological frameworks operating in and around this often highly multifaceted literature. The historical circumstances under which this material was produced are a key factor in contributing to these ideological structures, not least the problematic and often uncomfortable inter-relationships between notions of Scottish nationhood and the mooted political status of the country during this period. The tension between often virulent notions of Scottish national identity and the political status of 'North Britain', can be seen operating on many levels in literature of the period. Both alongside and deeply in dialogue with this, this literature consistently reflects an awareness of ideological developments derived from Scottish Enlightenment thought, and can often be seen responding to these directly. Combined with the seismic social, political, economic and agricultural developments taking place across this period, these factors create a dynamic set of historical circumstances for literature. Given this, investigating the ways writers' mobilize the aesthetic tools of literature to engage in polemical dialogues is a key venture towards further illuminating this work.

In aiming to survey some of the ways literary aesthetics relate to polemical engagement across the canon, and under unavoidable practical constraints, this study has had to restrict primary consideration to a relative minimum; instead focussing on wider ideological trends across writers' work, combined with a heavy reliance on a strong body of recent criticism in this field. This focus has detailed some of the most important critical work to have emerged in the field in recent years. Linking together the arguments of these key critics, and using the critical framework thus achieved to address some pertinent primary textual examples, has provided a strategic means towards achieving the aims of the study. Although the Scottish situation over this period is unique, it is nonetheless in constant dialogue with the wider British and European landscape, and a longer study would certainly move to take more account of the particular interconnections between this Scottish material and examples from other national literatures. It is an important part of the process of properly identifying the unique features of Scottish writing to locate this material within the network of its surrounding and influencing traditions.

The introduction to this study contains a reference to the important work of the 'New Historicist' critical school – in particular that of major figures Jerome McGann and Clifford Siskin – and this critical debt is perhaps one that requires further clarification. The notion of literature as a 'transcendent' art-form which supersedes its own historical time and place is a dangerous idea for criticism, and one which Romantic theorizations of literature can in some cases particularly encourage. The important strain in Romantic literature which theorizes itself in this ahistorical manner cannot however be ignored, providing

we recognize that this ideology is itself powerfully historically-located. Though this study is far from denying the potential for universal kinds of appeal in literature, any critical focus which fails to identify the importance of historicity will inevitably achieve only a limited understanding of its subject. Though the methodological approach of this project has been almost entirely focussed around aesthetic methods and inter-textual (some inter-disciplinary) relationships – rather than any extended analysis of historical circumstances – the fundamental determination of this historicizing critical practice has been nonetheless influential.

## II

In the introduction certain of the key notions underpinning the project were established, including the significance of the deployment of language in Scottish literature of the period, and issues surrounding the Enlightenment project of stadial historiography. The problematic issue of periodization in reference to the material under focus was also addressed. This concluded that given the aesthetic and ideological nature of a Romantic period, our definition must inevitably be somewhat vague, given the organic nature of aesthetic and ideological developments. However, for the Scottish model, the importance of figures like Allan Ramsay in facilitating the circumstances which made such a tradition possible, must be recognised – suggesting the propriety of a long eighteenth century over a shorter Romantic period surrounding 1800. One important Romantic ideological position was then addressed, using the examples of Coleridge, Keats and Shelley as representative of a critically-important strand in this writing. This ideology was cited as placing a powerful focus on an

imaginative subjectivity which, though in varying manners, significantly seems to seek to disconnect literature from a 'degrading' involvement in everyday polemical issues, instead aspiring towards a 'transcendent' universality. This position is by no means ubiquitous across even the English Romantic tradition, and its applied plausibility is highly questionable, yet it undeniably occupies a pivotal role – especially in contemporary theorizations.

