

**'NATURE'S MAKING': JAMES HOGG AND THE  
AUTODIDACTIC TRADITION IN SCOTTISH POETRY**

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## Chapter Eight: Parodies and Experiments

'The Border district of Scotland was at this time, of all the districts of the inhabited world, pre-eminently the singing country.... The easily traceable reasons for this character are.... Firstly, distinctly pastoral life... Secondly, the soldier's life, passing gradually, not in cowardice or under foreign conquest, but by his own increasing kindness and sense, into that of the shepherd; thus, without humiliation, leaving the war-wounded past to be recalled for its sorrow and its fame.

Thirdly, the extreme sadness of that past.... Fourthly (this a merely physical cause, yet a very notable one), the beauty of the sound of Scottish streams.... There must be much soft rain...the rocks must break irregularly and jaggedly.... the loosely-breaking rock must contain hard pebbles.... giving the stream its gradations of amber to the edge, and the sound as of "ravishing division to the lute".'

(John Ruskin, Fors Clavigera: Vol III, The Works of John Ruskin, ed E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, (London and New York, 1907), Vol XXVII, Letter 32 (August 1873) pp.593-95.)

Like Ruskin's stream, Hogg's poetry mixes the indigenous traditions of the Borders with a range of extraneous elements. His facility in diverse styles is particularly evident in parodies and experiments. In his ability to combine derivative and individualistic elements Hogg far exceeds the expected performances of the autodidact, demonstrating once more his exceptional ability to absorb new information. This chapter considers three of Hogg's liveliest experimental poems: The Poetic Mirror (1816), 'The Russiadde' (1822), and A Queer Book (1832).

Hogg relished demonstrating his stylistic virtuosity, transcending his peasant poet stereotype. The Poetic Mirror (1816), he later stated, was planned as a representative selection of the finest contemporary verse from Scotland and England. Subsequently, Hogg asserted, the resistance of his intended contributors (especially Scott) forced him to supply imitations himself. Although The Poetic Mirror is anonymous, Hogg leaves clues to his identity. Recalling Cela in The Pilgrims of the Sun (1815), for instance, the maligned heroine of the first item, 'The Guerilla', is Kela.<sup>1</sup> The Second Canto of 'Wat o' the Cleuch' (pp.53-129) opens with a nod to 'Kilmeny'. Where 'Bonny Kilmeny's gaed up the glen / But it wasna tae met Duneira's men' (ll.1-2) in 'Wat o' the Cleuch', 'Now Wat o' the Cleuch's gone down the dale, / But he is not in hauberk or glistening mail' (Canto II, ll.1-2).



The Poetic Mirror is arranged with great care, once more showing Hogg's attention to structural detail. There is a tonal shift throughout the volume, as the pieces become increasingly venomous. The first items are akin to artistic homage: affectionate tributes to Byron and Scott. These are followed by less respectful parodies of Wordsworth, Hogg himself (the middle and pivotal piece), Southey and Coleridge. Finally, there is forthright satire in the poems attributed to John Wilson. Hogg takes revenge for the 'Noctes Ambrosianae' by showing up Wilson at his hackneyed worst. 'Hymn to the Moon' (pp.267-75), for instance, hails the 'sweet spirit', unlike Hogg's own celestial rambles, in a cloying way which is sadly close to The Isle of Palms and other Poems (1812).

Demonstrating his autodidactic ability to imitate diverse styles, Hogg convincingly represents the most prominent contemporary poets. Wordsworth appears at his most lugubrious in 'The Flying Tailor' (pp.155-70); its narrator dismisses 'the impotent scorn of base Reviews' (especially the 'accursed...Edinburgh Review'). The piece opens in Grasmere churchyard and describes the career of the deceased 'Flying Tailor' with his 'unusual strength' (even though 'His mother was a cripple' and his father 'declined into the vale of years'--a repeated point). The cross-legged tailor at work, his 'natural circulation' often 'impeded', parallels the tailor-hero Russ (discussed below). Hogg takes off Southey, with an autodidact's



offended pride, in 'Peter of Barnet' (pp.215-41); its hero is admired for 'Nature's strong workings' in his form, he is the 'stereotype' of a 'page from nature's manual'.

Several of the heroes are given Scottish peasant traits. In 'The Guerilla' (pp.1-26), attributed to Byron, Hogg's Aragonese Alayni is a peasant 'goodly hind' who shares his 'parents' healthful toil'. This poem, one of the finest pieces in the collection, demonstrates Hogg's admiration for the most extreme aspects of Byron's work, already expressed in The Pilgrims of the Sun. The passionate style of 'The Guerilla' is reminiscent of The Giaour (1813) and The Corsair (1814). There are elements, too, of the savagery Hogg had attributed to some Scandinavians in The Pilgrims, particularly in the horrific revenge exacted by Alayni on the Frenchman, Marot, who raped Alayni's lover Kela. After slaying Marot, Alayni is filled with an overwrought sense of honour. He tries to make Kela 'pure' by killing her, then brutally massacres his enemies. Hogg is experimenting with the type of the zealot which he would perfect in the venomous anti-hero Robert Wringhim. Alayni, though, is motivated by blighted love rather than religious fervour.

Hogg's pastiche brilliantly takes off Byronic excitement and eroticism in the face of danger, as well as his characteristic stanzaic forms. In the following passage, for instance, the lovers meet under terrible circumstances:

She look'd into his face, and there beheld  
 The still unmoving darkness of his eye;  
 She thought of that could never be cancell'd,  
 And lay in calm and sweet benignity;  
 Down by her side her arms outstretched lie,  
 Her beauteous breast was fairer than the snow,  
 Its fascinating mould was heaving so,--  
 Never was movement seen so sweetly come and go!  
 (verse 17)

Hogg portrays the exotic behaviour of foreigners through love and war, with Byronic excess. Alayni, 'maniac-like', enters the battle wearing Marot's helmet, crowned with 'Kela's raven hair'. From now on, 'Blood was his joy' and others fear him like 'A demon spirit'. As the forces feast in an orange grove Alayni maintains his sullen, Byronic front, suffering the 'agony...of spirit comfortless'. Each Guerilla (anticipating Queen Hynde) takes a 'captive maid' or 'high-born dame' to his 'cabin'. Meanwhile Alayni wanders, with 'a form no other eye can see' before him. This is followed by Hogg's characteristic musings on the horrific nature of death in war so 'that sycophants may rule'. That night the 'darkling ruffian' Alayni rampages through his troops, killing the women 'in lawless couch'. Alayni, at times, resembles an Ossianic unkempt 'savage hero'; he becomes a legendary terror figure who roams the mountains of Segovia until he dies in battle, clasping Kela's hair. The whole is compelling and morally repugnant, at once capturing the

energy of Byron and Hogg's agenda as an autodidact.

Suggesting a structural awareness not usually associated with autodidacts, Hogg groups his parodies carefully. The spirit of 'The Guerilla' contrasts with the understated elegance of the following item, supposedly by Scott. There are two 'Scott' poems. One is polished, the other wild in the manner of The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805). The first item, 'Epistle to Mr R. S\*\*\*\*.' (pp.27-51), is the only piece in the Poetic Mirror probably not by Hogg. This gentle, autumn excursion through Teviotdale is attributed to Hogg's friend Thomas Pringle.<sup>2</sup> It presents Scott as a friendly antiquarian escorting the reader through rural scenes, enjoying traditional, convivial pursuits. Supernatural associations include the 'Mountain Spirit' of the hill, no doubt referring to Hogg himself, seated on a double-edged 'elf-enchanted Hanging Stone'. Borders religiosity is stressed. Countering Scott's measured statements on the Covenanters, made the same year in Old Mortality (1816), partisan words are placed in his mouth against 'bloody Graham' and the 'fawning horde' who 'hunt the peasant'. Even 'torture and the stake' could not 'that intrepid spirit break' in man or woman (offering a link to the previous poem).

