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Annals of the Parish, edited by Robert P. Irvine, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2020, xlviiii + 267pp.

Three Short Novels: Glenfell; Andrew of Padua, the Improvisatore; The Omen, edited by Angela Esterhammer, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2020, xl + 330 pp.

John Galt was born in Irvine, North Ayrshire in 1779 and died in Greenock, Inverclyde, about 30 miles away, in 1839. In the intervening years, he 'wrote in a panoply of forms and genres about a great variety of topics and settings, drawing on his experiences of living, working, and travelling in Scotland and England, in Europe and the Mediterranean, and in North America', in the words of the Preface to this new scholarly edition of Galt's works (vii). This summary, which emphasises both geographical and literary diversity, gets to the heart of the ongoing critical effort to assess the full scope of Galt's contribution to Romantic literature, a contribution that seems to be best defined by its variousness.

Galt is known for his writing about the rural West of Scotland but also for his writing on North American colonisation and land development, in which he was directly involved as Secretary of the Canada Company. He was a contemporary of Walter Scott with a markedly different approach to writing about historical change and its impact on the individual, expressed in an innovative narrative form which he called 'theoretical history'. He produced short stories and short novels and wrote prolifically for periodicals, most notably *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine*. He was a businessman (not often a successful one) and as Ian Duncan puts it in *Scott's Shadow* (2007), 'John Galt understood his literary career in frankly entrepreneurial terms, as a series of business ventures among others, and by no means the most important of them' (53). Galt himself invokes the concept of variousness in his *Autobiography* (1833), albeit in rather self-deprecating fashion: 'Notwithstanding I have put together many books, and become so various an author, it has

been rather in consequence of the want of active engagements than from a predominant predilection for the art' (1: 84).

Recent critics, on the other hand, see the impossibility of pinning Galt down to one genre or one geographical location not as the unfortunate by-product of a scattered professional life, but as a positive feature of his work. Kenneth McNeil's *Scottish Romanticism and Collective Memory in the British Atlantic* (2020), for example, argues that 'The varied professional experiences, movements and writerly interests of John Galt make him perhaps uniquely positioned, even among highly mobile Scots of the time, to survey the complexity of the Atlantic world' (272). In Gerard McKeever's *Dialectics of Improvement* (2020) Galt is a key case study for 'considering Scottish Romanticism as a varied, modal set of literary works coordinated around the idea of improvement' (153). This appreciation of Galt's multifacetedness can be understood as a course correction from an earlier critical tendency to focus on a particular subset of Galt's works to the exclusion of the wider picture; to see him only as a chronicler of a changing rural Scotland or to emphasise his status as a significant figure in early Canadian literary history, without allowing these frames to overlap.

A reassessment of such segmentation has been under way at least since the 1980s, when a collection of essays entitled *John Galt: Reappraisals* (1985) brought together contributions on his Scottish and Canadian writings. Ian Campbell's introduction to the 1994 Mercat Press edition of *Annals of the Parish* (1821) diagnosed a gradual shift away from stereotypes of 'Galt the local historian, Galt the Scottish painter of a rural idyll, Galt the genial satirist, Galt the regretful describer of a vanishing Scotland – all true, all most successfully achieved, all partial. The real John Galt, at last, is a little more visible (vii). Gerard Carruthers and Colin Kidd's introduction to the *International Companion to John Galt* (2017) is able to report more optimistically that Galt has 'for now at least, achieved the recognition his remarkable and distinctive fictional voice deserves' (7).

Carruthers and Kidd describe Galt as 'the champion of the local and the global' (7), and one common thread of recent Galt scholarship has been a desire to problematise the opposition between these two categories and to show that 'Galt sees at once the social and economic interconnections between Britain's core, its colonies and its peripheries, as they are writ large on an increasingly globalised scale' (McNeil 273). Or as McKeever puts it, 'His Scottish novels are at pains to explore the capacity of the modernising imperial framework to cope with, and to sustain, the presence of localised, historically rooted and distinctive cultural forms' (151). That imperial framework is the focus of Katie Trumpener's massively influential *Bardic Nationalism* (1997), and Galt's *Bogle Corbet*, which shunts its melancholic protagonist between Scotland, London, the West Indies and, finally, Canada, is an important pillar of the book's argument. For Trumpener, Galt represents a critique of the 'Abbotsford' ideal of empire – that is, a consoling vision, derived from the works of Walter Scott, of British imperialism as a structure that can compensate Scots for the loss of their political autonomy, co-opting and preserving the uniqueness of peripheral, regional identities.

