

mind was brightened, as well as chastened and strengthened by this wise occupation, the disposition improved by the habit of reflexion.' (II, 168) The author says that she has omitted much painful material (II, 245): one wonders what it can have been.

A major source of interest in these memoirs is the appearance of well-known figures, often in unflattering guise. It is difficult to disentangle possible truth from political malice in the snobbish attack on Scott's snobbery (II, 71-4, 115): it would be interesting to know just why Elizabeth Grant thought 'the whole idea given of the highlands (in *Waverley*) so utterly at variance with truth', and was Scott really dull when out in company (she never met him herself)? We have thumbnail pictures of Shelley at Oxford ('I should think to the end half crazy': I, 167), and of Coleridge ('that poor, mad poet, ... who never held his tongue': II, 182). The attractive characterisations of family friends such as Francis Jeffrey and the Freres are probably more trustworthy.

For many readers the most memorable feature of these reminiscences is what might be called their technicolour quality. Just as rare colour photographs from before 1945 shock us into remembering that the world wars were not fought in black and white, so do these memoirs fill in the gaps in official (and largely male) biography and autobiography of the early nineteenth century. Again and again there are vivid touches: the physical appearance of the child's books (I, 10); Queensferry 'an hour at the quickest crossing, often two or three' (I, 23); the constant subtle mutations of taste and manners; the ever-threatening boredom and intolerable heat in India. The vividness is also evident in numerous anecdotes - sad, weird, and hilarious - of which one example may convey the flavour, so to speak: on Lady Bradford's death at St Helena 'her devoted husband preserved her body in spirits, and, not properly watching the cask, it was tapped by the sailors, many of whom died from the effects of the poison' (II, 237). After reading this first complete version of Elizabeth Grant's *Memoirs*, it may safely be said that in various small but not unimportant ways one's view of the early nineteenth century will never be quite the same again.

Aberdeen

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FROM GALT TO DOUGLAS BROWN, NINETEENTH CENTURY FICTION AND SCOTS LANGUAGE.
By Emma Letley. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press. 1988. pp. xiv + 351. £17.50.

Emma Letley's subject is the way in which Scots is used in nineteenth-century Scottish literature. Her aim is not to describe the Scots language but to show what literary effects authors can achieve by its use. (Dr Letley herself generally refers to Scots as a dialect, pointing out that both Scott and Galt use the term 'national dialect' and noting that she intends 'no pejorative implications' (xii). In a

description of Scots I would prefer the term 'language' but in this context I believe she is right to use the term 'dialect' since it is as 'dialect' that Scots is generally introduced into nineteenth-century Scottish fiction.) Starting from the claim that 'the multiple meanings which accrue to the regional language give it the literary status of an image, a sign whose presence in the text generates meanings beyond those which the words alone convey' (xii), she examines the work of the major nineteenth century novelists and illustrates, with considerable skill and subtlety, how they use Scots to generate such meanings.

At the same time she shows how the use of Scots by a number of major writers raised its status as a literary language.

Dr Letley begins before the nineteenth century with Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* and argues that 'the overall impression that the reader has from this novel is that dialect is automatically associated with some kind of *defect*' (2). She then traces how this status is reversed by various means so that Scots comes to be associated with positive qualities. For instance, Scott used it in serious contexts, like Evan Dhu's speech at his trial, and Galt made it the medium of serious historical narrative in *Ringan Gilhaize* and gave the 'imaginative victory' to the Scots-speaker in Watty's conflict with George in *The Entail* (83). In Hogg's *Justified Sinner* the presence of Scots helps us see another side of the story and thus calls into question the editor's English narrative. George MacDonald associates Scots with a return to childhood and thus with spiritual rebirth, and William Alexander uses it to present major historical events. Stevenson takes up the equivocal role of Scots which Galt had partly explored: Scots is associated with good qualities but can also be used by those who merely wish to appear to possess those qualities, like James Durie in *The Master of Ballantrae*. Thus in James Durie Scots is a mark of deceit but in Lord Hermiston it is a sign of his straightforwardness. By the end of the century the positive associations of Scots are dominant and are exploited by the kailyard writers in a way which is only partly reversed by the Brown's anti-kailyard *House with the Green Shutters*. There is also an interesting chapter on the use of Scots in children's literature (an area usually neglected by critics). Thus, through a range of novels (more than are mentioned here), Letley charts the various authors' response to their uniquely advantaged position of being able to use two languages within the one work.

Novelists do not write in a void, and novelists using dialect need to bear in mind the general public's attitudes to dialects, not least when they are aiming to change those attitudes. To give us some idea of these attitudes Dr Letley begins most chapters with a survey of contemporary reviews. From this there develops a clear picture of increasing acceptance of Scots to the point where some reviewers of the kailyard novelists see the mere inclusion of Scots as a positive attraction to many readers. As we might expect, and as this study shows, the changing attitude to Scots affected the writers. Yet a paradox emerges. The kailyarders, writing at a time when Scots is widely accepted as valid in literature, make much lighter linguistic demands on their readers than did writers like Scott, Galt and MacDonald who wrote in a climate of much greater critical hostility to Scots. It is striking how much Scots nineteenth-century writers were willing to introduce into their novels, especially when we consider how well those novels sold outside Scotland; Scott's great success no doubt encouraged others, but who encouraged Scott? Yet even more striking is the attitude that the authors adopted to the problem of intelligibility. Of course, they became adept at all sorts of devices to explain the Scots for non-Scots readers without appearing to do so, but there remains a