Extending local identities, the second imitation of Scott is a Borders adventure, with a character resembling Marmion at its centre: 'Wat o' the Cleuch' (pp.53-129).



This is deliciously overdone, referring back stylistically to the first poem of the collection. Wat is described in hilariously abundant, traditional-style formulae. Hogg skilfully replicates the exuberant style of The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802-03) ballads and imitations:

Wat o' the Cleuch came down through the dale,  
In helmet and hauberk of glistening mail;  
Full proudly he came on his berry-black steed,  
Caparison'd, belted for warrior deed.  
O bold was the bearing, and brisk the career,  
And broad was the cuirass and long was the  
spear,  
And tall was the plume that waved over the brow  
Of that dark reckless borderer, Wat o' the  
Cleuch'.  
(Canto First, verse 1)

Wat is sacrilegious. He plunders Jedburgh (archaically 'Jedwort') Abbey, hugely amused by the 'grovelling monks', forcing the abbot to provide forage for his troops.

Hogg is adept at capturing Scott's poetic style at its most meticulously detailed, and with a hint of the manner of the Waverley novels. He includes, for example, a long list of dishes provided for Wat's men, from 'haggies' to meats, fish and various types of fowl. The peasant poet thereby demonstrates his far from common linguistic range both in English and Scots:

Such only may and will I note,  
 As suiteth rythm [sic], and rythme and rote;  
 Such as the Grebe and Gullimote,  
 The Diver from Saint Mary's pool,  
 The Avoset and Gallinule,  
 The Bilcock, Egret, Ruff, the Mew,  
 The Whimbrel, and the Heronsheugh,  
 The Stint, the Phalarope, and Tern,  
 The Mergenser and Midnight Hern,  
 The Dunlin, Wagel, Piper-cock,  
 The Shoveller or Kellutock,  
 The Imber, from broad Alemore lake,  
 The Tarroch, Tough, and Kittiwake;  
 These all were got, and all brought there,  
 It suits not how, it boots not where.

(Canto First, verse 15)

Not surprisingly, the narrator humorously notes that the monks are appalled when Wat's comrade Halbert of the Swire (like Scott, 'of Harden's doughty race') suggests Wat's forces winter at the abbey. The raison d'être of the tale is spelt out when 'the Mountain Chief', ignoring the abbot's wrath, explains therefore (with a nod towards Hogg's 1822 The Three Perils of Man) the need to take Roxburgh castle from their enemies. If the abbot teaches Wat's men their 'cant of hypocrisy' they can achieve their aim. The abbot agrees to help the fighters pass as monks.

As an autodidact, Hogg seems to particularly relish experimenting with the mannerisms of 'better' educated poets. There is a great deal of slapstick, hilariously

overdoing Scott's chivalric accounts of Borders' warfare. The freebooters make unlikely monks. Wat, without the weight of his armour, feels 'light and free to breathe' and seizes a friar 'by the nape' (anticipating the rumbustious actions of the 'Russiadde', discussed below). The friar (strong as his counterpart in Three Perils of Man) strikes a 'rude' blow making Wat's mouth and nose bleed (anticipating an episode in the career of Robert Wringhim). Wat is delighted by such strength and the plucky monk, Hew, is offered as Wat's guide when the warrior vows to go on a pilgrimage should he take the castle with the abbot's help.

Hogg shows his genuine admiration for Scott, though, as well as his own considerable skill, in imitating the dramatic tension, and fast-paced plots of his compatriot. As Wat and his men ride out in disguise the leader's anxiety is noted by his page (modelled on the 'little foot page' characteristic of ballads). Seven 'bowmen' watch the 'stalworth monk' pass and note his resemblance to Wat o' the Cleuch. They prepare to fire at the monk but he, overhearing, rides outwith their range. At Kelso the party, supposedly bearing a repentant chief's goods, are welcomed but the abbot uses 'anathemas' against Wat. Wat, equally, rages at the Abbot as a 'dunghill mass of corruptness'. 'Prior' Hew cannot placate Wat and, in the subsequent struggle, Wat's band are forced to restrain the Cistercians in Kelso Abbey. Hew visits the Roxburgh



Governor, Sir Guy de Lis, and gains permission to allow two monks to read Vespers in the fortress.

As he describes the Borders landscape Hogg captures Scott's love of locations, which he shared, with great tenderness, from 'the swarthy brows of Lammermore' to the Eildon hills 'cleft in three'. Local legends, anticipating those used in Hogg's own Three Perils of Man, are remembered by Wat within this emotionally charged setting. Past adventures and present events skilfully interlink, as the autodidact emulates Scott, and adds his own distinctive Borders style:

The Tweed ran slow, the Tweed ran deep,  
 Till round the abbaye making sweep,  
 It sung so loud and so harsh a note,  
     That it made Wat remember well  
 A tale he scarce had e'er forgot,  
 Of his own grandsire, Michael Scott,  
     And the three dargsmen, fiends of hell,  
 Who stemm'd that mighty torrent's sweep,  
 And damm'd that pool so broad and deep;  
 And he saw the gap stand to that day  
 From which the elves were scared away;  
 A chillness crept o'er all his frame,--  
 It could not be that warlock theme,  
 But feeling scarce to minstrel known--  
 A dreaming, mix'd sensation  
 Of things at hand, and things of yore,  
 For a bloody night lay him before!

(Canto II, verse 20)

The subsequent adventures are as exciting as those of Waverley (1814) or Redgauntlet (1824). Hew chooses two monks as key figures in the raid: Hab of the Swire, capable of reading the breviary, and (after teasing the illiterate anti-hero) Wat o' the Cleuch. Withdrawing from the tale to address the 'beauteous dames of merry England', as readers, Hogg / Scott warns of 'reavers' ruthless deed'. While they might prefer a tale of 'Pembroke's raid' the 'minstrel' cannot provide 'Such humbling'. Rather, free as the 'bird that swims the polar seas' an 'unconstrain'd...geste' follows.

Hogg is adept at capturing the characteristic action of Scott's poetic voice, as well as the way Scott contextualises his tales with fine details. Once more, Hogg's performance suggests the unusual ability of autodidacts to absorb and understand literary styles. In climactic Canto Third the promised fray comes to fruition. Before the action starts, though, there is a lengthy preamble, in the style of Scott, on the associations of Roxburgh castle; its modern 'mouldering turrets' are no reflection on the 'courage high' demanded of past commanders like Sir Guy. That night, as the garrison sit in Roxburgh tower, Howard demands a song. When the supposedly holy men enter, they hear a scurrilous song about the 'beggarly moss-trooper knave', Wat o' the Cleuch. Wat, not surprisingly, has to be restrained by his fellow 'Monks', who claim he is afflicted by 'fits'.

The 'unsaintly' monks do not convince their hosts and, after being threatened with a search, take defensive positions near to the wall. Wat, delighted to be able to fight, wreaks havoc around him, cleaving one knight in two and impaling the 'songster' on the floor. Like Alayni, Wat feels 'battle was his sole delight'. Prior Hew, too, kills all he opposes. Halbert Scott, however, is forced back to the wall and Wat, seeking to help, is frustrated when his broad-sword breaks from its hilt. Seizing a 'Southron' as 'shield 'gainst many a coming blow' (as Russ would), Wat casts aside his human buckler into the English. Now only four men are living: Hew kills them all. Wat, 'by the might of Michael Scott', feels he has exacted revenge from the 'Southrons'. However, when Hab expires, Wat swears to avenge his death.

In this item, the autodidact is careful not to transcend the bounds of the expected relationship between the peasant poet and the mentor. While hinting that Scott is sometimes over-wordy, Hogg manages to maintain a friendly attitude to his erstwhile patron. As Hogg enters further into the tale he begins to relish the storytelling opportunity and departs a little from Scott to add his own brand of humour. As the town is in flames, and the Southron women and chaplains trapped, due to the machinations of 'Wat's ungracious page', the 'warriors of the Cleuch' come down, like 'bog-meteors' (a reductive reference to Hogg's own favourite image of the meteor).