In Ian Duncan's *Scott's Shadow*, Galt is again a foil to Scott, this time in the 'distinctive literary field' of Romantic Edinburgh (xi). His function here is not to displace or decentre the dominant literary figure of the age, but to offer an alternative method of transmuting Scottish Enlightenment historiography into fiction. *John Galt: Observations and Conjectures on Literature, History, and Society* (2012), edited by Regina Hewitt, is a wide ranging collection that covers Galt's plays, his magazine writing and some of his least-discussed fiction as well as offering new readings of better-known works such as *Annals of the Parish*. Underpinning the volume is a focus on the relationship between Galt's literary practices and Scottish Enlightenment historiography and social theory, advancing an understanding of Galt as a fundamentally interdisciplinary writer.

Galt features prominently in two recent studies of literary responses to the experience of mass migration, which employ quite different temporal and geographical frameworks: Juliet Shields' *Nation and Migration: The Making of British Atlantic Literature, 1765–1835* (2016) and Josephine McDonagh's *Literature in a Time of Migration: British Fiction and the Movement of People, 1815–1876* (2021). Robert Irvine has also written about Galt's engagement with contemporary debates about colonisation, while Jennifer Scott's work shows that literature and land speculation were mutually reinforcing ventures for Galt, focusing not just on his two North American novels but on the ways in which he uses his periodical writings as 'an important socio-professional network that supported his work as a businessman as well as an author' (369). 'Speculation' is also a key concept in Angela Esterhammer's recent book *Print and Performance in the 1820s* (2020), in which the work she has done to recover some of Galt's more obscure and idiosyncratic texts is integrated into a comprehensive and engrossing account of 1820s print culture.

The fact that all of this excellent, field-shaping critical work has been done in the absence of definitive and accessible scholarly texts makes the Edinburgh Edition an extremely welcome development. It appears at a moment when three other major Scottish authors of this period, Robert Burns, Walter Scott and James Hogg, are already the subject of major scholarly editions: the Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns is based at the University of Glasgow's Centre for Robert Burns Studies; the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, completed in 2012, is now being followed up by the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's Poetry; and the Stirling / South Carolina Edition of James Hogg, in progress since 1993, is now only a handful of volumes away from completion. In contrast to these projects, however, the Galt edition will not publish his complete works and correspondence. Whether this is because Galt still occupies a more peripheral position within the standard Romantic canon than these contemporaries, or because his – very extensive – output is more

variable in quality and less well preserved, the decision to take a more selective approach certainly seems a defensible one, without any need to take up Galt's own rather dismissive attitude to some of his work (which led him quite frequently to claim to have forgotten things that he had written).

Robert Irvine and Angela Esterhammer's edited volumes represent a major contribution to the ongoing re-evaluation or recontextualisation of Galt's place within Romantic studies. The fact that *Annals of the Parish* and *Three Short Novels* are the first two instalments to appear gives an indication of the project's scope, its intention to revisit Galt's most popular works as well as bringing some of his least accessible and least studied out of the shadows. *Annals of the Parish* is Galt's best-known book and the one which cemented his subsequent literary reputation as a regional chronicler, for better or worse. It is an account of the life of the village of Dalmailing from 1760 to 1810, related by the parish minister, the Reverend Micah Balwhidder. It is, as Irvine puts it, 'a narrative which might appear to have no plot at all . . . beyond its record of the local realisation of the universal providential plot of incremental technological and social progress' (xxxiv). As Balwhidder notes down the events of the year, registering local happenings alongside international events on the scale of importance, a picture emerges of the impact of industrialisation, war and social change on the life of the parish, and of how this process is understood – if indeed it is, fully – by the elderly clergyman. The three novellas in Angela Esterhammer's volume are far more obscure; two of the three, *Glenfell* and *Andrew of Padua*, have never been republished since they first appeared anonymously in 1820. *Glenfell; or, Macdonalds and Campbells* is a light-hearted comedy of errors which takes place in contemporary Edinburgh and Glasgow, while *Andrew of Padua, the Improvisatore*, a story of trickery and seedy theatrical settings, draws on Galt's travels in the Mediterranean between 1809 and 1811, and *The Omen*, first published in 1826, is a gloomy, Gothic psychological tale.