Chapter One explored some of the important ideological interconnections between Scottish literature and Scottish Enlightenment theory over the period. Primarily drawing on the work of Susan Manning and Cairns Craig, the difficult relationship between notions of 'union' or 'continuity' and 'fragmentation' or 'disruption' in this material was touched upon, operating on both a linguistic and an ideological level. Focussed primarily around the Enlightenment project of stadial historiography, the study explored briefly the focus in Scottish writing on these ideas of continuity and disruption, indicating a tension which is at the heart of the most important larger conclusions of the study. This tension – one influenced by the political situation of the Scottish nation – represents a key feature of the ideological struggle over Scotland which the writers under study have been shown engaging with. The battle between notions of continuity, and those of disruption (tied in this circumstance to Scottish native culture), forms a central dynamic in Scottish literature over the long eighteenth century. The interplay between notions of Romanticism and an 'Enlightened' ideology was also cited in the key example of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's*, with their contrasting approaches representative of this ideological divide.

The chapter then addressed Scott's *Waverley* as displaying the notion of a 'polemic of the aesthetic'. Overtly placing questions of Scottish national identity in an abundantly Romantic aestheticized frame – alongside a sophisticated adoption of Enlightenment stadial theory – *Waverley* can be read as moving key ideas of Scottish nationhood, national politics, and history, into a purely 'romantic' domain. This agency, which de-politicizes issues of Scottish history by transferring them into highly romanticized, and historically-obsolete aesthetic territory, is one much commented on in reference to Scott's novel. The question remains whether this agency is one which primarily acted to preserve a dialogue on Scottish nationhood in the face of British imperial politics and cultural homogenization, or helped to de-politicize Scottish culture for safe consumption within the British state. This dynamic was explicitly juxtaposed against the literary idiom represented in Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, seeing Galt's fiction as displaying a contrasting focus on social and political specifics, and firmly grounded in the everyday. Galt's 'empirical' approach to fiction was cited as a key position in Scottish writing over the period, and one heavily in dialogue with, and openly drawing on, Enlightenment theory and analytical practice, in particular the form embodied by the Statistical Account project.

In Chapter Two James Hogg's relationship to the topical foci of the study was examined, exploring the ideological struggles he narrates in his fiction. As a brief prelude, however, Hogg's own personal role within the Scottish literary establishment was touched upon, citing the author himself as in a sense representative of the kind of Scottish native culture capable of disrupting an Enlightenment historiographical narrative which would seek to repress it. This

positions Hogg as a particularly relevant subject for the study, with this personal status both an interesting feature in isolation, and an important influence on his work. A short analysis of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* examined Hogg's fascinating use of experimental literary approaches, ultimately reading the novel as displaying a deep scepticism of the ability of modern ideology (in either 'Enlightened' or 'Romantic' forms) to interpret the Scottish cultural and historical situation. Finally, a longer focus on *The Three Perils of Women* explored Hogg's complex use of language, depiction of Scottish manners and exploration of Scottish history as engaging with the debate over Scottish nationhood. Hogg's virulent heteroglossia, his destabilization of generical expectations and his powerful focus on the grotesque were seen working in an exuberant subversion of polite literary convention. Crucially, this novel was cited as displaying an 'anti-transcendent' aesthetic mode, a central feature of the manner in which Hogg's fiction differs from, and indeed seems to openly reject, the Scottean 'polemic of the aesthetic'. In refusing to gloss over the violent realities of Scottish history, and narrating in patient and gruesome detail the 'ground-level' specifics of events post-Culloden, Hogg creates a fictional mode which declines to repress the difficult political and cultural situation created by problematic events in Scottish history. In this sense Hogg's novel can be read as staging the influence of the native culture Craig sees as 'waiting to erupt back into the present and disrupt the progressive narrative of the historical' (Craig, *Out of History*, p.71). Upsetting the coherent stadial narrative of an imperial apologetic project through its brutal focus, the novel denies the comfort of historical clemency. Though in this sense Hogg's novel can be read as acting against such a project, the fact that it does so within the context of what

can often be seen as a highly 'Romantic' aesthetic literary mode is problematic, arguably contributing itself to a further de-politicization of its subject matter. This ideological ambiguity is characteristic of Scottish literature in the period, with a number of conflicting ideological possibilities seen in constant flux.