solid body of Scots that is un glossed. Only the less able writers like Susan Ferrier spend very much time on explaining the Scots for the benefit of the reader. The attitude seems very much to be: if you want to read this you must learn to read Scots. This attitude reaches its logical extreme in Stevenson's comment that 'he who can't read Scots can never enjoy Tod Lapraik' (quoted p. 171). In this respect the presentation of Scots as a dialect has certain advantages: the reader is implicitly told that Scots is not the same as English but related to it, and thus the non-Scottish reader's knowledge of English can be used to understand the Scots. The strategy worked: readers were apparently willing to learn to read Scots and the use of Scots became more acceptable. Yet, as Dr Letley shows, the kailyard writers squandered an opportunity. They adopted the quite different strategy of presenting Scots as a foreign language requiring frequent authorial comment and parenthetical glosses. They offered to act as guides for the foreigner encountering this exotic tongue and, like all good tourist guides, they knew how to simplify and trivialise. The introduction of Scots became a literary end in itself rather than serving any wider purposes. But we should not dwell too long on their faults; after all, their work prompted a reaction from Brown who, in the process, pioneered new ways of breaking down the barriers between Scots dialogue and English narrative which were fruitfully followed up by others like Lewis Grassie Gibbon. Moreover, it was perhaps necessary for certain later literary developments that Scots should be seen as a separate language.

I have only one major and one minor criticism of this excellent book. Firstly, the minor: it is not true that Scotland had to wait until 1983 for a Scots version of the New Testament (xiii). Both Smith's version and the first printing of Nisbet's sixteenth-century version appeared in 1901. More seriously, I find Dr Letley's handling of Walter Scott in some ways inadequate. After writing well about Scott's use of Scots in *Waverley* and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* she ends by describing Scott as 'talking about the language rather than using it and letting it speak for itself' (22). To my mind Scott does 'use' Scots in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. There is a real connection between Jeanie's simple but heroic goodness and her use of Scots. Scots, in the novel, is associated with certain fundamental human qualities which are ultimately more important than the political power which rests in the hands of the English-speaking government. Scots is the language of ordinary people. Jeanie triumphs through the use of Scots, as Dr Letley earlier recognises, and through her the basic human qualities of ordinary people are asserted. In her subsequent discussion of *old Mortality* Dr Letley is, I believe, led astray in her interpretation by her belief that Scott has only contempt for Mause. I would argue that Scott, while seeing her as ignorant and prejudiced, nevertheless allows us to admire her courage. Once again the Scots speakers express qualities - including, in the case of Cuddle, the will to survive - which cannot be adequately encompassed by the English-speakers or the English narrative. Finally, it seems strange that the book contains no discussion of the use made of Scots in 'Wandering Willie's Tale', especially as it must have been Stevenson's main model in 'Tod Lapraik's Tale', a work Dr Letley discusses in detail.

Ultimately, of course, Scott's use of Scots is too large a subject to be adequately dealt with in a book surveying the whole nineteenth century. Furthermore, as her subtitle suggests, Dr Letley's real starting point is Galt. The use of Scots in nineteenth-century novels is a fascinating field. Others, notably Derrick McClure in a number of articles, have dealt with parts of this field but this is the first comprehensive and wide-ranging study. Dr Letley does justice to her subject and

produces a fascinating book on a fascinating topic.

Adelaide

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Hugh MacDiarmid, *A DRUNK MAN LOOKS AT THE THISTLE*. Edited by Kenneth Buthlay. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press. 1987. (ASLS Vol. 17.) pp. liv + 203. £12.50 cased; £4.95 paper.

The studies of Hugh MacDiarmid which have appeared in some abundance in the decade since the poet's death do relatively little to equip the reader for a meaningful encounter with the poetry. To say this is not so much to disparage the critics as to acknowledge the scale and complexity of the difficulties facing the prospective adventurer in the *Complete Poems*. The most daunting of these is not as is usually thought linguistic, but contextual. Thus while most of the riches of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* can be made available to the energetic beginner by way of a reliable glossary, almost everything in the subsequent *oeuvre* requires annotation - verbal and philosophical sources must be identified, relationships between poems signposted, chronology of composition established, and a battery of references, from the autobiographical to the arcane, explained.

A critical introduction cannot be expected to supply such specifics. The ideal book on MacDiarmid would doubtless be a Reader's Guide, but it is difficult to imagine either a scholar or a publisher taking on so inescapably voluminous an enterprise. Shorter guides to particular areas of the canon are perhaps a more practical proposition. These might best take the form of critical editions: online commentaries could scarcely fail to be more illuminating than the glancing treatment which is all some even of the central poems have so far been accorded, and might lay the basis for authoritative readings in the future. Annotated marshallings of the surviving parts of projected long works like *Clann Albann* and *Mature Art* would enable the reader to come to his own conclusions about the viability of these enterprises, while eliminating the need for hopping between one volume of the *Complete Poems* and the other in order to survey them.

It is tempting and, one hopes, not too foolishly sanguine to see Kenneth Buthlay's magisterial edition of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* as a first step in the direction of an exacting presentation of each of the major constellations in the MacDiarmid galaxy. *A Drunk Man* might be thought to stand less in need of this sort of treatment than some of the later extended works in that the poet succeeded not only in getting its constituent poems between the covers of a single volume, but also in arranging them with a semblance of necessary order. Buthlay, however, demonstrates that the resonances of his material were seriously under-exploited by MacDiarmid in this work too, with careless assembly suppressing the connections between many of its key passages. The ghost of a more closely-knit