The text of *Annals of the Parish* is buttressed by a wealth of literary, historical and religious context. The Essay on the Text gives a full account of the relationship between Galt and his publisher William Blackwood and how this dynamic impacted both the composition and publication of *Annals*, and there are also two extremely useful appendices, 'Sources for Incidents' and 'History and Practice of the Church of Scotland', as well as an extract from Galt's *Literary Life* (1834) which describes the genesis of the novel in his own words. Robert Irvine's introduction provides a comprehensive and illuminating overview of the reception of *Annals* both at the time of its publication and later. Of the contemporary reception of the novel, we learn the suggestive fact that 'none of the reviews in the London weeklies compares *Annals of the Parish* to the novels of Walter Scott' (xxi), pointing instead to other literary comparisons such as Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) – though Irvine later argues convincingly that the closest fictional analogue for *Annals* is actually Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), a text that was available to the young Galt in the Greenock Library. Irvine returns to this local book history in the 'Literary Context' section, discussing Galt's reading of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy as well as *The Old Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791–99) which, as the novelist Christian Isobel Johnstone astutely notes in her contemporary review, might be the novel's most direct literary model, being a compilation of submissions by parish ministers. Fascinatingly, she 'suggested that *Annals* should be added as an appendix to future editions of the *Statistical Account*' (xxxii), offering implicit support for Galt's characterisation of the work as 'a kind of treatise on the history of society in the West of Scotland during the reign of George the Third' rather than a novel (171).

One of the most valuable parts of the introduction is the section on 'Later Reception' which examines the late-nineteenth-century revival of interest in Galt's Scottish writings. A selected *Works of John Galt* was brought out in 1895, entering the Scottish literary

marketplace in the heyday of the 'Kailyard School' of sentimental local-colour fiction. One popular Kailyard author, S. R. Crockett, was instrumental in pushing for the republication of Galt's works at this time and claimed him as a forebear, crediting him for pioneering 'the writing which glorifies the little quaintnesses of the towns and villages of Scotland' (xxviii). There was pushback even at the time to this understanding of Galt, however: Irvine highlights one reviewer who points out that 'from the perspective of a late Victorian reader, the Scotland of *Annals of the Parish* looked *less* devout than the modern nation, not more' (xxviii). It has never been straightforward to read Galt's work either as a full-throated celebration of traditional values or an optimistic vision of 'progress'. Reviewers in the 1820s were also somewhat split on this question; though the tendency seems to have been to read the novel as pastoral nostalgia, some detected notes of ambivalence. What this section does so effectively is to demonstrate the continuity of this particular debate even as the ground on which it was conducted shifted over time. The desire to view Galt as the chronicler of a lost way of life becomes more detached from his actual literary practice the more the period covered by the novel recedes into the past, paving the way for the stereotyping and misapprehension from which critics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have sought to rescue him.

The primary purpose of Angela Esterhammer's introduction to *Three Short Novels* is to demonstrate that *Glenfell*, *Andrew of Padua* and *The Omen* are of interest not only as precursors or companion pieces to Galt's longer and better-known works, but in and of themselves; that reading these tales can tell us something important about Galt's career and further, about the Romantic literary scene in the 1820s. As she points out, although Galt had his first great success with the serial publication of *The Ayrshire Legatees* in *Blackwood's Magazine* between June 1820 and February 1821, it is *Glenfell*, published in January 1820, which represents his first 'humorous, socially and historically insightful tale of Scottish life' (xvii). And *Glenfell* turns out to be a delightful read, a story of compounding

misunderstandings and meddling relatives whose titular hero's eccentric personality and somewhat accidental involvement in the main romantic and financial plots makes it a slightly cock-eyed version of the standard comedy of manners. Esterhammer's introduction shows the fruits of painstaking efforts to trace the publication history of this almost-forgotten text as it originates as a play, is rewritten and published as a short novel as part of a quickly-abandoned series called the *Periodical Novelist* then (barely) survives in circulating libraries and in French translation. Notably from the point of view of book history, she has been able to identify one of the few extant copies (held at the University of Guelph) as a gift from Galt to his mother.

