

"Pirate" publishing : the battle over  
perpetual copyright in eighteenth-century  
Britain

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## CHAPTER 4

# SCOTLAND'S NETWORK OF “DIABOLICAL KNOWLEDGE”

How did it happen that Alexander Donaldson ended up as a “pirate” publisher in the first place? In answering that question, it helps to know something about the history of Scotland and the society, economy, and publishing conditions of the eighteenth century, an important era in copyright history. To give a sense of the atmosphere of the times and the reasons for the upsurge of literature in Scotland, I introduce the poet and booklender Allan Ramsay (1686–1758).

Scotland has preserved its distinctive culture over the centuries—often stereotypically portrayed by such things as bagpipes, tartan-weave textiles, the kilt traditionally worn by men, and Scotch whisky. Today the northern part of Great Britain, Scotland was a separate kingdom until 1603, and for another century had a separate parliament and legal system. In 1707 it was made part of the kingdom of England. It is difficult to fully understand the *Donaldson v. Becket* case without being aware of the disparities that this “union” brought to the publishing industry of the two countries.

Here is a puzzle to consider first: Why did the publishing industry flourish in a remote northern city like Edinburgh? Eighteenth-century Scotland produced a wealth of brilliant figures—among them father of modern economics and capitalism Adam Smith, key figure in Western philosophy David Hume, inventor of the steam engine James Watt (1735–1819), father of modern sociology Adam Ferguson—all men who led the way in the development of England’s modern civilization. Such figures active in Edinburgh or Glasgow were closely interconnected. The philosophical and intellectual trends advanced by these and others came together in what is known as the Scotland Enlightenment or Scotland Renaissance. Scholars today are increasingly pointing to this ferment as the cradle of “modern civilization” itself—calling Edinburgh the “Athens of the North.” To appreciate what was achieved in eighteenth-century Scotland, however, we need some further background. Let me trace briefly how Scotland came into being and the flow of its history until the late eighteenth century that is the setting of this book.

### **Scotland’s Stone of Destiny**

The complex history that ties together England and Scotland is well symbolized by what is known as the “Stone of Destiny,” or the “Stone of Scone” from the locale associated with the type of stone from which it was cut. (By pure coincidence, Lord Mansfield was

a native of Scone.) I saw the stone in 1992, when it was still at Westminster Abbey, a very ordinary sort of stone, built into a by-then rather shabby-looking throne of wood. The “Stone of Destiny” had been used for the coronation of the kings of Scotland until 1296 when it was taken to England as booty of war. It came to be used for the coronations of the sovereigns of the British Isles and he or she who was crowned on that stone was recognized as the legitimate sovereign of the land. The stone thus became the symbol of the monarchy. In 2002, I found the stone inside Edinburgh Castle, to which it had been moved in 1996, after an interval of 700 years, when England returned it in response to Scotland’s demands.

The Stone of Destiny provides a glimpse into the complex histories of the two countries. The kingdom of Scotland is believed to have been established in 843 by a man named Kenneth MacAlpin (?–858). Under the reign of the famed eleventh-century Duncan I (?–1040; r. 1034–1040), the entire territory of Scotland was united. Generations of Scotland’s kings swore fealty to the kings of England. In 1290, when the Canmore family line of kings extending from Duncan I died out, Scotland’s nobles asked the English king Edward I (1239–1307; r. 1272–1307) to intercede in the succession. Edward chose a member of nobility named John Balliol (1250–1313; r. 1292–1296), and though Balliol owed his kingship to Edward, the two did not get on well. Edward had just finished conquering Wales and was waiting for a chance to take over Scotland as well. Claiming that Balliol had formed an alliance with France, Edward I invaded Scotland and his army was invincible. Scotland was soon defeated and Edward took the “Stone of Destiny” back to England.

The patriot to take up Balliol’s banner was William Wallace (1270?–1305). Through his exploits, the army of England was temporarily defeated, but it was only a matter of time until Wallace was captured by the English army, and later executed in London. Robert the Bruce (1274–1329), one of the claimants to the Scottish throne who had sided with Wallace, defied Edward I’s rule, proclaiming himself Robert I (r. 1306–1329) of an independent Scotland. Edward naturally sent out an army against him, but Robert managed to elude capture. When, not long after, Edward I died, his successor, Edward II (1284–1327; r. 1307–1327) showed no interest in Scotland. So Robert I lived out his life as king of Scotland, and it was his grandson, Robert II (1316–1390; r. 1371–1390) who was to found the Stewart (Stuart) family line, which united the royal houses of the two countries.

The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were a time of repeated and bloody wars, as England sought to force Scotland into submission. With the reign of Elizabeth I (1533–1603; r. 1558–1603), cultural exchange was encouraged between the two countries, and as she did not marry and at her death in 1603 left no direct heir, her cousin James VI of Scotland (1566–1625; r. 1567–1625) was crowned James I of England (r. 1603–1625). The royal house of England and the Stewarts had strengthened their blood ties from the

time of Elizabeth I's grandfather, Henry VII (1457–1509; r. 1485–1509), and James was the closest in line to Elizabeth I. In this way, the royal houses of England and Scotland were united and the two countries were brought together by the personal union of their monarch. At this time, the "Stone of Destiny" at Westminster Abbey changed its nature from emblem of the conquest of Scotland to a symbol of the united royal house.

### **The Union with England**

The language of Scotland is a dialect of English, although to those from other countries it may sound like another language altogether. People who speak the same language quickly band together, and not surprisingly, people of Scotland living in England were quick to embrace their common heritage and loyalty to their homeland. Apparently, that tendency was famous among people from Scotland, as Samuel Johnson observed with some irony, referring to Boswell:

‘The Irish mix better with the English than the Scotch do; their language is nearer to English; as a proof of which, they succeed very well as players, which Scotchmen do not. Then, Sir, they have not that extreme nationality to say, that you are the most *unscottified* of your countrymen. You are almost the only instance of a Scotchman that I have known, who did not at every other sentence bring in some other Scotchman.’<sup>132</sup>

Scotland is divided geographically into two regions, the Lowlands and the Highlands. The Lowlands, the region closer to England, includes the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Commerce, industry, and culture flourished in this region where the climate was relatively moderate and England not far away. In the Highlands, by contrast, the land was less fertile and the climate cold; no major industry developed and life was very hard. Scotland is also a country of strong ties among members of the same clan, or extended family, and these blood relations are especially strong in the Highland region. The differences between the Lowlands and the Highlands, in addition to these clans, are what make Scotland's culture complex.

After Scotland's James VI went to London to become James I of England, he did not return to Edinburgh save for very short visits. The nobility of Scotland he left behind was divided in two: those seeking to gain favor with the king and success in London and those advocating reliance on the Catholic state France. The conflict between these two camps often led to political deadlock. James II (grandson of James I; 1633–1701; r. 1685–1688) came to the throne of Britain in 1685, but misgivings about his Catholic leanings led to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and he was driven into exile. Anti-Catholic forces con-

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132 Boswell 1998 (1791), p. 531.

trived for the throne of Scotland to pass jointly to Dutch born William III (1650–1702; r. 1689–1702) and his wife James II's daughter Mary II (1662–1694; r. 1689–1694), who was a Protestant. Forces loyal to James II, declaring that he and his male descendants were the real kings of England, were known as Jacobites. The Catholic James II received support from France, so the connotation of “Jacobite” is Catholic and “pro-France.” Particularly in Scotland, Jacobites were connected with anti-England activism, and there were periodic Jacobite-led rebellions in the Highlands during the eighteenth century.