Wat gains new life, but Hew prevents Wat from entering the fray. Wat calls his men: 'Dicky of Bellenden', 'Christy of Thorleshop', 'Sim of the Brae' and 'Rutherford'. The Southrons ambush the Scots from behind. Wat sees his warriors flee and the drawbridge raised. Leaving Hew in the tower, Wat manages to escape, swimming the fosse to enter the fight. He comes too late for the initial onslaught but, when Wat's 'boardly frame' is seen, his men shout out. He advances as 'lion on a herd of sheep' but succeeds only in breaking his weapon, so mighty are 'the blows in ire he gave'. At this critical juncture the page, hilariously, saunters into view, 'Eating sweet cake' stolen 'From burning shop-board' and restoring Wat's 'good sword' to the warrior. Hogg indulges in his favourite mock-epic images. 'Southron heads' are severed 'in whole files' as if 'thistles', mowed down by Wat's 'two-handed sword' like a 'comet through the stars of heaven'.

Pursued by Scots, the foe flies over the Border. The poem ends, playfully, with a summary of the subsequent history of Roxburghshire, as the 'huge stores of Roxburgh fell', the 'wealth the monks of Jedwort won', and the Southrons 'Fled in dismay'. Despite hinting at the further adventures of the 'mountaineer' Wat, the writer decides not to 'lengthen out my lay'. Scott, he thereby suggests, might be advised to observe some narrative restraint. Equally, there is a suggestion that Hogg deeply enjoys comic action, riots and fantasies: he too (like his anti-

hero Russ) is tempted to indulge.

The Poetic Mirror offers real insights into Hogg's creative ideals, and his self image as an autodidact. Centrally, 'The Gude Grey Katt' (pp.189-214), written half way through the writer's career, pokes fun at Hogg's own style. It is highly likely that this poem indicates Hogg thought of himself as no pampered pet, or 'Noctes Ambrosianae' amusement. His claws, he suggests in the context of this poem, are sharp and avenging. The Gude Grey Katt prefers supernatural flight to the fire-side of a patron, and plunges those who attack its shape-changing abilities directly into hell. This poem, then, might be read as highly barbed satire, allowing the writer to transcend his stereotype and, simultaneously, poke fun at the critics. Perhaps Hogg's image of the 'katt' is intended to counterbalance Burns' emblematic dog (discussed in Chapter Two), representing the writer's predicament as a reluctantly patronised peasant poet.

'The Gude Grey Katt' flirts with Hogg's recurrent theme of a virgin's magical night-flight (Kilmeny, Mary Lee) guided by a heavenly helper (the 'reverend fere', Cela) to celestial enlightenment before a glorious, ennobled return to earth. Here, the notion is subverted as an unworthy victim, the corrupt Byschope of Blain, is ushered, by a vengeful feline, into damnation. The light, joyful flight becomes a dark, if comic, satanic journey. Hogg had already explored a similar route in 'The Witch of



Fife', with its raucous night flight. There are shades, too, of the divine retribution visited on 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope', and the terrifying journey of 'George Dobson's Expedition to Hell'.<sup>3</sup> The outcome of the poem parallels Hogg's viewpoint in The Pilgrims of the Sun as the otherworld triumphs over the natural world (Hogg's revenge on his common sense critics). Hogg, though, maintains a parodic, good-humoured atmosphere by ultimately revealing his cat / woman is the Queen of Fairyland. The plot has pace and, as it progresses, the parodic elements are often forgotten in the excitement of the tale.

Perhaps paralleling the position of Hogg and his fellow peasant poets, the cat is presented as a humble creature which deserves high honours. The initial description is pseudo-mediaeval; it blends ballad and lyric language and formulae. This is a poem which should be read out loud: there is humour in its pronunciation, replete with deliberately clumsy, pseudo-antiquated Scots. The syntax shows Hogg's awareness of the most archaic aspects of his own work, and subtly suggests that critics often missed the humorous aspects of his writing:

There was ane katt, and ane gude grey katt,  
                     That duallit in the touir of Blain,  
 And mony haif hearit of that gude grey katt,  
                     That neuir shall heare agayn



Scho had ane brynd upon her backe,  
 And ane brent abone hir bree;  
 Hir culoris war the merilit heius  
 That dappil the krene-berrye.

But scho had that withyn her ee  
 That man may neuir declare,  
 For scho had that within hir ee  
 Quhich mortyle dochtne beare.  
 (verses 1-3)

This cat dominates its setting. 'Ane ladye' sometimes visits the grey katt's tower, where she meets 'ane mauykn', but (as with Kilmeny, May, or Russ) she vanishes. When she is sought there is only the katt in the tower, 'thrummyng at hir sang'. When matrons look in the katt's face they 'yollit throu frychte' and stagger off, resembling the comically simple-minded courtiers of 'The Pilgrims of the Sun' (or perhaps the Scottish Literati faced with Burns at his most unashamedly rustic, the clumsy Noctes Shepherd, or their future equivalents from Alexander Anderson to James Young Geddes).

The cat is replete with traditional resonances as well as unique characteristics. Is it an animal of divine origin, or a magical helper (the cat of 'Dick Whittington' and of 'Jack' tales'), a supernaturally transformed revenger, witch's familiar, deceiver of other animals, or beast of ill-omen associated with the dead? The gude grey katt acts as surrogate parent as well as avenger.

The laird of Blain's spouse has died and he has seven lovely daughters. To the children's delight, the cat offers to raise them and 'breide them fayre' and pure. The cat, in addition, is typically feline:

The katt, scho thrummyt at hir sang,  
 And turnit hir haffet sleike,  
 And drew hir bonny bassenyt side,  
 Against the babyis cheike. (verse 19)

In an alternative persona, as 'ane ladye gay' the cat epitomises the 'Queen of the Fairy Land'. She is dressed in 'gress-grene sylk' with hair 'lyke the threidis of goude'. Her stated purpose, in this form, is to be 'gardian of the gude' and enemy of 'the wycked'.

There are layers of narrative playfulness here, directed with skill at Hogg's self-styled social superiors. Those of apparently high status are presented as particularly unappealing. The laird, for instance is a wily, 'cunnynge' aristocrat. His feasting companion, the Byschope of Blain, is a loathsome cleric, spiritually kin to Hogg's sexually deviant priest in 'Mess John'.<sup>5</sup> The bishop is introduced in a pseudo-mediaeval, charmingly tongue twisting, alliterative passage as: 'any wyce and wylie wychte / Of wytch and warlockrye' (verse 23). This is a man who has, as he sees it, justifiably 'byrnit' and 'hangit' witches--or someone who likes to burn old wives.

The interaction between cat and bishop highlights the rivalry between supernatural tradition and Christian ideology in Hogg's work. While the cat is absent during the Bishop's 'holye grace', an uncannily 'fayre ladye' appears, wearing 'the sylken sheene'. All except the laird of Blaine are captivated by her voice; he recognises the voice of the gude grey katte. The laird, barring all doors and windows, suggests the 'wytych' should be roasted. This is a prelude to an attempt at institutionalised torture which, it is suggested, the Bishop enjoys:

The Byschope knelit doune and prayit,  
     Quhill all their hayris did creipe;  
 And aye he hoonit and he prayit,  
     Quhill all war faste asleipe;

He prayit gain syn and Sauten bothe,  
     And deidis of shyft and schame;  
 But all the tyme his faithful handis  
     Pressit the cumlye dame.

Weil saw the Laird, but nething saide,  
     He kenit, in holye zele,  
 He grepit for the merkis of hell,  
     Whilk he did ken ful weile.