Chapter Three turned to Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns. Using a close analysis of the arguments of Nigel Leask and Murray Pittock, the chapter explored Burns's relationship to the issues under focus. Burns's status at the very heart of the Scottish Romantic canon, and indeed Scottish literature more widely, places extra importance on his role within these issues. Exploring both a small selection of Burns's poetry and his prefatory material, the chapter found Burns expertly mobilizing literary trends within his work and self-projecting his own poetic persona to national status. In his use of language and his focus on Scottish patriotism, Burns's poetry can often be read as displaying a powerful assertion of 'altermentality', making a defensive cultural statement of patriotic pride and cultural difference. His further role as an antiquarian and song-collector, alongside his authoring of *Tam o' Shanter*, were read primarily as engaging significantly with dialogues on cultural authority, challenging the cultural mainstream and asserting a Scottish national 'other' in defiance of British cultural homogenization. However, there are undeniably problematic agencies at work within Burns, not least in the highly romanticized notions operating at the heart of his projection towards national 'bardship'. Combined with his two-dimensional adoption at the centre of Scottish culture, this may contribute towards the process of cultural de-politicization through romanticization. However, perhaps Burns's legacy has displayed this agency

more than his work, and the strong focus within his poetry on asserting a culturally-defensive Scottish national identity is routinely present.

### III

There have been a number of key ideas upon which the major critical drive of this study has rested, and it seems appropriate to return to the most influential of these in summation. A number of the critics referenced throughout this project present useful interpretations of the process through which strains in Scottish literature over the long eighteenth century displays a culturally-defensive resistant force, asserting a strong national identity in the face of British cultural homogenization. Murray Pittock's notion of an 'altermentality', Cairns Craig's 'disruptive' forces and Susan Manning's idea of a 'fragmenting' agency, are all representative of this resistant force of cultural defence. The Enlightenment project of stadial historiography has been shown to involve a dismissal of native culture into a 'primitive' and ahistorical territory, an agency which acts hand-in-hand with a wider cultural homogenization and standardization, and in this circumstance ultimately a more comfortable incorporation of Scotland into a developing British state. These oppositional forces can be seen as staging a major cultural and political contest over the long eighteenth century, and one which literature is very much involved in. Literature's role within this dialogue has been seen as extremely flexible, ranging from appearing to aid and support such processes of cultural incorporation, to staging impassioned defensive protests against them.

Scottish Romanticism's polemical use of literary aesthetics has shown a considerable ideological range. Certain features of this literature can be read as

deploying a romanticizing agency – termed here a ‘polemic of the aesthetic’ – which ‘defuses’ Scottish history and culture, drawing on a Romantic notion of aesthetics as separate from politics. This was seen acting hand-in-hand with the ideological programme of stadial historiography to place Scottish nationhood in an ahistorical, apolitical, aesthetic vacuum. In opposition, the features of works cited as displaying cultural resistance in mobilizing literary aesthetics towards the purpose of Scottish cultural and political defence, stage a ‘patriotic polemic’ through their use of literature. This oppositional dynamic is symptomatic of the overtly ideologically-charged nature of Scottish writing over the long eighteenth century. It would ultimately be a fruitless procedure to attempt to conclude which agency is stronger, or has been more lastingly influential, given that even within individual works such overlapping and conflicting sides of this dialogue are seen in operation. The complex ideological frameworks of Scottish Romanticism – a heteroglossic literary tradition sitting somewhat uncomfortably in the midst of opposing political and cultural ideologies – can often present a deeply problematized and even contradictory cultural model.<sup>71</sup> Yet it is in many ways the ideologically-problematic nature of this work which increasingly widens its appeal within the modern critical establishment.