In 1695 the population of England was around six million and that of Scotland around one million. The annual revenue of Scotland was about one-fortieth that of England and the value of the pound was about one-twelfth. Scotland was one of the poorest countries in all Europe.<sup>133</sup> Natural disasters and poverty added suffering to continual political turmoil. Famine struck Scotland following unstable weather from 1695 through 1699, and it is said that more than one hundred thousand people—13 percent of the population—starved to death.<sup>134</sup> The income gap with England only grew wider, with conditions in the Highlands region particularly cruel. Even in Edinburgh, Scotland's capital, the situation was not good, causing Adam Smith to write in *The Wealth of Nations*: “There was little trade or industry in Edinburgh before the Union. When the Scotch parliament was no longer to be assembled in it, when it ceased to be the necessary residence of the principal nobility and gentry of Scotland, it became a city of some trade and industry.”<sup>135</sup>

The poverty of Scotland was the result not only of climate but of misjudgments. England and Spain had established colonies in the “New World,” but Scotland did not have such sources of supply. It had no trade routes such as the English East India Company. Then a plan was proposed, known as the “Darien Scheme,” by which it was hoped Scotland would be able to obtain both a colony and money-making trade routes in the New World at one stroke. The plan was to establish a colony in Darien, a place in Spanish territory near the Panama Canal today. At Darien, a slender stretch of land only thirty miles wide separated the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. A colony established there would command a key center of trade between the two great oceans. Everyone thought it was a wonderful idea. The nobility of Scotland placed the nation's fate in this plan and invested vast fortunes in it. It is said that half of Scotland's wealth was invested in the “Darien Scheme.”

In 1696, three ships carrying 1,200 settlers sailed forth on this mission to Darien. They reached the New World on 3 November the same year. They were met, however, with unimaginable misery as malaria ravaged their ranks. An average of twelve people died every day from the malaise. Many also lost their lives in the assault by the Spanish forces. English

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133 Ross 1998, p. 209.

134 Allan 2002, p. 87.

135 Smith 2009 (1776), p. 244.

forces were not far away, but they did nothing. They simply watched while the Scotland scheme failed. The desolate survivors drowned their sorrows in drink<sup>136</sup> and the Darien Scheme ended in complete failure within half a year. In July 1699, the remnants of the mission left Darien by ship, but only a handful of the settlers were able to return home. With this failure, Scotland's economy completely collapsed. Some people in Scotland believed that England was at fault, but even if England had done nothing culpable, few people in Scotland thought well of England's stance, treating Scotland as a vassal kingdom.

England—in its need to placate Scotland as part of its efforts to be on the winning side the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714)—found union to be its most expedient option. One of many people mobilized as part of the propaganda effort in support of union was *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) author Daniel Defoe (1660?–1731). Traveling around Scotland on observation tours, he wrote political tracts designed to guide public opinion in favor of bringing the countries together.

The nobility of Scotland were favorably disposed to union. Some, by currying favor in Westminster, hoped to recoup the losses incurred in the Darien Scheme, and this was the motive of all the Scottish nobles who participated in the debates on union in 1706. The debates focused on two issues: funds that would be paid to Scotland as incentives and the treatment of Scotland's nobility in England. Prior to union, the House of Lords of England was composed of 170 members of the peerage and 26 members of the clergy. In Scotland all 130 of its nobles held seats in its parliament. As a result of the negotiations, it was decided that 16 of Scotland's peers would be chosen by election and given seats in the House of Lords at Westminster.<sup>137</sup> When the negotiations were concluded, the Treaty of Union was ratified, and Scotland became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707. Under the provisions of the treaty, private law and the courts of Scotland were to remain as they were, and as mentioned earlier, Alexander Donaldson used the resulting institutional mismatch to his advantage in his battle with the monopolist booksellers.

Among the populace of Scotland, however, the highhanded maneuverings of the nobility in pushing for the union were unpopular. The discontent, linked to Jacobite sentiment that continued to brew in the Highlands region, was at the root of the frequent revolts against the crown that occurred in the eighteenth century. The uprisings of 1715 and 1745 were among the largest. The attempt to reassert Scotland's sovereignty in 1745 collapsed of its own weakness, but London launched policies aimed to weaken Scotland's cultural identity, among which was the prohibition on the use of the clans' distinctive tartan dress (kilts). The national anthem of Great Britain at the time included a sixth stanza—today no longer sung—that went as follows:

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136 Herman 2002, pp. 28–29.

137 Aoki 1997, pp. 24–36.

Lord grant that Marshal Wade,<sup>138</sup>  
 May by thy mighty aid,  
 Victory bring,  
 May he sedition hush,  
 And like a torrent rush,  
 Rebellious Scots to crush.  
 God save the King (Queen)!

These lines vividly evoke the way the nation that is Great Britain came into being, but no Scot would be happy to see such words. In a sense, the embers of popular dissatisfaction with the union continue to glow, stirring independence-movement sentiment even today.

### **The Church and Literacy**

Also essential to an understanding of Scotland's history and culture are the religious reformer John Knox (1514?–1572) and the Presbyterian Church. Religious reform paved the way for increased literacy and the advancement of printing and publishing.

Until the reign of Queen Mary Stewart (1542–1587; r. 1542–1567), Scotland had been a Catholic country. Mary Stewart is not to be confused with her more vengeful contemporary, Mary I, Queen of England (also a Catholic; known as “Bloody Mary”), introduced earlier in Chapter 2. Knox was originally a member of the Catholic clergy, but under the influence of religious reformer George Wishart (1513?–1546) he had converted to Protestantism. He went to England and continued to propagate his reformist ideas, but as the suppression of Protestantism under England's Mary I grew violent, he escaped to Geneva, where he met and studied under John Calvin (1509–1564). In 1559, when a Protestant monarch again came to the throne in England, Knox returned to Edinburgh. He led an upsurge of support for Protestantism in Scotland and became a minister at St. Giles' Cathedral. Knox stridently criticized Catholicism in his sermons and destroyed icons of Catholic worship. His reforms and teachings spread throughout most of Scotland, with Catholicism lingering only in fringe areas.

Knox had been successful in spreading Protestantism in part because of the absence of Queen Mary Stewart, who left Scotland at the age of five (1548) following her engagement to the heir apparent to the throne of France. She returned after the death of her husband in 1561, but by that time Knox's teachings had already spread quite widely. Still the queen regnant of Scotland, Mary sought to rein in Knox's influence. She ordered him to appear at the palace four times, and their interviews were the scene of

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138 George Wade (1673–1748). Commander of the English army who put down the Jacobite uprising of 1715.

fierce religious debates. Ultimately, however, she was forced to recognize the support he enjoyed and compromise with him. Scotland's nobility was divided between Catholics and Protestants, and she herself perpetrated a scandal by her second marriage and was ultimately forced to flee to England. The queen of England, by then the Protestant monarch Elizabeth I, imprisoned Mary Stewart for eighteen years before finally executing her for treason. After Mary Stewart's departure, Protestant nobles in Scotland made sure that the infant son she had left behind was raised a Protestant, and from that time onward, Scotland has been predominantly Protestant. Scotland's Protestantism is of the Presbyterian persuasion, in which each church is managed jointly by its minister and "presbyters" elected from among the members of the congregation.

One of the main teachings of the Presbyterian Church is that the Bible is the sole authority for all things. This absolute faith in the Bible had two important ramifications: one was that the Bible needed to be *printed* and widely distributed and the other was that the faithful had to acquire the ability to *read* the Bible for themselves.

The strategy of spreading the content of the Bible through printing technology was very good for the propagation of knowledge in general. In attempting to spread the teachings of the faith, the impact of sermons was necessarily limited, since people had to be physically present in church to hear their message. By relying on printed matter, it was possible to take the teachings of the Presbyterian Church into every home. The Catechism, Bible, and the hymns were brought in from England and "pirate" editions mass-produced. And thus were laid the foundations of the publishing industry of Scotland.

The Presbyterian Church also emphasized literacy education in order to enable people to read the Holy Scripture, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century Scotland had a better primary education system in place than did England. The "Act for Setting Schools" was issued in 1696, providing for a school to be established in every parish throughout Scotland, the purpose of which was to teach children to read Holy Scripture.<sup>139</sup> The basic curriculum of these parish schools consisted of the Catechism, hymns, reading, writing, arithmetic, and a little Latin.<sup>140</sup>

So what was literacy like in Scotland in those days? Of course, it is probably impossible to find out for sure how well people of long ago could really read. The literacy rate will differ depending on *what* they could read. A common index that is used to measure literacy is whether a person could write his or her own name, and that can be determined by studying documents showing people signing their own names. Robert Allan Houston's *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity* (1985) gives the results of his survey of signatures found in old records. His figures for literacy by occupation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are shown below.<sup>141</sup>

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139 Herman 2002, p. 19.