(verses 25-27)

Here, however, the supernatural takes its revenge. The hand the Bishop fondles becomes a paw with 'crukit clawis' and the 'breste of heuinlye charme' becomes 'hayrie'. The



cat lifts up the terrified Bishop by 'ilken lug' and flies away with the cleric. Unlike the 'meteor' 'Pilgrims of the Sun', the katt is like a 'schado throu the daye'; the Byshope's 'fleschlye forme' makes a clumsy passage. As the Byshope's prayers and 'waylingis' fade the narrator, typically of Hogg, muses on his fate (recalling, too, 'Tam Lin' (Ch 39): 'sum saide that they hearit them still, / And sum saide all was loste' (ll.151-52).

Hogg now presents a series of darkly comic cameos, going beyond self-satire to demonstrate his autodidactic versatility. There is a nocturnal shepherd on Dollar Law who receives no angelic visitation but is 'stealyng in ane gude haggysse'. He hears and sees the unlikely pair pass and, in a delightful detail, Hogg describes the cat holding the bishop like 'ane jollye mouse'. This leads on to a description of the cat, natural and supernatural in its attributes, singing so sweetly that nature takes note of its demonic lullaby, punctuated with a cat-like 'Murr':

That greye kattis sang it wase se sweete,  
 As on the nychte it fell,  
 The Murecokis dancit ane seuinsum ryng  
 Arunde the hether bell....

The Hurchanis [hedgehog] helde ane kintrye dance  
 Alang the brumye knowe,  
 And the gude Toop-hogg rase fra his layre  
 And ualtzit with the youe.

(verses 42, 44)

The humour of the occasion is highlighted, along with the Bishop's bulk, as a terrified Border herd interprets the pair as 'ane greate clypse of the mone'. He has to consult 'the Belfaste Almanake' but finds no eclipse there. The terrible punishment which awaits the Bishop, like all the 'yerdlye greate', is filtered through the reactions of a 'great Filossifere' who, in a lyrical passage, waits 'on Etnyis height' for sunrise:

And all the lychte lynis of goude,  
                   As on the se they fell,  
 And watch the fyir and the smoke,  
                   Cum rummilyng up fra hell. (verse 50)

As the day passes, the 'Filossifere' sees the moon, pale 'lyke dethe' with 'ane littil stern' by its side. As he turns to the north he sees the priest and cat pass, the latter still with a firm grip on the former's 'lugis'. Eventually, the cat's grip relaxes and the bishop falls through the 'hollow nychte' into hell, with a sound like 'ane great bom-be'. The 'smouder and the smoke' rises up as the Bishop falls through the volcano and the cat disappears, to be replaced by the Queen of Fairyland.

The supernatural, highly moral, dénouement, shows Hogg's facility in oral narrative styles. The lady declares her intention, having disposed of the Bishop, to help the Laird of Blain's seven daughters, inverting a

sinister ballad formula: 'The Laird of Blain hethe seuin dochteris, / But sune he shall haif nane' (ll.289-90).

One by one she will transform them by bathing them in the 'krystal streime' of Fairyland and give them the 'hues that luvelye angelis weire', purity of form and mind. As predicted, the laird's babies are removed one by one, and he wanders through life as if 'in a dreime'. After seven years he walks through the woods, thinking of his lost lady and children, and kneeling in tearful prayer. An unlikely procession moves towards him: 'seuin bonnye maydis' wreathed in 'the brychtest flouris the worild er saw'. The bard withdraws:

But cese yer strayne, my gude auld herpe,  
                   O cese and syng ne mayre!  
 Gin ye wolde of that meityng tell,  
                   O I mocht reue it sayre! (verse 87)

The moral is explicit: 'syn' and 'schame' leads to sorrow.

'The Gude Grey Katt', as a whole, shows great stylistic sophistication and sums up the essential significance of The Poetic Mirror as both parodic and experimental. It indicates Hogg's awareness of the pitfalls, and advantages, in being considered as an autodidact. The peasant poet is supposed to stand up for moral purity and to make proper use of traditional material: this is neatly reversed as a supernatural



creature plunges an over-zealous and morally dubious bishop into hell. The peasant poet, as has been seen, was often typecast as quaint and anachronistic, an Ossianic throwback; the supposedly archaic spelling here makes a mockery of such assumptions. Hogg seems to be indicating that, like the cat, he can change shape and be socially dangerous. The 'gude auld herpe', though, of the autodidactic minstrel, is not wholly rejected. Cushioning subversive aspects within a rollicking, hilarious poem, Hogg both exploits and disdains autodidactic stereotypes. Hogg's skilful exploration of traditional precedents here, as elsewhere, no doubt inspired and sustained his fellow autodidacts in their experimentation. Allan Cunningham and John Leyden, in particular, hugely enjoyed experimenting with apparently antique forms (as discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten).

Hogg's unmistakable autodidactic style, however, meant the pretence to anonymity fooled nobody. The Scots Magazine of 1817 was dismissive of The Poetic Mirror. The Scots Magazine appreciated the 'burlesque' Wilson imitations and thought 'the Guerilla' was 'an uncommonly pleasing little poem' but thought 'Wat o' the Cleuch' lacked Scott's 'dignity'. Paradoxically, The Scots Magazine preferred the visible evidence of Hogg's autodidactic style to his parodies:

We have not much to say in favour of our author, either as an imitator or a parodist. The resemblance is generally very rude and imperfect; or become closer, only by the aid of almost mechanical copying. The author, whoever he be, appears to us to have studied and admired very particularly the poetry of Mr. Hogg; for whomsoever he attempts and professes to imitate, he slides almost naturally and insensibly into the style of the bard of Ettrick. In many cases, however, it is in the best style of that meritorious bard; so that if the author of this volume cannot be much extolled in the humbler character of an imitator, his merit, in the higher capacity of an original poet, is frequently of no ordinary cast.<sup>6</sup>

The comments indicate the high regard in which Hogg was held as an autodidact, even if the description of the 'meritorious bard', and word choice of 'humbler' indicate the more demeaning associations of peasant poetry.

The British Lady's Magazine (1816) was kinder, drawing attention to elements in contemporary poetry which deserved to be mocked. It enjoyed the Byronic piece, as 'a sober attempt to select and handle a subject in his peculiar manner'. The Scott imitation, at times, could even 'far exceed the usual tone of the original'. Recognising the change in mood throughout the collection, the critic observed that, in the vein of Wordsworth, 'the author first smiles beneath his mask'. The Coleridge

piece was especially convincing and The Lady's Magazine complimented Hogg for capturing 'The indescribable mixture of talent and childishness' in the work of John Wilson. Even so, like The Scots Magazine, The Lady's Magazine considered parody to be an inferior artistic form, finding the whole project a little unseemly:

There possibly never existed, at one time, a set of bards more assailable either by serious or burlesque imitations than the present leaders of Britain who, to an individual, are mannerists in garb, and we were almost about to add, fantastic in sentiment.... the author displays a command of imagery and numbers, which we are sorry to see thrown away in avowed imitation. The genuine mock-bird has no mate of its own.