Literature's role in the formation and alteration of cultural and political attitudes is particularly rich and complex in the Scottish public and literary sphere over the long eighteenth century, perhaps to a degree resulting from, and certainly in light of, the high importance attributed to issues of language by the influential ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment – indeed Robert Crawford is

---

<sup>71</sup> Though perhaps this is generally true, to some degree, of all such problematic and (arguably) artificial constructions as ‘national’ cultural traditions.

among many critics who see eighteenth-century Scotland as the birthplace of what the modern establishment terms 'English Literature' (Crawford, pp.16-44) – itself of course a highly political notion. This study has shown that Scottish writing over this period displays a unique set of ideological structures which distinguish it, both temporally and topically, from any homogenous 'British Romanticism' formation. Whether indeed the term Romanticism remains comprehensively useful when describing this Scottish material is debatable, given the ideology displayed in this writing can often seem alien, if not directly opposed to, conventional definitions of the term. Over a historical period during which Scotland bordered on a political non-entity, the engagement in issues of cultural politics by literature is striking. These writers employ literary aesthetics in a wide range of highly sophisticated ways to engage in the keen polemical debate surrounding the Scottish nation. Exploring these fascinating ideological frameworks is a key practice in further understanding the evolution of modern Scotland and modern Scottish literature. In light of recent developments in Scottish politics, and the renewed vigour of the independence movement, continuing to address the ideological specifics of Scotland's cultural history – some of which may have been unfairly subsumed within British cultural models – is surely a more necessary procedure than ever.

### Bibliography

- Barnard, John, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin Books, 1973)
- Barrell, John, 'Putting Down the Rising', in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, eds. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.130-138
- Blair, Hugh, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London: Baynes, 1824)
- Bold, Valentina, *James Hogg: A Bard of Nature's Making* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007)
- Britain, Ian, 'Education', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.161-170
- Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- Chandler, James, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)
- Christie, William, 'Romanticism', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.682
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- Craig, Cairns, *Associationism and the Literary Imagination: From the Phantasmal Chaos* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)
- *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996)
- Crawford, Robert, *Devolving English Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000)
- Cuddon, J. A, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, rev. C. E. Preston (London: Penguin Books, 1999)
- Davis, Leith, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorenson, eds., *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Duncan, Ian, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

Fielding, Penny, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Fitzpatrick, Martin, 'Enlightenment', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.299-311

Galt, John, *Annals of the Parish & The Ayrshire Legatees* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994)

— *Annals of the Parish and the Ayrshire Legatees, with Memoir of the Author* (London: Maclaren, n.d.)

Gifford, Douglas, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh: The Ramsay Head Press, 1976)

Gittings, Robert, ed., *John Keats: Selected Letters*, rev. John Mee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Hart, Christopher, W, 'Byron', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.441-442

Hart, Francis R, *Lockhart as Romantic Biographer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971)

Hawkes, Terence, ed., *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare: A Selection of the Essays, Notes and Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the Poems and Plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959)

Hazlitt, William, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), VII, pp.75-236

Hogg, James, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)

— *The Three Perils of Women*, eds. Douglas S. Mack and Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002)

Hume, David, *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar, to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983)

— *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

- Jarvie, Gordon, ed., *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales from Burns to Buchan* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008)
- Johnson, Samuel, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland*, in *Travel Writing: 1700-1830*, eds. Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.149-163
- Kinsley, James, ed., *Robert Burns: Poems and Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)
- Kinsley, James, ed., *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)
- Leader, Zachary and Michael O'Neill, eds., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)
- Leask, Nigel, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988)
- *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010)
- Manning, Susan, *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2002)
- McGann, Jerome, J, 'Poetry', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.270-279
- *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983)
- McIlvanney, Liam, 'Hugh Blair, Robert Burns, and the Invention of Scottish Literature', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 29, II (Spring, 2005), pp.25-46
- Mee, John, 'Ossianism', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.630
- Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Classics, 2000)
- Otto, Peter, 'Imagination', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.553
- 'Literary Theory', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.378-385

Ousby, Ian, ed., *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Pittock, Murray, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

— *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Robertson, William, *The History of Scotland during the reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI till his accession to the crown of England: with a review of the Scottish History previous to that period*, 2 vols (London: Jones, 1827)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Literature and Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1994)

Scott, Walter, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, ed. Fiona Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

— *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)

Siskin, Clifford, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988)

Smith, Adam, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (London: Oxford University Press, 1976)

Steven, Maisie, *Parish Life in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: A Review of the Old Statistical Account* (Dalkeith: Scottish Cultural Press, 2002)

Wordsworth, William and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (London: Longman, 1992)