140 Herman 2002, p. 97.

141 Houston 1985, p. 33 (figure revised for this publication).



	England		Scotland	
	1640–99	1700–70	1640–99	1700–70
Professional	97	100	97	99
Gentry/Laird	100	100	99	97
Craft & Trade	57	74	75	82
Yeoman/Tenant	51	74	74	68
Husbandman	25	58	not applicable	
Laborer	15	37	18	32
Servant	27	50	42	45
Soldier	45	54	35	61
Unknown	38	70	49	53

Figure 4. Literacy by occupation in England and Scotland.  
(Houston 1985: 33, revised)

Comparing the lower strata of society in the seventeenth century, literacy in Scotland is higher than that of England. By the eighteenth century, the gap had nearly closed. These figures, however, are for the Lowland region of Scotland only, and literacy in the Highlands region of the north was said to be the lowest in Europe. As mentioned above, the reason literacy was high in the Lowlands of Scotland was because of the teachings of the Presbyterian Church. Followers of the Presbyterian Church believed that children had to be taught to read the Bible. Knox, too, in his *First Book of Discipline* (1560), appealed for a country-wide effort to advance education.

To fulfill the demands of the Presbyterian Church for Bibles, therefore, the printing industry became established, and it was on that groundwork that the publishing industry of eighteenth-century Scotland flourished. Books, pamphlets and sermons were exported to the European continent and to the American colonies from Edinburgh, making it an important center of publishing culture.<sup>142</sup>

### The Heyday of the Publishing Industry

The growing prosperity of Scotland's publishing culture is reflected in a number of statistics. In 1763, there were 6 printing companies in Edinburgh; by 1790 there were 16. Another record indicates that 4 printing companies in 1739 had increased to 27 by 1779.<sup>143</sup> One record shows that there were about 300 bookstores in Scotland before 1775.<sup>144</sup> The population of Edinburgh in 1763 was about 60,000 and in 1779 it was

<sup>142</sup> Colley 2008 (1992), p. 40.

<sup>143</sup> Chitnis 1976, p. 18.

<sup>144</sup> Kaufman 1965, p. 247.

about 80,000.<sup>145</sup> It is believed that the population of Scotland in around 1775 was about 1.4 million.<sup>146</sup> That means that around the end of the eighteenth century, there was about one bookstore for every 4,000–5,000 people in all of Scotland, and in Edinburgh about one printing company and bookseller for every 3,000 people.

Other figures are available that offer insight into the level of culture in eighteenth-century Scotland. Of the population of 1.5 million in 1795, some 5,000 families, about 20,000 people made their livelihood from work relating to "literature." The numbers for those who supported themselves from teaching were 3,500 families and 10,500 persons.<sup>147</sup>

Samuel Johnson's observation on Scotland's learning, too, suggests something about the level of learning there in his time: "Their learning is like bread in a besieged town: every man gets a little, but no man gets a full meal." "There is (said he,) in Scotland, a diffusion of learning, a certain portion of it widely and thinly spread. A merchant there has as much learning as one of their clergy."<sup>148</sup>

Informed discussion on literature, philosophy, and science seems to have been part of daily life in post-Union Scotland, spreading widely among "students, lawyers, clergymen, merchants, lairds, noblemen and, in some cases, women."<sup>149</sup> The reason for this can easily be attributed to the high level of literacy and the prosperity of publishing. The culture of the so-called Scotland Renaissance emerged from the learning and cultivation achieved even among the general population.

### Poet Allan Ramsay

Now that we have a general grasp of conditions in Scotland after union with England, I would like to introduce the story of the poet and book lender Allan Ramsay. As a member of Edinburgh's cultural circle in the first half of the eighteenth century, his life and career provide valuable insights into the way people lived in those days and the nature of Scotland's publishing culture.<sup>150</sup>

Ramsay was born 15 October 1686 (although there is some debate about whether it might have been more accurately 1684 or 1685) in the village of Leadhills, in South Lanarkshire, forty miles southwest of Edinburgh. Located at a height 1,500 feet above sea level, it was known for its lead and gold mines. The neighboring village of Wanockhead was called "the highest village in Scotland." Leadhills fell within the lands of the Earl

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145 *Longman Companion to Britain*, p. 290.

146 Smout 1998 (1969), p. 242.

147 Chitnis 1976, p. 16. Chitnis does not explain what occupations are included in the scope of "literature," however.

148 Boswell 1998 (1791), p. 627.

149 Allan 2002, p. 132.

150 For more on the life of Allan Ramsay, see Chalmers and Woodhouselee 1851, vol. 1; Smeaton 1896; Gibson 1927; Martin 1931a, 1931b; and Brown 1984.

of Hopeton, and lead had been mined there since the thirteenth century. Gold mined in the village had been used for the crown of Scotland's King James IV (1473–1513; r. 1488–1513) and rings for Queen Mary Stewart.

We can get an image of what the village of Leadhills was like at the time from the *Statistical Account of Scotland*, published in the late eighteenth century:

The external appearance of Leadhills is ugly beyond description: rock, short heath, and barren till. Every sort of vegetable is with difficulty raised, and seldom comes to perfection. Spring water there, is perhaps as fine as any in the world: but, the water below the smelting-milns, the most dangerous. The lead before smelting is broke very small and washed from extraneous matter. It contains frequently arsenic, sulphur, zinc, &c. which poisons the water in which it is washed. Fowls of any kind will not live many days at Leadhills. They pick up arsenical particles with their food, which soon kills them. Horses, cows, dogs, cats, are liable to the lead-brash. A cat, when seized with that distemper, springs like lightning through every corner of the house, falls into convulsions, and dies. A dog falls into strong convulsions also, but sometimes recovers. A cow grows perfectly mad in an instant, and must be immediately killed. Fortunately this distemper does not affect the human species.

About 30 years ago, most of the smelters died either madmen or idiots. Now they retain their senses as well as other people. The reason given is: formerly spirits were cheap, and the smelters partook liberally of them at their work. For many years past they drink nothing at their work, but pure spring water; they now live as long and as rationally as others.<sup>151</sup>

This account describes Leadhills about 100 years after the time Ramsay would have lived there. That was not the environment, however, in which Ramsay spent his childhood. Born at the end of the seventeenth century, Ramsay grew up before the onset of the Industrial Revolution, and demand for lead was much smaller than it was at the end of the eighteenth century. In a time before the invention of the steam engine, mining would have been done entirely by hand, and the amount of lead mined would have been quite limited. Judging from the world of the works Ramsay wrote, we imagine a much more beautiful and rich landscape than that portrayed in the above account, although this must remain largely conjecture.

Work in the eighteenth-century lead mines was hard. Women did not work in the mines, but boys began to work at an early age. Boys who had turned eight years old were put to work helping with the smelting and with the loading of ore onto the sledges to be carried out of the mines. At age ten they would become apprentices in the mines and

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151 Sinclair 1973 (1799), pp. 215–16.

learn to excavate the lead. Lead was mined by raw manpower, breaking through rock deep in the darkness of the mines, with only candles for illumination. The heavy ore was hauled through mine shafts to the surface by manpower as well, the wooden barrels piled high with ore pulled up on a winch rotated by powerfully built men. The men worked six-hour days and had one day off per week. The homes of the miners were cottages where families of eight often lived in one room serving as kitchen, living, bath, and bedroom. The floor was covered with straw and a fireplace in the center fueled with peat from the moors provided heat and the cooking fire. Lead poisoning and tuberculosis were common afflictions and men lived to an average age of fifty-five. The wages of the lead miners were better than for ordinary laborers, but were not paid until the lead that had been mined was sold, which usually took about a year. The miners bought necessities at the mining company store on credit, which was subtracted from their wages upon payment.

Allan Ramsay's father was John Ramsay (d.u.), described as "overseer to the Hopes of Hopeton" and superintendent of the Earl of Hopeton's lead mines. His mother was named Alison Bower (?–1701?) and the daughter of a mine engineer. His grandfather Robert (d.u.) was in the employ of a lawyer who was also an "overseer to the Hopes of Hopeton." Thus Allan and his older brother Robert were born to a family that had served the Hopeton family for two generations. But John died in his mid-twenties, leaving behind his wife and two young sons. The cause of his death is unknown, but is easy to imagine, given the dangers of the lead-mine environment. Allan Ramsay was born either just before or after his father died.