Perhaps such comments reflect notions of autodidactic presumption in attempting to copy even such 'mannerist' leaders although it may be overly sensitive to see the criticism of 'thrown away' talents as patronising. However, the Lady's had typecast Hogg as the peasant poet author, and could not resist adding depreciating comments on the Scottish associations of the project. The 'Gude Grey Katt', for instance, won praise as the outpourings of 'the mountain harp' although its lack of affinity with 'the worn-out English way', and language, meant it was not worth quoting; 'we fear it would be almost useless without a Glossary'. At once praising and patronising, the



magazine allowed that the 'lustre' of the 'northern population' deserved to be appreciated.<sup>7</sup>

Modern critics are divided on the value of The Poetic Mirror, while recognising key items. Gifford, while dismissing the 'irritating pseudo-Scots' of the 'Gude Grey Katt', admires its ending as 'one of the most vivid of Hogg's comic nightmares'. However, he adds, 'Hogg partly spoiled the superb climax by having the cat explicitly reveal that she is the Queen of the Fairies'. The present writer, though, considers the overdone parody, exaggerating characteristic elements to an experimental degree, to be both intentional and effective. Hogg, usually ambiguous in presenting supernatural possibilities, almost challenges the reader to point to a fault (perhaps as a double-bluff regarding the writer's identity). Groves convincingly indicates the importance of 'The Gude Grey Katt': 'The cat unites human, natural, and supernatural qualities, and represents the imagination of James Hogg'. This is, though, slightly overstated; Hogg's imagination, as has been seen, ranged through many more areas than those explored in 'The Gude Grey Katt'. Groves' interpretation of the bishop as representing 'Rational consciousness', deposited on Mount Etna as 'a symbol of literary orthodoxy' is less convincing. The present writer sees the bishop, after all concerned with supernatural events, as representing the kind of debased religion profiled in The Private Memoirs and Confessions

of a Justified Sinner. Recently, Antony Hasler has discussed the 'ingenious lies' of the text, finding the ways Hogg toys with the reader to be analogous to those of the Confessions narrators, and presenting The Poetic Mirror as crucial to the formation of Hogg's creative personae. Certainly it allowed Hogg to experiment in a wider range of styles than hitherto, while infusing the results with his own, distinctive, literary accent.<sup>8</sup>

Hogg's highly developed capacity for experimentation (and, perhaps, for the self-satire suggested in 'The Gude Grey Katt') influenced his later tale of a supernatural journey, 'The Russiadde: A Fragment of an Ancient Epic Poem, supposed to have been written by Gilbert Hume, a Tutor of Selkirk' (1822).<sup>9</sup> This parodies the intricacies of epic, through deliberate doggerel, to hugely comic effect (as does Tennant's Anster Fair (1812), discussed in Chapter Ten). Hogg attacks the romantic notion of visionary poet as prophet through experimental satire. 'The Russiadde' promises an unusual combination of aristocratic ideals in the burghal context:

A song of sooth and sober sadness,  
Of matchless might and motley madness,  
Long as the reach of morning lingle,  
And brisk as blaze of evening ingle.  
Begin, my Borough Muse, and sing;--  
And Janet's wheel her boldest string  
Shall vibrate to they swelling note,  
Of days, and deeds so long forgot. (verse 1)



Uneven verse paragraphs, characteristic of Hogg and the Romantics, give an off-centre feel to the piece which is appropriate to its self-proclaimed status as a 'fragment' (and shows Hogg had profited from the experience of creating imitations in The Poetic Mirror). There is an inbuilt joke against pseudo-historical aspects of modern writing (including Hogg's own work with The Minstrelsy). As a whole, as Groves comments succinctly, 'the Shepherd laughs at his own cosmic myth-making' here.<sup>10</sup>

An introductory, apparently sincere, tribute praises the 'burly sutors' who stood firm against 'Southron blood' at Flodden. It is not unadulterated homage though. The poet deliberately deflates his compatriots with comic rhyme: 'Though galled by darts, by horses trode on, / They bore their standard off from Flodden' (ll.20-1). Moreover, while the sutors resisted a 'haughty PONTIFF's sway' in the cause of 'Freedom', their (proverbial) solution--earning the name by having 'Sold 'thy d--d kirk' and hanged the priest seems overly brutal (verse 3). The poem proper appears to begin with the introduction of a 'hero', using the oral stylistics which Hogg, as an autodidact, employed with great skill:

Well then;--as all old tales began,  
 "In Selkirk once there lived a man;"  
 But such a man! Ah! shall we ever  
 Behold his like again? No, never!  
 His name was John; his trade, 'tis true,



Was boots and shoes to shape and sew:  
 My muse has so much cant about her--  
 In short, he was a Selkirk sutor (verse 5)

This is near the tone, if not the form, of Standard Habbie, with the deflating element of 'Tam o' Shanter'. Given the traditional association of Selkirk sutors and the devil the reader probably expects a supernatural tale. Claiming elevation to classical status, Hogg begs the 'Genius of Virgil' for inspiration; his motives compliment neither audience nor poet: 'That men may read, though not admire me' (1.51).

Despite this evocation of literary precedents, Hogg creates, in John, a close relative to the Black Douglas of Borders oral tradition. John is 'near six feet high' with 'dark and piercing eye', 'dark and bushy' hair and beard. Being of, 'a manly make from crown to sole' (emphasising his trade), John was able 'to bear a mighty load' although 'his work dress was coarse and droll' (verse 7). John has six sons and, although he was a warrior in his youth, now enjoys quiet pursuits and self-respect. John is a fitting singer of traditional songs, a model for the autodidact who prays morning and night. The character's combination of a gruff exterior, quiet devotion and exemplary lifestyle, moreover, recalls Hogg's Borders heroes, Charlie Scott and Daniel Bell.<sup>11</sup> His is the humble household of the 'Cotter's Saturday Night':

No oath was minced while John was by;  
 No word spoke angrily or high;  
 But each strove to outdo the others  
 In generous acts, as all were brothers;  
 So high they valued his esteem,  
 What he approved they all would seem.  
 His stall was large and seated round,  
 There every boy a shelter found;  
 Even dogs that were ill-used at home,  
 To this abode of peace would come,  
 And fawn on all with much affection,  
 Aye sure to meet a kind reception.

On winter evenings cold and bright,  
 That stall was crowded every night  
 With those who loved his minstrelsy,  
 For many a tale and song had he;  
 And much he loved to see them all  
 Silent as squires in courtly hall.  
 And how their ardour rose and fell,  
 As different tales he chose to tell!  
 What pleasure glowed in every face,  
 At Robin Hood or Chevy Chace!  
 And how it thrilled each stripling's blood,  
 To hear how Maitland victor stood. (ll.93-116)

The second verse reveals Hogg's motivation in introducing John Hume; he is not the real hero but the tale-teller; the audience has been fooled. In the tale-telling context he has created, the writer is now ready for the next narrative layer: the story proper. The reference to 'Maitland' both fits the context of father and sons, and shows Hogg's (not altogether serious) desire to show his

text to be authentic (see Chapter Five for a discussion of Hogg's text 'Old Maitland').

In a self-conscious way, contrary to notions that autodidacts were solely heaven-inspired, Hogg includes an investigation of his own narrative intentions. John's rustic existence is contrasted, in a passionate outburst, with those who use 'the immortal mind' for 'strife, and litigation' (perhaps the literary slander Hogg experienced) or those concerned with 'power and rule'. Any objection to digression is anticipated, the Muse (presumably the skittish rustic of The Spy sketch, discussed in Chapter Three) is blamed. Hogg enters into an oral-style dialogue with his inspiration:

"But, Muse, you promised me a story,  
Leave off your prosing, I implore ye;  
Page after page I here have wrote,  
And all the length that I have got  
Is just no more, nor further than,  
In Selkirk once there lived a man:  
If thus you wind and wind about her,  
I'll ne'er get on with John the suitor.

Well, well, my master, I obey thee:  
Where left I off my story, pray thee?  
But 'tis so good and so sublime,  
I'll tell it o'er a second time.

(verses 21-22)



The audience are re-distanced from the opinionated intrusion into the storyline; the Scots voice is re-established by the rhyme: 'wrote / got'. Hogg raises the question, in the process, of whether he is really digressing or if his 'main' theme is the communal co-existence. Is the tale, or the moral, more important? Apparently, 'I hate description's meagre art, / And love a tale with all my heart;' (ll.215-16) but such a statement cannot, necessarily, be accepted at face value. The poem seems to explore conceptions of what is 'fitting' for poetry and, crucially, for the peasant poet. According to John, established as credible narrator, this tale is true.

In this highly literary, reflexive context, Hogg recreates an oral atmosphere in an assured manner, making use of the full range of his knowledge as an autodidact. Returning to the opening formula, now, the reader enters into another layer which comprises the tale proper:

Once on a day, in Mercia's bound,  
 There lived a man for might renowned,  
 His name was Russell; but in sport,  
 Or else because the name was short,  
 Men called him Russ; no doubt his name  
 You oft have heard, and wondrous fame.