Andrew of Padua is an ingenious literary hoax or *mise en abîme*, with both the titular Andrew and the novella's alleged author Francisco Furbo turning out to be frauds. The elderly 'Andrew' who tells his life story to Furbo in Arabian Nights style over several long evenings of drinking, was not actually a famous performer in his youth, and there is in fact no 'Abbate Furbo', an esteemed author with a long list of previous publications to his name. Esterhammer's introduction to this tale builds on her 2009 article which firmly established Galt's authorship of the text. She reads *Andrew of Padua* both as an entertaining tale in its own right and as an 'ironic literary memoir that traces Galt's trajectory from his Mediterranean travels to his breakthrough Scottish fiction by way of his biographical, pedagogical, and dramatic writings' (xxvii). That is, the tale is on one level about improvisation in the context of extempore dramatic performance, but on another, perhaps more important level, it is about Galt 'improvising a place for himself' in the literary world, writing for the theatre, doing anonymous hackwork, engaging with the hoaxing culture of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and turning the experience of European business travel into fiction.

The Omen, which was published in 1826, was not quite so drastically overlooked in its own time, though it was published anonymously rather than as a new work 'by the Author of

Annals of the Parish, &c.' in service of another hoaxing narrative device: a postscript that claims the tale has been 'extracted, rather than compiled' from letters and rejected for publication in *Blackwood's Magazine* (295), thereby undermining what has come before, which gives no indication of being anything other than a relatively coherent first-person narrative. The plot of *The Omen* testifies to Galt's interest in extreme or unusual mental states; it is powered by flashbacks, premonitions and intuitions as Henry, the tragic protagonist, attempts to recover the partially-remembered traumatic events of his childhood and is cruelly led by some force of fate or divine retribution towards an incestuous marriage, narrowly averted. The case for placing *The Omen* here alongside two of Galt's earlier short fictions rests on its similarly experimental nature and the insight that it provides into Galt's different stratagems for navigating the world of publishing. A great strength of both Esterhammer and Irvine's introductory materials is the picture that they piece together of the 1820s literary marketplace, ensuring that even for the non-specialist, Galt serves as a fascinating case study of the ways in which literary careers could be carved out in this decade.

For a reader already familiar with Galt, one of the pleasures of *Three Short Novels* is spotting early versions of character types and themes that he will rework and refine for the rest of his career. In *Glenfell's Mrs Campbell Ardmore* we can begin to make out the outlines of one of Galt's most memorable characters, the obstreperous Leddy who dominates *The Entail* (1823). Andrew of Padua and his 'author' Francisco Furbo are both sly, tricky figures like Andrew Wylie, Provost Pawkie and Lawrie Todd, the titular heroes of *Sir Andrew Wylie, of that Ilk* (1822), *The Provost* (1822) and *Lawrie Todd, or the Settlers in the Woods* (1830). Where Lawrie Todd's youthful indiscretions get him shipped off to the United States, Andrew of Padua's drive him on to the stage. *Glenfell's Mr Grant*, a wealthy and eccentric returnee from Upper Canada who acts as fairy godfather to the younger characters, is an early

prototype of other rough-hewn benefactors such as Lawrie Todd's Yankee uncle-in-law Zerobabel L. Hoskins, and like Bogle Corbet in Galt's novel of Canadian settlement, *Glenfell's* Ruart departs for the colonies after his financial ruin.