His mother remarried a local small-holder named Andrew Crichton (d.u.), and had several other children by her second husband. Allan was still very young when his mother remarried and he had no memory of his real father. Thanks to his mother's remarriage, the young Ramsay was saved from the fearsome fate of the lead mines. Instead, he was assigned to tend his stepfather's sheep, a task that suited him fortuitously. Spending his days watching over sheep on the endlessly rolling hills, he developed into a sensitive and thoughtful young man. The experiences of his boyhood can be seen reflected in one of the works for which he is best known, *The Gentle Shepherd*. He attended a local school until the age of fifteen. Since Leadhills did not have a school until 1715, he probably attended the parish school in Crawfordmoor, which was 7.5 miles away. Thus, it was at one of the parish schools where literacy education under the Presbyterian Church flourished that Ramsay got his grounding in poetry reading works in Latin by the Roman poet Horace (B.C. 65–68).

### **To Edinburgh**

Allan Ramsay's mother Alison died around 1701, and his stepfather appears to have remarried by 1703. Although the great famine that ravaged Scotland six years earlier had more or less passed, Andrew Crichton had many young mouths to feed, so life cannot

have been easy. No doubt Andrew was eager to have his first wife's fifteen-year-old son become independent. Ramsay himself wanted to become a painter, and he had shown talent not only as a writer but as an artist. Andrew seems not to have had the power to grasp and encourage his stepson's exceptional talents or aspirations. Still, Ramsay's writing records no unhappiness about his boyhood, and no resentment toward his stepfather, even though he was virtually sent away from home at age fifteen.

Ramsay became an apprentice to a wigmaker in Edinburgh named Jerome Robertson (d.u.) around 1704. Allan's older brother Robert had been apprenticed to Robertson in 1695, and had probably set up his own business by the time his brother arrived in the city. Apprenticeship to the same firm where his brother had served assured the young Allan could earn a living in Edinburgh, and in the eighteenth century, wigs were part of formal dress, symbols of elite status, in Europe and the British Isles. A wigmaker's customers, then, were wealthy and of high social standing. No doubt Ramsay's expanding acquaintance among the well to do greatly benefited from his training in the wig trade. In that sense, for a young man from the country, the work of a wigmaker was quite a fortuitous choice.

Ramsay served Robertson for seven years, learning the wig-making trade, and then set up his own shop in Grassmarket, southeast of Edinburgh Castle. On 14 December 1712, at the age of twenty-six, he married Christian Ross (?–1743). The eldest daughter of Robert Ross (d.u.), who worked in the office of a lawyer, and Elizabeth Archibald (d.u.), Christian was two years Ramsay's senior. They were happily married and had numerous children. Their eldest son was named Allan (1713–1784) after his father, and later became a central figure in the Scotland Renaissance and a well-known portrait painter. Several other children—Christy, Susanna, Niell, Robert, and Agnes—all died young. It is believed that three of his daughters—Janet, Anne, and Catherine—worked in his shop, but how many children he had in all is not clearly known.

On 12 May 1712, seven months prior to the marriage, Ramsay formed a Jacobite literary group with a number of friends called the "Easy Club." The club was active until 1715 and was known as a gathering place of the more refined followers of the Jacobite persuasion. Members of the club wrote poetry, polished their skills at conversation while commenting on each other's works, and read *The Spectator*, a single sheet daily newspaper then published in London with observations and opinions on current events, cultural issues, and moral behavior. Ramsay was no monarchist, nor was he anti-England, but he was discontented with the state of Scotland. As Jacobites went, he was more emotional than political, so he did not participate in the uprising of 1715. All the club members had pen names, and Ramsay's was Isaac Bickerstaff. At the end of 1713, he adopted the pen name Gawin Douglas. Both these names have the ring of both Scotland and England, suggesting Ramsay's aspiration to revive Scotland's literary arts and seek a new literature merged with the culture of England. His talents nurtured in the critical atmosphere of

the Easy Club, Ramsay's poetry blossomed. He earned a reputation as a poet who knew how to use the language of both Scotland and England. Indeed, while most of his works are composed in classical meter, they brim with a good Scot's humor and satire.

Within a few years after becoming independent, Ramsay gave up the wig-making trade. Ramsay's first collection of poetry was published in 1721, and its introduction began with the foppish salutation—"To the most Beautiful the Scots Ladies."<sup>152</sup> The printing of the anthology was funded by subscriptions from people requesting copies beforehand. The subscription method seems to have been quite the common practice in the publishing culture of the time. It was customary to list the names of the subscribers in the acknowledgement, and people contributed funds with the expectation that their names would be listed in the printed book. In some cases, persons interested in supporting a book would be invited by placing an advertisement in the newspaper.<sup>153</sup>

Not only was he an active poet but a folklorist and student of literature who collected the old poetry, essays, and songs of Scotland, which he edited and made into books. The first product of these efforts was *The Tea Table Miscellany*, published between 1724 and 1737. But Ramsay was apparently not the rigorous scholar type of collector, and he freely revised the works he selected into a neo-classic style of English and added his own touches before printing. In 1724 he also published an anthology called *The Ever Green*, a collection of late-medieval period Scottish poems chosen from old hand-copied books. Ramsay changed the spelling and order of the words given in the original poems and even the style of the poems, sometimes completely rewriting verses. His editing was apparently motivated by the desire to have the poems accepted by his contemporaries, but later scholars have tended to decry his efforts as excessive distortion. He also published *A Collection of Scots Proverbs* (1737). Including not only proverbs, but folk songs and poems, this work represented a valuable effort to rediscover and record Scotland's culture. The standard proverb collections of today invariably include those gathered by Ramsay.

Ramsay's efforts to bring old Scotland's literature to light were of course a product of his times. About twenty years had passed since the union of Scotland and England, but the gap in the economies of the two countries had not narrowed. Influential members of the nobility were drawn to London. Information and culture from London poured into Scotland, driving its rapid Anglicization. Ramsay's efforts to find and preserve the literary heritage of Scotland must have arisen from his sense of crisis—that English culture might completely overwhelm and wipe out the culture of the Scotland that he loved. These activities were both part of, and moving forces in a renaissance of regional culture that was embraced by the people of Scotland.

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152 Martin and Oliver [1945]–1974, vol. 1, p. xv.

153 Chitnis 1976, p. 38.

### *The Gentle Shepherd*

One of Allan Ramsay's major poetic works was the comedy *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), set in rural Scotland. Told in verse, the story goes as follows: In the period of the restoration of monarchial rule (around 1660–1685) a gentle shepherd named Patie and Peggy, the daughter of another shepherd of the neighborhood he has known since childhood, are in love. Patie's close friend, also a shepherd, named Roger, loves a lovely, clever girl named Jenny, but Jenny is attracted to another man named Bauldy and does not respond to Roger's overtures. Patie and Peggy, hoping to get Roger and Jenny together, offer both of them advice.

Bauldy, meanwhile, who was once betrothed to a woman named Neps, is attracted to Peggy and seeks the advice of another woman named Mause in capturing Peggy's affections. Bauldy firmly believes that Mause is a witch. He asks Mause to cast a spell so that Peggy will fall in love with him and that Peggy's lover Patie, will fall in love with his current fiancé, Neps. Mause, however, scolds Bauldy, declaring that she is no witch and that the so-called powers she possesses are the result of the "education" she received.

Now a local landowner named Sir Worthy appears on the scene, announcing that he is Patie's real father. Sir Worthy recounts how he was driven from the land under the regime of Oliver Cromwell and left his son Patie in the care of the shepherd. Patie is happy to be reunited with his father, but when forbidden to marry Peggy because she is of lesser birth, he is plunged into misery.

Jenny, meanwhile, is persuaded to accept Roger's love, but Bauldy is tormented by ghosts, and he appeals to Sir Worthy, declaring that his torments are the work of Mause. Observing this, Sir Worthy realizes the importance of education in preventing people from coming under the influence of superstition.

In the end, Bauldy returns to Neps. It turns out that Peggy is in fact the daughter of Sir Worthy's younger sister. Like Patie, she had been left in the care of a shepherd when she was small. And so in the end, Patie and Peggy are happily married.