(ll.225-28)

Appealing to 'you' directly involves the reader with the community in the text, affiliating the reader with the

tale-telling circle of John Hume and his family.

Russ himself is a bizarrely compelling creation, distorting the prowess of traditional heroes like Cuchullain. He has legendary prowess: uprooting pines; dashing rocks from the Eildons. His exploits (recalling the fight of 'The Marvellous Doctor') are individualistic:

Once by a furious bull o'erthrown,  
Quite unawares, and all alone--  
A bull, for strength of horn and hide  
Unequalled on the Border side--  
Russ rose, renewed the rough attack,  
And tossed him fairly on his back!  
Carved with his sword ('tis truth I tell ye)  
Saint Andrew's cross on his broad belly:  
He rolled, he bellowed, torn with pain,  
Then groaned to death upon the plain.  
If this is not heroic writing,  
I give the palm up for inditing. (11.237-48)<sup>12</sup>

The aside (11.247-48) emphasises ridiculous qualities in Russ, and the posturing quality of the piece. Wielding a steel wagon-wheel belt Russ slew as many Scots as Southrons: 'Your club is dyed with kinsmen's blood, / You do ten times more ill than good"' (11.271-72). This is an anti-chivalric hero, like Charlie Scott, who defies conventions of intelligent war-mongering, and courtly love. His undirected strength makes Russ doubly deadly. Russ enjoys 'Venus's war'; he is a lowly Don Juan.

Just as Byron delights in his bisyllabic 'Ju-an' so Hogg uses 'Rus-sell' to full comic potential. A bishop cannot relieve the 'windy cholic' of two sisters and so:

Two doctors then in haste are sent for,  
Who came well furnished at a venture,  
And eased the maids with little bustle;  
But ah! the blame fell sore on Russell.

(11.293-96)

After the birth of these illegitimate children, a lynch mob forms; Lord and Lady Coom advise flight. Hogg suggestively indicates that she would rather lose lands and lord than Russ. Impishly, he adds, 'This must be noted to be plain, / A laird's wife was called lady then' (11.317-87). Russ is a more successful George Cochrane, contrasted with the paragon sutor who opened the piece. Russ rides out, provided with arms, horse and money by Lady Coom, who advises Russ to make for Cumberland while she seeks his pardon 'From Rome or France'. Reaching a cot where a familiar damsel resides, Russ spends a day and a night in none-too-subtly-euphemistic, 'raptures of supreme delight'.

The storyline manages to be both compelling and ludicrous. The mob finds Russ, seeking to boil him 'In caldron of offensive oil' (1.356), recalling the legend of the Earl of Soulis, boiled alive in lead.<sup>13</sup> Russ is trapped; weapons out of reach in the damsel's hall, 'If



hall it could be called, where smoke / Brooded condense  
 o'er hearth of rock' (ll.357-58). 'Russell and his  
 flower' are in a one-roomed house. Russ is confronted by  
 a medley of rural weapons: 'halbert, pitchfork and  
 claymore'. He responds with a table as shield,  
 anticipating Rassendyll's defence in Anthony Hope's The  
 Prisoner of Zenda (1894). The damsel's screams stir Russ  
 into a grotesque Iliad-style aristeia of carnage, allowing  
 Hogg a wry aside:

Like tiger o'er his tender young,  
 Russ on the crowd in fury sprung;  
 Swords, lances, pitchforks, men and all,  
 Bore with his table 'gainst the wall,  
 Their bodies squeezed as thin as paper,  
 And laughed to see them firn and caper;  
 While squirting blood so fiercely played,  
 That holes were in the ceiling made.--  
 Now, gallant Muse, I think thou'lt show 'em  
 Thou can'st indite heroic poem.

(ll.379-87)

Priest, monk and peasant, an unholy alliance of Catholics,  
 set fire to Russ's refuge. He strikes the door from its  
 hinges and, with a characteristic epic simile, 'like the  
 cloud-struck ocean wave' pushes the crowd before him. He  
 makes a new choice of arms:

It was a lean and sordid priest,  
That chanced among his feet to lie,  
Not dead, but in extremity.

Him by the heels he roughly drew,  
And soon in air his reverence flew  
With rapid whirl, and broken howls,  
Pouring destruction on their souls....  
None ever wrought such dreadful doom  
As did this limb of papal Rome.

(11.422-28, 433-34)

The hostility to Catholicism, implicit here, is one of Hogg's less appealing characteristics, recalling the environment of his Ettrick tale of 'Mess John'.

The plot becomes increasingly bizarre; it is as if Hogg, as an autodidact, feels compelled to include fantastic elements (fellow autodidacts, like Allan Cunningham and John Leyden, certainly seem to have been directed towards supernatural themes). Facing foes from all the Merse, Russ loses his reason and would have died, 'Had not dame Venus, from the sky, / Beheld him with a pitying eye' (11.461-62). In a mildly erotic fantasy, Russ sees something 'like swan or white sea-mew' descend:

But how surprised was he, to see  
A nymph come smiling o'er the lea;  
Straight as the stateliest pine that grows,--  
And fresh as bosom of the rose;  
Taper and round was ever limb,  
Her waist was short--not over slim:

The veil, o'er her fair bosom thrown,  
 Though muslin of the sky seemed brown,  
 Never did air become so well,  
 Never did form so sweetly swell,  
 Her sweet ripe lips of rosy hue,  
 Her speaking eye so soft and blue,  
 Her locks light waving as she run,  
 Like yellow clouds before the sun;  
 Her blushes sly, that went and came,  
 Set Russell's gallant heart on flame.

(11.471-86)

This beauty recalls the demanding Lady of 'Tam Lin' (Ch 39) and The Faery Queen; her 'light locks' the dead heroine of 'I hae naebody now'. Sensually, Venus commands, 'Come on my back without delay' (1.499). Initially, Russ refuses to 'use you so ill!' but submits as the goddess' sworn champion.

While drawing on the success of his previous work, Hogg explores new avenues. Venus is a pagan, voluptuous alternative to the ethereal guides of 'Kilmeny' and The Pilgrims of the Sun. No Virgin Mary, she will show Russ 'wonders' as 'in the farthest nook of hell'. Incidentally, the planet Venus is seen as the land of the dead in African tradition (as is the moon in Samoan tradition) and parallel beliefs may be reflected. Hogg, too, is parodying the visionary tradition of Ramsay, Burns and himself (in the mode of 'Kilmeny'). He may, too, be alluding to the Divine Comedy where, of course, the



aforementioned Virgil is spirit guide.<sup>14</sup> Russ, though celestially guided, is as stupid as Connell of Dee. Venus offers a unique journey:

The rainbow's lovely arch we'll climb;  
Sail on yon saffron cloud sublime;  
Then souse, our panting breasts to lave,  
In ocean's green and shelvy wave.

(11.513-21)

They will travel through 'Breadalbane's deepest dell' to 'dismal shades below'. Russ is dumfounded, Venus decisive. He 'Clasped his huge fists around her bosom' (1.537), causing Venus to nearly lose her breath as they fly to a Valhalla-style heaven, more reminiscent of Hades, which includes warriors engaged in battle within 'cloud so dark and dim'. The descriptions here resonate with the flavour of Hogg's earlier journeys, especially those of The Pilgrims of the Sun with its belligerent section on Mars. Hogg often includes such self-referential moments, often with a touch of humour. The narrator, carried away by the success of his description, comments, 'Well done, my Muse! by that same rule, / Virgil's a prosing drivelling fool' (11.575-76). (Such ambivalent celestial journeys would provide an intriguing theme for later autodidacts, such as James Young Geddes in his 1898 collection In the Valhalla).