It is well known that Galt's interest in Canada predated his own direct involvement in colonisation with the Canada Company, which he helped found in 1824: he published a short 'Statistical Account of Upper Canada' as early as 1807 and around the time of *Glenfell's* publication in 1820 he was helping to lobby the government on behalf of claimants in Canada who had suffered losses in the War of 1812. The role of Canada as a plot device in this early literary work – as a solution to the financial difficulties its Scottish characters face – is another link in this chain and one that has rarely, if ever, previously been commented on due to *Glenfell's* almost total obscurity prior to its republication here.

At the same time as we see Galt recycling certain character types, another aspect of his approach to characterisation is at least as striking. This is an interest in oddness, in traits, both physical and mental, that set people apart and mark them out as unusual. Andrew's schoolmaster loses a thumb so cannot be a tailor; one of Andrew's youthful companions from his brief stint as a novice monk loses his nose; Andrew himself has a tooth removed which 'spoiled my singing' (217) while Furbo 'had the misfortune to be so deformed in the mouth by falling against a table, on which a boiling coffee pot was standing, that his articulation was scarcely intelligible' (139). The sheer gratuitousness of these accidents, in plot terms, suggests that there must be some other reason for their presence, and indeed disfigurement and physical and mental illness are to be found everywhere in Galt's work. Lawrie Todd suffers from an unspecified wasting malady in childhood which leaves him permanently stunted in his growth and also has the effect of making him exceptionally observant and perceptive: 'Thus it came to pass, that the neighbours thought me, while I was yet but a perfect laddie, something by ordinar' (1: 5). Bogle Corbet remarks that 'more than once I

have overheard it said of myself, he had always something odd about him' (1: 24). Bogle is 'to a most unfitting degree, prone to the indulgence of a meditative disposition, fantastical notions, and other follies of thought which, though they resemble philosophy, are in reality but the froth of the mind' (1: 149). In this, he bears a certain resemblance to the quirky and impulsive young Glenfell who is given to fits of abstraction and peculiar behaviour that occasionally causes others to question his sanity, but also, in his darker moments, to the tortured protagonist of *The Omen*.

Bogle's depression has often been read as an expression of the novel's specific themes: for example, McNeil describes it as a 'melancholy world-view inspired by a circum-Atlantic memory of constant upheaval and psychic trauma' (269). When read alongside the *Three Short Novels*, however, the sheer omnipresence of this preoccupation with physical and mental divergence from the norm, across genres and settings, emerges more powerfully as a worthy object of inquiry in its own right. There is a significant study of Galt to be done, I think, from the perspective of disability studies. The cumulative effect created by reading these three texts together, and the more complete understanding of Galt's literary output that is enabled by their republication, opens up the possibility of many other new readings and new directions for Galt scholarship.

Several more texts are set to be published by Edinburgh University Press over the next few years: *Sir Andrew Wylie, of that Ilk* (edited by Sharon Alker), *The Provost* (Caroline McCracken-Flesher), *The Entail* (Mark Schoenfield and Clare Simmons), *The Ayrshire Legatees* and *The Steam-Boat* (Mark Parker), *Lawrie Todd* (Regina Hewitt) and *Bogle Corbet* (Katie Trumpener). Also projected are some volumes of shorter fiction, more Scottish novels (*The Last of the Lairds*, *The Member* and *The Radical*), *Ringan Gilhaize*, Galt's great historical novel of the Scottish Reformation, and his *Literary Life* and *Autobiography* which will be edited by Gerard McKeever. *Not* planned for inclusion in the Edinburgh Edition, to

the best of my knowledge – in addition to Galt's poetry, generally rated as inferior to his prose and no great loss to an edition that does not aim to be exhaustive – are his plays, his travel writing, his non-fictional periodical contributions, experiments in biography like the rather controversial *Life of Lord Byron*, and certain less-successful novels (*The Earthquake*, *The Spaewife*, *Rothelan*, *Southennan*, *Stanley Buxton*, *Eben Erskine*). Overall, though, this edition promises to continue striking a judicious balance between reissuing more canonical works and reviving overlooked but significant texts, and between the interests of Galt scholars and specialists in Scottish Romanticism and those of a broader audience.

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