This romantic pastoral comedy is written in a mixture of English and Scottish, with numerous folksongs of Scotland included. Drawing on the experiences of his boyhood in Leadhills, Ramsay himself is no doubt the model for the shepherd Patie. Having lost his father early in life and spent years in the countryside tending his stepfather's sheep, Ramsay's imagination spread its wings wide in that pastoral setting. There was likely a model for Peggy as well—and the author's dreams of how he would have been united with such a girl if only his father were the Earl of Hopeton.

What was Ramsay's message in *The Gentle Shepherd*? The story portrays people who are swayed by ancient superstitions about witches and ghosts. The Witchcraft Act had yet to be abolished, and for the common people, witches may have seemed very real. Indeed, until 1727, witches were regularly sentenced to death in England. Bauldy is a character symbolic of the popular belief in superstition. He relies on magic to achieve his



wish and is tormented by ghosts. The story offers an instructional tale on the importance of education so as not to be misled by superstition. Certainly Ramsay wanted to send a message of the power of education in defeating medieval irrationality and building a new era. That conviction was what inspired his circulating library business.

*The Gentle Shepherd* won acclaim as a leading example of the "pastoral comedy" of Scotland. James Boswell, a man of Scotland, was among those impressed by the work, which he mentions in *Life of Johnson* in a 1773 passage, as follows:

I spoke of Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, in the Scottish dialect, as the best pastoral that had ever been written; not only abounding with beautiful rural imagery, and just and pleasing sentiments, but being a real picture of manners; and I offered to teach Dr. Johnson to understand it. 'No, Sir, (said he,) I won't learn it. You shall retain your superiority by my not knowing it.'<sup>154</sup>

Johnson's reaction, reflecting his slight disdain for Scotland's world of letters, may have been typical of the reviews of Ramsay's work in England.

In 1729, Ramsay created an opera version of *The Gentle Shepherd*. He was probably influenced by John Gay's (1685–1732) *The Beggar's Opera*, which had been a big hit in London the year before. The opera of *The Gentle Shepherd* was performed widely throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Edinburgh, London, Birth, and New York. Recently revived, it was included on the program of the Edinburgh Festival in the summers of 1986 and 2001, and is firmly established as a classic of Scotland's performing arts.

### Ramsay's Circulating Library

In 1725, the year Ramsay published the first edition of *The Gentle Shepherd*, he moved to the center of guild trade in the city of Edinburgh called the Luckenbooths, where he started a circulating library, said to be the first shop of its kind in Great Britain. The library also sold books. Some sources say that the books for sale were lent out to fee-paying members of the library for one- to two-week periods. Others say that the bookshop and circulating library were separate.<sup>155</sup> It is difficult to corroborate either claim.

Ramsay's shop flourished. It was a popular gathering place in Edinburgh regularly used by young people as a meeting place. It drew not only young people but the literary elite of the town, as well as travelers. Unfortunately, the Luckenbooths was demolished when the neighborhood was redeveloped in 1817, and no trace remains today to sug-

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154 Boswell 1998 (1791), p. 515.

155 *Booksellers Dictionary*, pp. 246–47.



gest the atmosphere of Ramsay's shop. As of 2005, only a single souvenir shop called "Luckenbooth" remained as testimony to that interlude of local history.

Ramsay's shop enjoyed overwhelming popular support, but his business was cause for furrowed brows among some in positions of authority. Leaders of the church and conservative government condemned his circulation of "obscene" books, as testified in one mid-nineteenth century document referring to Ramsay's circulating library in 1728.

Besides this, profaneness is come to a great height; all the villainous, profane, and obscene books and playes, printed at London by Curle and others, are gotte down from London by Allan Ramsay, and lent out, for an easy price to young boyes, servant women of the better sort, and gentlemen, and vice and obscenity dreadfully propagated. Ramsay has a book in his shop, wherein all the names of those that borrow his playes and books for two-pence a-night or some such rate are set down, and by these wickednes of all kinds are dreadfully propagated among the youth of all sorts. My informer, my Lord Grange, tells me he complained to the magistrates of this, and they scrupled at meddling in it, till he mooved that his book of borrowers should be inspected, which was done, and they were alarmed at it, and sent some of their number to his shope to look through some of his books; but he had notice an hour before, and had withdrawn a great many of the worst, and nothing was done to purpose.<sup>156</sup>

Ramsay did indeed make it his business to bring to Edinburgh before anyone else all sorts of "diabolical" books as soon as they had been published in London and make them available to young people at cheap prices. His shop was filled with irreverent and enjoyable books of all kinds and the church tried to get the authorities to close it down. Their alarm was not surprising, as Ramsay's store stood just to the left of the St. Giles' Cathedral, the very headquarters of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. No doubt it appeared to them a direct challenge to have such a provocative establishment in that particular place. Alerted by the church authorities, the magistrates went to inspect the circulating library, but Ramsay was warned in advance and removed the most "dangerous" books before they arrived. When the magistrates got there, and found only row upon row of books on theology and philosophy, they had no choice but to reluctantly withdraw. Some say there is no evidence of such dramatic moments in the history of Ramsay's shop,<sup>157</sup> but given Ramsay's overall activities, it would not be surprising if there had been, for he was engaged in a guerilla-like strategy against the authorities. What he was doing was certainly considered "diabolical" from the viewpoint of so-called "upright"

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<sup>156</sup> *Literary Gazette*, p. 455.

<sup>157</sup> Kaufman 1965, p. 244.

people of the time. That which was considered "diabolical," however, ended up fostering the endeavors of young people in developing new values, and these young people did in fact give rise to the Scotland Renaissance.

The business of a circulating library could only have been successful in Edinburgh because the popular literacy rate was quite high. The Presbyterian Church policy of furthering elementary education succeeded in pushing up the literacy rate, so Ramsay simply took advantage of the cultural momentum set in motion by the church itself, and ultimately contributed to the overturn of the very values the church had sought to put in place. The play *The Rivals* (1775) written by Ireland-born author Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), includes the line, "a circulating library in a town is, as an ever-green tree of, diabolical knowledge!"<sup>158</sup> Although this depiction of London was made about fifty years after Ramsay's day, it expresses an interesting view of the circulating library in the eighteenth century. "Diabolical knowledge" means knowledge considered wicked or ungodly from the viewpoint of Christian values. The "tree" that Ramsay tended spread branches quite unlikely ever to wither from the very center of Edinburgh, and in the shadow of its boughs, the youth of a new civilization gathered.

Now let us take a somewhat closer look at the "circulating library" business. Until their position was ousted by "public libraries" under the Public Libraries Act of 1850, there were all sorts of circulating libraries in England. Some operated for profit, some as a non-profit service; some were managed by individuals, others by local communities; some were membership-based, some not, and so on. Whatever their form, they all played a major role in the increased literacy of the populace and the flowering of culture. In an account of London in the 1780s in a book entitled *Travels Chiefly on Foot, Through Several Parts of England in 1782*, a German named Karl Philipp Moritz (d.u.) wrote of his surprise to find that his landlady, the widow of a tailor, was entertaining herself with literature by reading borrowed books. "My landlady, who is only a taylor's widow, reads her Milton; . . . I have conversed with several people of the lower class, who all knew their national authors, and who all have read many, if not all of them."<sup>159</sup> Booklending was clearly helping to improve the literacy of the common people.

Ordinary people were not the only users of the circulating libraries. Historian Devendra P. Varma (1923–1994) writes that well-known authors like Walter Scott (1771–1832) and Robert Burns, as well as Romantic-movement authors such as the following were regular users:<sup>160</sup>

William Shenstone (1714–1763)

William Cowper (1731–1800)

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158 Sheridan 1775, p. 27.

159 Moritz 1797 (1795), p. 38.

160 Varma 1972, p. 81.

Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770)  
 Fanny Burney (1752–1840)  
 William Wordsworth (1770–1850)  
 Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)  
 Jane Austen (1775–1817)  
 Henry Crabb Robinson (1775–1867)  
 Leigh Hunt (1784–1859)  
 John Keats (1795–1821)

According to Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, 75 percent of popular fiction was purchased by circulating libraries.<sup>161</sup> So at this stage, the circulating libraries were welcome not only to ordinary readers and educated people but booksellers and writers as well.