The following sections alternate lyrical descriptions with humorous elements, interweaving parody and experiment as Hogg adeptly explores the dramatic possibilities of his situation. Like Kilmeny, Russ is amazed by his celestial vision, finding the sight of 'Scotland from the ambient air' the fairest of all. As the pair travel higher, Russ fears that, due to a 'strong attraction' to the moon, Venus may be separated from his 'heavy' form:

Dame Venus laughed, yet was afraid  
 It might prove just as Russ had said;  
 And round her atmosphere so blue  
 Took of the moon a distant view,  
 Russ saw his sinful countryman  
 Beneath his burden growing wan,  
 Who to the moon was whipped up one day,  
 For stealing sticks on a Sunday.  
 He saw, besides, an iron gate,  
 At which a hungry colt did wait;  
 Over the spikes his nose was lying,  
 And Russell thought he whiles was neighing.  
 The new moon glowed in all her charms,  
 Yet clasped the old moon in her arms,  
 Much like himself and lovely dame:  
 All this he saw, then off they came. (verse 61)

The man in the moon punished for breaking the Sabbath is a traditional motif; the moon being appropriately associated with love and death, as well as numbskulls (apt in the case of Russ). Russ sees further wonders, including the

stars as lamps which 'little seraphs scrubbed...clean'.  
Such resonances suggest a strongly moral undercurrent.<sup>15</sup>

Hogg, though, goes beyond the 'Cotter's Saturday Night' style celebrations of married love which were associated with the proper, peasant poet. As Russ passes through the air, in a frankly sexual fashion, Hogg is much more sophisticated than with the clumsy orgy sequence of 'Connel of Dee'. He creates a sensual atmosphere around Russ's experiences:

Sweet Venus's bosom beat so high  
With her huge burden through the sky,  
She hovered low, her limbs to lave  
Slight on the bow of emerald wave;  
Each billow tipt, her breast to cool,  
Like swallow on the evening pool,  
While trembling sailors shunned the track  
Of dolphin on the mermaid's back. (verse 63)

The inversion of dolphin riding mermaid parallels Russ' flight on Venus. The fragile, full-breasted swallow is a gently erotic parallel, reflecting ambiguously on Venus. The goddess is traditionally associated with sexual love and sin; the planet and sometimes the land of the dead. Venus' love play includes 'roguish tricks': floating like a swan and then diving. Russ, like Connel, expects, 'With brine his bellows-pipe would choke' (ll.667). 'Sly Venus' makes Russ, for once, fear 'the effects of female charms'.



The narrator admonishes Russell; women are not 'malicious' and (as was learnt in Pilgrims of the Sun) men are to blame for any 'fickle' qualities associated with women (verse 66). The piece on one level is frolicking pastiche. On another it is a cautionary tale told by father to sons, an argument against rash love-making which can leave a 'sinful' hero in a precarious position.

With such double-edged intent, the 'Russiadde' deserves to be treated as a formative piece in Hogg's creative development. The writer's skilful structuring of his poem (its layers of tale-telling and meaning for instance) and its fittingly abrupt ending, as a 'fragment', as the pair come towards the tide, show a sophisticated side to Hogg which was not, on the whole, encouraged. The sensual elements, as a whole, lead only to a dead end (the sniggering sexual adventures of the Confessions seem more in tune with the Noctes Ambrosianae mentality). However, Gifford perceptively notes that in the 'Russiadde' Hogg exhibits, 'a real comic bent that in a more robust age would have been encouraged'. Extending this observation, perhaps in a more tolerant age the peasant poet would have been freer to develop the more manipulative aspects of his literary persona.<sup>16</sup>

Hogg adopts an entirely different range of experimental techniques for his final poetic collection, A Queer Book (1832). There are reflections on subjects as diverse as 'Superstition and Grace' and 'A Greek Pastoral'

(the second treating Ramsayan themes in an Olympian setting). Many of these poems, ostensibly, return to the styles and tones of ballad. Once more, however, showing his unusual autodidactic versatility, Hogg adapts traditional forms to diverse ends. Various unsavoury individuals are featured, many recalling character types from oral tradition. 'Robin Reid', for instance, is a long 'ballad' in three 'fyttes'; in effect it tells a Jack-tale in verse. This is close to 'straight' ballad imitation, indicating Hogg's sustained ability to perform credibly in oral styles. Set in the Forest's past it relates the adventures of an unlikely hero:

"My name," said he, "is Robin Reid,  
           I think no shame to tell;  
 My father was daft, my mother was keude  
 [supernaturally gifted],  
           And I'm hardly right mysel!" (verse 37)

Reid, nevertheless, sweeps the board at Lord Scrope's Border tournament. In so doing he is following the traditional convention of the apparently lowly humbling the mighty; a theme pursued in 'Johnie Scott' (Ch 99), where a youth defeats an 'Italian champion'. Hogg provided a version of 'Johnie Scott' to Scott.<sup>17</sup> However, the grotesque aspects of the mentally challenged hero, who overcomes his social superiors, suggests an element of subversion in Hogg's treatment of his ballad model. In A Queer Book all is not what it seems.

'The Wife of Edzel More' (pp.1-48), also in three 'fyttes', combines supernatural aspects with elements drawn from humorous ballads like 'The Friar in the Well' (Ch 276) and 'Our Goodman' (Ch 274):

There dwelt a Wife in Edzel-more,  
     A wondrous wife I wot was she,  
 For she had the unyirthly lore  
     Of witchcraft and of glamourye.  
(verse 1)

She makes lads and lasses 'gyte' and turns true lovers into bonnie moorhens; a mixture worthy of the marriage of terror and revelry which is so characteristic of Scottish tradition. However, the ridiculous is at the forefront when the 'black laird of Gilbertoun' seeks transformation, to pursue Barbary Blake who is in the form of a skylark. The laird can only be turned into an unsightly corbie which frightens birds, and even his mother. Hogg blends in a personal touch of sublimity as the lark sings a song of repentance to the laird. In the pathetic ending, 'Thresher John' shoots the laird / bird. 'Lord Randal' (Ch 12) is mimicked in the mother's exclamation, 'Oh, who has done this ruthless deed, / My dear son tell to me?' (ll.874-75). The rapid tonal shifts, and ambivalent style of morality, show Hogg refusing to be stereotyped as a peasant poet and tradition bearer.

'The Good Man of Alloa' (pp.561-69), first published



as 'The Goode Manne of Allowa' in Blackwood's (1828), is a less naïve version of Hogg's own 'Connel of Dee', indicating Hogg's autodidactic skill in blending modern touches with oral traditions. It describes a fantastic journey beneath the sea where the hero feels as dry as if wearing, 'Mackintosh's patent ware,-- / The marvel of this world' (ll.192-93). The underwater landscape is indebted to ballad; it is like seeing the aftermath of 'Sir Patrick Spens' (Ch 58): 'Lovers and lemans' lie in the debris of a ship laden with treasure. With macabre ballad phraseology the man takes his knife, 'both sharp and clean', to sever the fingers of a 'royal maid', claiming her golden rings for the 'righteous poor'. However his motives are closer to those of Mr Fox (AT 311), the Bluebeard who cuts rings from wealthy victims' fingers (Hogg had used this motif in The Pilgrims of the Sun). Burnsian religious nuances join with the supernatural ballad elements here to moral and comic effect. The old man, returned to everyday life, keeps his booty, and is punished with a ride through hell. The minister of Alloa is a witness, and the moral--don't covet riches--given an ironic twist with an exhortation to readers to avoid meeting 'their Minister' in hell!

'The Carle of Invertime' (pp.151-60), which first appeared in the 1829 Anniversary, superficially treats a similar hero, but is more allegorical, reminiscent of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'. Suggesting 'between time' in title and text, it features 'a Carle uncouth / The

terror of age and the scorn of youth' (11.1-2). He wants no 'old gray wife; / Who hung like a link 'tween death and life' (11.51-52) but a young, pure beauty like Kilmeny: Hope, to guide him to a 'sinless world'. Hogg is preoccupied with liminal states of being; with people neither alive nor dead, like the bodies without souls in The Queen's Wake. This repeated theme may echo Hogg's near death experience, described in his 'Memoir'. It may equally be the psychological product of his 'peasant poet' status: he had left his working roots, but was not fully accepted as an intellectual.<sup>18</sup> Hogg's parodic and experimental pieces were largely unappreciated and this explains the lack of coherent development in his poetry. A Queer Book, in many respects, reverts to the ballad and lyric forms used in Hogg's earliest career, but Hogg subtly distorts these genres.