So how many circulating libraries were there in eighteenth-century England? Paul Kaufman, who has done a detailed study of booklending in modern England, says evidence shows that there were already at least six booklenders in London as of the year 1700, rejecting the popular belief that Ramsay's was the first in Great Britain.<sup>162</sup> According to a study by Hilda M. Hamlyn, there were at least nine booklenders in London in the 1740–1750 period. Between 1770 and 1780, the number had risen to nineteen, and stood at twenty-six in the following decade. Some sources indicate that there were more than 1,000 lending libraries throughout England in 1800. In 1802, John Feltham writes that "every intelligent village throughout the nation now possesses its Circulating library."<sup>163</sup> This affords a glimpse of how these circulating libraries supported English literature in Great Britain.

In Allan Ramsay's native town of Leadhills, in fact, the "Leadhills Miners Library" stands even today, calling itself the "oldest subscription library in Great Britain." Founded in 1741, it boasts a sign reading "Instituted by Allan Ramsay." The year 1741 was forty years after Ramsay moved to Edinburgh, however, and it seems unlikely that he had retained his connection with Leadhills. The guidebook published by the library admits that there is no evidence that Ramsay founded the library, so the sign is no doubt an expression of wishful thinking. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, published toward the end of the eighteenth century, includes a passage about this library:

The Leadhills library contains some trash, but as many valuable books as might be expected to be chosen by promiscuous readers. They are the best informed, and therefore the most reasonable common people that I know.<sup>164</sup>

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161 Varma 1972, p. 79.

162 Kaufman 1965, p. 244.

163 Feltham 1802, p. 238.

164 Sinclair 1973 (1799), p. 216.

I myself visited this library. Neither the building nor its contents were of the eighteenth century, but its collection was extremely interesting. It was full of weighty—both physically and content-wise—books on subjects like theology and philosophy. Leadhills was a village of miners, however, and I just could not imagine—though I have no intention to belittle—men exhausted from work in the mines sitting down to read books of theology in the dim light of their poor homes. I even asked the librarian—did the miners read difficult books like this?—and was told that they did.

In any case, what kind of books did Ramsay's circulating library actually provide? Kaufman has studied the composition of the collection of the circulating library that James Sibbald (1747–1803) managed, after taking over Ramsay's original shop. According to Kaufman's study, the inventory of the collection published 1780 and before was as follows:<sup>165</sup>

Classes	No. of Titles
History and Antiquities of Great Britain, Ireland, and Foreign Nations; Geography, Voyages and Travels; Lives, Trials, Peerages, &c.	832
Arts and Sciences, Natural History & Philosophy, Metaphysics, Trade, Husbandry &c.	544
Anatomy, Physics, Surgery, Midwifery, Materia Medica	326
Divinity & Ecclesiastical History	346
Poetry—Plays—Essays—Letters &c Entertaining & Critica—Translations of the Greek and Roman Poets and Orators	829
Novels and Romances	888

It is difficult to draw a line between what is "serious" and what "profane," but if we compare the top four categories with the bottom two categories, we see that the ratio is about 1:0.84. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, we should note, the "novel" as a genre was as yet not established, so it is likely that the proportion of popular books in Ramsay's time was lower than the figures shown here. Studies of extant catalogs of booklenders in England from the late eighteenth century indicate that the proportion of fiction in the collections was around 10 to 15 percent.<sup>166</sup> A report of the composition in 1791 of the collection of the Hamilton booklender of London indicates that of a total 1,500 titles, 1,050 were "novels."<sup>167</sup>

Perhaps more important than the composition of the collections, however, was what books people actually borrowed and read. What people were reading can be learned by careful examination of the lending records of these libraries. In general, the main

165 Kaufman 1965, p. 239.

166 Shimizu 1994, p. 114.

167 Varma 1972, p. 198.

strength of the circulating libraries would appear to be popular fiction, but some studies indicate that that was not necessarily so, at least with regard to Scotland. In the country town of Innerpefferay, about forty miles northwest of Edinburgh is “Scotland’s Oldest Lending Library,” established around 1680. Kaufman, who examined 1,483 records of books borrowed between 1747 and 1800, reports on 370 titles lent in the following categories.<sup>168</sup>

Religion	171
History, Law and Politics	85
General Secular Literature	37
Agriculture	18
Travel	11
Mathematics and Science	8
Miscellaneous	40

He gives the most frequently borrowed books, with number of times borrowed during that period, as follows:<sup>169</sup>

Robertson, History of Charles V	46
Clark, Sermons	37
Tillotson, Sermons	34
Sherlock, Sermons	30
Buffon, Natural History	27
Monthly Review	26
Mosheim, Ecclesiastical History	26
Abernethy, Discourses (Sermons)	24
Universal History	23
Atterbury, Sermons	20
Locke, Works	20

The occupations of the people who borrowed the books were extremely diverse, as Kaufman notes, “barber, bookseller, army captain, cooper, dyer, dyer apprentice, factor, farmer, flaxdresser, gardner, glover, mason, merchant, miller, minister, quarrier, schoolmaster, servant, shoemaker, student (of humanity, divinity, philosophy), smith, surgeon, surgeon apprentice, tailor, watchmaker, weaver, wright”<sup>170</sup>—obviously including many ordinary folk.

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168 Kaufman 1964, p. 228.

169 Kaufman 1964, p. 229.

170 Kaufman 1964, p. 231.

Another example may be found in the library of Haddington, a town about twenty miles east of Edinburgh, where of 2,837 lending records from the 1732–1796 period have been preserved. Kaufman notes that works like *Universal History*; Rolin, *Ancient History*; Henry Fielding (1707–1754), *Works*; Callender, *Collection of Voyages*; Sully, *Memoirs*; Rollin, *Roman History*; and William Robertson (1721–1793), *History of Charles V* were frequently borrowed.<sup>171</sup>

Kaufman's reports on these libraries is quite detailed but—given the rather extended time period for both libraries—the number of records studied seems strangely small. It would suggest, calculated by simple arithmetic, that Innerpefferay lent out only 27 books per year and Haddington only 43 books per year. Whether Kaufman's figures are based on only records that happened to survive or whether the study examined only part of the available records is not clear. Although it would be risky to draw any conclusions about the average level of education of country readers in Scotland from these records alone, they do offer convincing evidence that ordinary folk were reading quite difficult books.

Confirming in the above how significant was the cultural role of circulating libraries, let us return to the story of Allan Ramsay's career. It seems that by around 1730, Ramsay had ceased publishing collections of poetry, although he left numerous unpublished poems written after 1730.<sup>172</sup> Perhaps he found he could not write poetry he thought worth publishing. Instead he became active in various venues of the performing arts.

Ramsay also left his mark on the history of art education in Scotland. Lamenting that although he had had artistic talent but had been unable to realize his dream of becoming a painter, he seems to have decided to entrust his dream in the next generation by participating in the founding of an art school. The Academy of St. Luke, Edinburgh's first art school, was founded 29 October 1729, providing instruction in painting, sculpture, and architecture. Ramsay sent his sixteen-year-old eldest son to this school—or perhaps it was more accurate to say that he participated in its founding so that he could send his son to art school to fulfill his own unrealized dream of becoming



Figure 5. Portrait of poet Allan Ramsay (1686–1758) by his son Allan. (Smart 1992a: 17)

171 Kaufman 1965, pp. 265–66.

172 Martin 1931a, p. 36.

a painter. In actuality, the academy served the function of art school for only a short period, until 1733, but that was enough for Ramsay to educate his son, who drew the portrait of his father (see Figure 5). Drawn in 1729, the year the Academy of St. Luke was founded, the sketch is the oldest work of its kind among the extant works of the younger Ramsay. Vividly capturing his father's piercing gaze at something far away, the work foreshadows the genius that would make him one of the most successful portrait painters of his time.

Ramsay's nurturing of the "evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge" extended to the theater as well, with his creation of Carrubber's Close, a theater located just off High Street in Edinburgh. In the period of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, this was the location of a safe house for Jacobites. The theater's formal opening, held 8 November 1736, included a performance of Henry Fielding's *The Virgin Unmasked*. With a provocative title that might have seemed controversial, in fact it was more of a moral tale. A merchant who has grown very wealthy decides to marry off his daughter to one of three bachelors who are related to him by blood, as a means of protecting his fortune. The three men, one a druggist, another a ballroom dancer, and another a lyricist, vie to display their talents, but in the end the daughter marries a servant. The publisher of *The Virgin Unmasked* was the London bookseller John Clark (d.u.). Ramsay purchased the publishing rights to the book from Clark in July 1732, suggesting that he had been preparing to open the theater from four years earlier. His enthusiasm for the theater was not just a passing whim.

Ramsay sold year-long tickets to his theater to collect funds, but he probably had no idea of what its destiny would be. The youth of Edinburgh, eager for new forms of culture, were strong supporters. The Presbyterian Church, however, was not pleased, attacking the theater as a corruptive influence among youth. By unhappy coincidence, the Licencing Act, a law designed to control playhouses (which were likely to become the basis of anti-establishment activity in outlying parts of the country) went into effect on 24 June 1737. Under the Act, it became impossible to run a theater for profit anywhere outside of London. Caught by surprise by the law, Ramsay wrote to a friend in London, asking for a copy of the text of the law and any advice about getting around it, saying: "I am particularly attacked by a certain act against our publick Theatres having a set of players under my management I should be sory to see them driven to Beggary now, when I had last year got a brow new House for them."<sup>173</sup>

Since the laws of England and Scotland continued to be different in principle at that time, one wonders whether the Licencing Act would have applied in Edinburgh, yet Ramsay's alarm indicates that in fact it was fairly influential in the capital of Scotland as well. Clever as he had been at circumventing the law in his circulating library, it was to prove difficult for his theater to elude the long arm of the law. No longer able to present

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173 Kinghorn and Law 1951–1961, vol. 4, p. 207.



plays, Ramsay sought to get through his difficulties by giving performances of music and dance in the theater. The Presbyterian Church kept up its attacks on Ramsay under the terms of the Licencing Act, until he was finally forced to close it down. Only three years had passed since the theater had first raised its curtain.

### **Whereabouts of Ramsay's Library**

In 1738, Ramsay built a house on land he had obtained five years earlier north of Edinburgh Castle. Standing on high ground with a spectacular view, the area today is called "Ramsay Garden." In the early twentieth century, the area was redeveloped into a complex of homes for educated people, inspired by the idea of recreating the intellectual ferment of the eighteenth century.<sup>174</sup> Today, there are luxury apartments and tourist accommodations standing there.

Ramsay's original house is preserved today, featuring an octagonal structure evoking the architecture of Naples, familiarly known as a "goose pie" house, from the resemblance of its shape to the pie tin used to make the "goose pie" that is a traditional Christmas-season dish in Scotland.

The year after his theater was closed, in 1740, Ramsay retired to his goose-pie house, where he remained for the last seventeen years of his life, in imitation, it is said of the poet of the Roman empire, Horace, who escaped Rome to live in the quiet of the countryside. Enjoying conversation with his friends, reading, tending his garden, he frequently wrote to friends and penned poetry, living out his life without further rabble-rousing. His wife, Christian, died 28 March 1743 at the age of sixty. Ramsay survived her for fifteen years, but he suffered from scurvy in his later years and died 7 January 1758. An elegy written by a friend upon his death goes as follows:

How sweet his Voice when of Content he sings,  
Soft as the Musick of Angelick strings;  
No sour Philosophy disturbs his Rules,  
Free from the faults, and pedantry of Schools  
No severe Moral interrupts his Song,  
But all is Native Innocence along,  
Pleas'd with his Precepts, which so just appear,  
We view the Road of blest Contentment near.<sup>175</sup>

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174 Takahashi 2004, p. 185.

175 Kinghorn and Law 1951–1961, vol. 4, p. 312.



Ramsay was a man of middle stature, of a cheerful and kind disposition. Blessed with a rich imagination, he treated people of all levels of society on an equal basis. He devoted tremendous effort to gathering and publishing the poetry and songs of old Scotland in danger of being lost in the midst of the union with England. The texts that he published were perhaps not strictly faithful to the originals, but his efforts pioneered many other projects of similar vein. Although he came under the pressure of church authority, he imported progressive culture from London and made it available to the youth of Edinburgh. By operating a bookshop, circulating library, as well as theater, he acted as a kind of “producer” of culture, setting the stage upon which the Scotland Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was to flourish. His projects may have been called “diabolical,” but they may have been the sort of necessary evil that made it possible to break away from long-entrenched conventions and forge a new culture.

What happened to Ramsay’s circulating library? After Ramsay’s death, the shop passed to a man named James Macewan (d.u.), who subsequently turned it over to the large bookseller Alexander Kincaid<sup>176</sup>—the same Kincaid who was a business partner with Alexander Donaldson and who was both friend and foe to Millar. Later the circulating library passed to a man named William Creech (1745–1815).<sup>177</sup> Creech went on to work jointly with Cadell, who was the successor to Millar’s bookstore, and Millar’s close associate Strahan, and to publish the first Edinburgh edition of *Poems* (1787) by Scotland’s leading poet, Robert Burns.

In 1757, a man named John Yair (d.u.), who had operated a bookseller in Edinburgh’s Parliament Close since 1742, purchased the circulating library from Creech. After Yair’s death, his widow Margaret continued the circulating library’s business until 1780 after which it was purchased by Sibbald, as mentioned earlier.<sup>178</sup> Sibbald’s circulating library was to be the stage of an important encounter in the history of English literature: the meeting there in 1786 of Robert Burns and the young Walter Scott, two figures who became the champions of the Romantic movement of English literature.

John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854), who was Scott’s son-in-law and his biographer writes in *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837–1838) that Scott was a regular customer at Sibbald’s circulating library. It recounts how, having been granted the freedom to freely search for books in the library’s shelves, Scott thus came in contact with the classics of France and Italy. It seems certain that many of the books that Romantics like Scott and Burns read were those that had formerly been collected by Ramsay. Lockhart writes:

I fastened also, like a tiger, upon every collection of old songs or romances which chance threw in my way, or which my scrutiny was able to discover on the dusty

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176 Chalmers and Woodhouselee 1851, vol. 3, p. 221.

177 Chalmers and Woodhouselee 1851, vol. 3, p. 222.

178 *Booksellers Dictionary*, p. 370.

shelves of James Sibbald's circulating library in the Parliament Square. This collection, now dismantled and dispersed, contained at that time many rare and curious works, seldom found in such a collection. Mr. Sibbald himself, a man of rough manners but of some taste and judgment, cultivated music and poetry, and in his shop I had a distant view of some literary characters, besides the privilege of ransacking the stores of old French and Italian books, which were in little demand among the bulk of his subscribers. Here I saw the unfortunate Andrew Macdonald, author of *Vimonda*; and here, too, I saw at a distance the boast of Scotland, Robert Burns.<sup>179</sup>

In the year Sibbald died (1803), the circulating library was purchased by a man named Alexander Mackay (d.u.).<sup>180</sup> Records state that Mackay owned books that have the bookplate of Ramsay's circulating library,<sup>181</sup> but in 1805, the shop that had stood on the site where Ramsay had his original library was torn down and the collection was auctioned off in 1832. A large proportion of the collection was purchased by William Wilson (d.u.), who ran his bookstore until 1851.<sup>182</sup> What happened to the books after that is not known.

Representations of Allan Ramsay, the elder, have changed with the times. Having been described as "diabolical," his reputation until around the mid-1780s was pitifully low. Burns and Scott, however, had tremendous respect for Ramsay, who greatly influenced them. Thanks to the success of Burns and Scott, Ramsay was applauded throughout most of the nineteenth century as a pioneer of Scotland's arts and letters. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Ramsay's reputation again declined, but since research on Scotland's Enlightenment began to flourish from the 1960s, it has again risen.

Regardless of the ups and downs of his reputation over the centuries, his importance as an influential figure in the Romantic movement of English literature is undeniable. Sir Walter Scott recalled the influence of Ramsay's poetry collections on him as follows:

Two or three old books which lay in the window-seat were explored for my amusement in the tedious winter days. Automathes, and Ramsay's Tea-table Miscellany, were my favourites, . . . My kind and affectionate aunt, Miss Janet Scott, whose memory will ever be dear to me, used to read these works to me with admirable patience, until I could repeat long passages by heart.<sup>183</sup>

Active in the first half of the eighteenth century, Ramsay helped revive Scotland's native culture in the tumultuous era following the union with England and contributed

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179 Lockhart 1969 (1837–1838), p. 35.

180 Kaufman 1965, p. 239.

181 Varma 1972, p. 31.

182 Kaufman 1965, p. 239.

183 Lockhart 1969 (1837–1838), p. 16.

to the gradual incorporation of up-to-date culture from London. After the middle of the century, the demands of the times changed radically.

### The Younger Allan Ramsay

Just down the hill from Edinburgh Castle, on a rocky cliff rise the walls of the “goose-pie” house where the poet and book lender Allan Ramsay spent the later years of his life. In the days of the *Donaldson v. Becket* case, its main resident was his son, also named Allan Ramsay, the well-known portrait painter.

The younger Ramsay took as his second wife a cousin of Lord Mansfield, and by marrying a woman of good birth, he expanded his links with the upper echelons of British society. By then he had established his reputation as a portrait painter. Based mainly in London, he also resided in Edinburgh for certain periods.

The Ramsay houses in London and Edinburgh were gathering places of prominent figures of the times. According to *The Life of Johnson*, both Johnson himself and Boswell, his biographer, lunched there together at least twice in 1778–1779. The 29 April 1778 luncheon at the Ramsay house was attended also by Scottish historian William Robertson. The account says that Robertson related to Ramsay, Johnson, and Boswell his experiences publishing *The History of Scotland, during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI* (1759) as follows:

I sold my *History of Scotland* at a moderate price, as a work by which the booksellers might either gain or not; and Cadell has told me that Millar and he have got six thousand pounds by it. I afterwards received a much higher price for my writings. An authour should sell his first work for what the booksellers will give, till it shall appear whether he is an authour of merit, or, which is the same thing as to purchase-money, an authour who pleases the publick.<sup>184</sup>

His advice was, thus, that those who wished to make a living by their writing should take what the market (the booksellers) offered at the beginning, with the expectation that once they had established themselves, they could then ask for more. Most writers must have had to accept this situation, and yet not everyone could come out ahead. The vast majority of writers were simply taken advantage of by the booksellers. In 1778, even four years after the decision in the *Donaldson v. Becket* case, there appears to have been little change in the ways that booksellers exploited authors; authors for their part seemed to mostly put up with the situation.

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184 Boswell 1998 (1791), p. 980.

Boswell's account of the luncheon on that day describes an argument between Adam Smith and the bookseller and printer William Strahan and relates an exchange that took place about the work of Alexander Pope. The following day, Johnson remarked to Boswell "Well, Sir, Ramsay gave us a splendid dinner. I love Ramsay. You will not find a man in whose conversation there is more instruction, more information, and more elegance, than in Ramsay's."<sup>185</sup>

The painter had some memories about the publishing world. When he was still only nineteen years of age, his father had sent him to negotiate for the publication of the father's *The Tea Table Miscellany* with bookseller Andrew Millar. In 1732, the young man paid a visit to Millar in London, carrying a letter from his father. The father had told his son, "If you do not like the proposal tell Mr Millar so." In the postscript to his letter to Millar, moreover, he wrote, "My son brings you this, if he approves it."<sup>186</sup> We can tell from this account that the father already had full confidence in the judgment of his teenage son. Doubtless the latter had cultivated considerable learning from exposure to his father's library. Ramsay did go on, though he made his living as a painter, to be a man who could converse intelligently about the London publishing business and the issues of copyright.

After graduating from the Academy of St. Luke, which his father had been involved in founding, the younger Ramsay studied painting in London for about a year. In 1733 he returned to Edinburgh and began working as a portrait painter while living in his father's house. In the summer of 1736, just before the father opened the theater on Carrubber's Close, the son traveled to Paris, Florence, and Rome to study art. In 1738 he returned to London and took up residence in Covent Garden. He lived there until 1751 and his fame as a portrait painter grew.

In 1739 Ramsay married Anne Bayne (?–1743). They had two sons and a daughter but none survived, and his wife too, died in childbirth. In 1752, he married the above-mentioned cousin of Lord Mansfield, Margaret Lindsay (?–1782), with whom he had two sons (John and Allan) and two daughters.

During late 1753 to July 1754, the younger Ramsay moved back to Edinburgh and was involved in the founding of the Select Society, a kind of salon frequented by scholars such as Adam Smith and David Hume, writers, members of the clergy, and other prominent intellectuals. Donaldson's counsel, Sir John Dalrymple was also a member of this society. Alexander Wedderburn, who would serve as co-counsel to Becket, was at the young age of twenty-two a central member. Social scientist and historian Adam Ferguson and Boswell as a young man, too, were later members. Indeed, it was a society of all the leading lights of the Scotland Renaissance.<sup>187</sup>

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185 Boswell 1998 (1791), p. 982.

186 Smart 1992a, p. 7.

187 Smart 1992a; Chitnis 1976, p. 201.

The Select Society met almost weekly from summer into winter beginning in 1754 and until around 1763, its purpose mainly being to pursue philosophical subjects and refine the arts of conversation. The arts, science, industry, agriculture, and conversational skills were regular topics. The group was similar to the Easy Club founded earlier by the senior Ramsay. Among the numerous private clubs of eighteenth-century Scotland, the Select Society is one that historians believe had an especially great influence on the Scotland Enlightenment and the later modernization of Britain. I think it is worth emphasizing that the painter Ramsay was a member of this network of figures who built the foundations of modern society.

Ramsay made a second trip to study in Italy from 1754 to 1757 and when he returned, he took up residence in the Soho district of London. He painted a portrait of King George III and went on to solidify his status as a royal portrait painter. He also did portraits for many of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, including two for David Hume (in 1754 and 1766), and one of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) in 1766. Rousseau was staying in London with Hume's support, his writings having gotten him into trouble in his native Switzerland. It must have been through Hume's introduction that Ramsay did the portrait. We also know that Ramsay associated with Denis Diderot (1713–1784), editor of the famous *L'Encyclopédie*, when he was in Paris in 1765, although he did not paint Diderot's portrait.

In 1773, after seriously injuring his right shoulder in a fall from a ladder, Ramsay was forced to retire as a painter. He spent the rest of his life writing essays and traveling in Italy. While residing in Edinburgh in the famous goose-pie house he lunched often with friends. In March 1782 his wife Margaret died. Grief stricken, he left half a year later for his fourth trip to Italy with his son John. He died at the port of Dover in August 1784, just after having returned to England.

Ramsay was closely associated with the people of the Enlightenment. These men created loose networks within which they inspired and edified each other, and Ramsay was part of these networks. Although he was not a central figure, one gets the impression that if he had not been among them, the interrelations among these men might have been rather different.

The younger Allan Ramsay was not only talented as a painter; he also inherited his father's literary gifts. He wrote a number of social tracts that reveal the cultivation of his close association with the great minds of his day. His *Essay on Ridicule* (1753) and *The Investigator* (1755) were published by Millar's bookstore and his *Essay on the Constitution of England* (1765) was published by Becket. What we can tell from this is that both the elder Ramsay and his son associated with Millar and that the painter Ramsay and Becket, Wedderburn, and Dalrymple were connected via the same human networks. It was not as if the network of Enlightenment figures of which Ramsay was a part was a separate and rival network to that in which Donaldson moved. There is no doubt that

the elder Ramsay's circulating library contributed to Edinburgh culture and that both the Donaldson bookshop and Ramsay's network emerged in the setting of that cultural ferment. One of the reasons for the blossoming of Scotland's Enlightenment was definitely the ready availability of "pirate editions"—books available more cheaply than in London. The relationship between "pirate publishers" like Donaldson and the leaders of culture may seem at odds, but was in fact one of coexistence.

With the rise of the Scotland Renaissance and against the backdrop of developing transport networks, it became necessary to both challenge London and quickly and actively import its culture. It would be Alexander Donaldson who carried on Ramsay's legacy.