The critics, as ever, were divided on the merits of A Queer Book. The Literary Gazette focused on the title, finding the whole 'queer in title, queer in plan, queer in execution'. The Monthly Review fumed, patronisingly, 'We suppose that the shepherd of Ettrick imagines that, in consequence of his late reception in London, he may publish any thing he pleases'. The New Monthly Magazine was more complimentary, observing that although the book contained mainly previously printed work, most pieces merited 'a second reading'. Modern critics have followed this directive and paid closer attention to the book.



Peter Garside's modern edition is typical, rightly appreciating the 'humour, quirkiness, variety, and virtuosity' of the whole. Garside points out that while 'queer' in English indicates strangeness, in Scots the word 'queer' carries connotations of wittiness and comedy. Hogg, in effect, uses the word in both its senses.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps Hogg's uniquely experimental approach to poetry might best be approached through images. His techniques could be compared to literary reiving, as the writer uses Border warfare techniques to purloin an eclectic collection of source material for his own ends. Looked at from another perspective, Hogg fragments sources and reassembles them as if in a kaleidoscope (borrowing Cedric Whitman's image for Homer's poetic methods). Such practices codify those of former peasant poets, like Burns and Little, and provide a precedent for later autodidacts. To use Hogg's own key image, his approach to writing is modelled on the bodyless soul, allowing him to combine new and historical experiences on journeys which animate the peasant poet predicament. His imagination is ranging with a 'Muse'; his body, by implication, is anchored by worldly concerns and social position. Aesthetic changes are implied too, as Hogg explores the shift from ballad's communal ethos into the self-exploratory world view of romanticism. The bodyless soul is, in effect, a ritual symbol for Hogg; condensing, unifying and polarising creative elements into ambiguous states of mind.<sup>20</sup>



After Hogg, self taught poets (many less literate than Hogg and without his creative self confidence), sometimes lacked creative direction. Part Three considers the Scottish autodidactic tradition as it developed alongside and after Hogg, during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Scottish peasant poets, as will be seen, survived and flourished in a variety of (often hostile) contexts. Nevertheless, the peasant poets of Scotland were consistently more eclectic than the formally educated in their use of sources, literary and oral. They absorbed new information more readily than the supposedly learned, and utilised it in more experimental ways. They were prepared to take creative risks.

## Notes

1. In James Hogg, 'Memoir of the Author's Life', The Mountain Bard, (Edinburgh and London, 1821), p.lvii-lx, Hogg states comments on Scott's resistance to contributing to The Poetic Mirror (London and Edinburgh, 1816), noting that other contributors had gave him items which would not win 'celebrity' for the work. References here are to the 2nd ed (London and Edinburgh, 1817) including 'The Guerilla', pp.3-26; all references are given, hereafter, within the text in parentheses. David Groves edited James Hogg: Poetic Mirrors, Scottish Studies Vol 11, (Frankfurt um Main, 1990): this consists of the 1816 Poetic Mirror and the 'New Poetic Mirror', published between 1829 and 1831 in the Edinburgh Literary Journal. The latter work, not considered here for reasons of space, uses similar practices to the first series.
2. While Groves, for instance, states the poem is Pringle's, the tenor of the piece and its placing suggest that, at least, Hogg was actively involved with its presentation; see Groves 1990, p.vii.
3. James Hogg, 'Mr Adamson of Ladhope'; 'George Dobson's Expedition to Hell', The Shepherd's Calendar, 2 vols, (Edinburgh, 1829), vol I, pp.33-68, 131-47.
4. See Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk Literature, 6 vols, FFC 106-09, 116, 117, (Helsinki, 1932-36) on feline motifs: A1811.3 cat of divine origin: praying when it purrs, N411.1 Whittington's cat, K815.13 cat makes truce with mice, then eats them, B147.1.2.2. cat as beast of ill omen, H1385.4.1 husband reincarnated as cat, E436.2 Cats crossing one's path sign of ghosts, A671.2.13 scratching cats in hell.
5. James Hogg, 'Mess John', The Mountain Bard, (Edinburgh and London, 1807), pp.68-95.
6. 'The Poetic Mirror', review, The Scots Magazine, 79



(1817), pp.46-51.

7. 'The Poetic Mirror', review, The British Lady's Magazine, 4 (1816), pp.381-87.
8. Douglas Gifford, James Hogg, (Edinburgh, 1976), pp.47-48; David Groves, James Hogg, The Growth of a Writer, (Edinburgh, 1988), p.77; Antony J. Hasler, 'Ingenious Lies: The Poetic Mirror in Context', Papers given at the Second James Hogg Society Conference (Edinburgh 1985), ed Gillian Hughes, (Aberdeen, 1988, pp.79-96.
9. James Hogg, 'The Russiadde', The Poetical Works, 4 vols, (Edinburgh and London, 1822), vol 3, pp.295-359.
10. David Groves, James Hogg. The Growth of a Writer, (Edinburgh, 1988), p.82.
11. On the Black Douglas see Walter Scott, Tales of a Grandfather, 3 series, 6 vols, (Edinburgh, 1828-30). Charlie Scott and Daniel Bell feature, respectively, in Hogg's Three Perils of Man, 3 vols, (London, 1822) and Three Perils of Woman, 3 vols, (London, 1823).
12. James Hogg, 'The Marvellous Doctor', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 22 (1827), pp.349-61.
13. On the legend of the Earl of Soulis see John Leyden's treatment, discussed in Chapter Ten.
14. See Thompson, motifs E481.8.3 and E481.8.2. On Dante in the nineteenth century, see Paget Toynbee, Britain's Tribute to Dante in Literature and Art: A Chronological Record of 540 Years, (London, 1921).
15. See Thompson, motifs including Z127.1 Venus as sin personified, and E481.8.3 Venus (planet) as land of dead. See too moon motifs including A.751.1.1. Man in moon has punishment for burning brush on Sunday in North Carolina, related to C631. Tabu: Breaking the Sabbath and C950. Person carried to other world for breaking tabu. There is D1812.5.1.5.1. New moon with the old moon in her arms as sign of storm. The moon



- and stupidity are associated in folktale, see Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folktale, FFC 184, 2nd rev ed, (Helsinki, 1961), AT 1334 The Local Moon, AT 1335 The Eaten Moon and 1335A Rescuing the Moon and AT 1336 Diving for Cheese. See too traditional moon rhymes in Robert Chambers, Popular Rhymes of Scotland, 1826, 3rd ed, (Edinburgh, 1847), including 'New moon, true moon, / Tell unto me, / If [naming her favourite lover] will marry me', p.344.
16. Gifford, p.222.
  17. James Hogg, 'Superstition and Grace' first published Bijou (1829), pp.129-34 and 'A Greek Pastoral' first published Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 27 (May 1830), pp.766-71. These appear, along with 'Robin Reid', in A Queer Book, (Edinburgh and London, 1832), pp.252-56, 331-44, 49-75 respectively. All subsequent references to poems from A Queer Book are given within the text, in parentheses. For Hogg's ballad texts, including 'Johnie Scott', see 'Scotch Ballad Materials', NLS MS 877.
  18. See James Hogg, 'Memoir' (1821), p.xxii.
  19. Reviews ctd, James Hogg, A Queer Book, 1832, ed P.D. Garside, The Stirling/South Carolina Research Edition of the Collected Works of James Hogg, vol 3, (Edinburgh, 1995), pp.xi-xii.
  20. Cedric H. Whitman, Homer and the Homeric Tradition, new ed, (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p.14. On key symbols see Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Mdembu Ritual, (Ithaca, New York, 1967); Nancy D. Munn, 'The Effectiveness of Symbols in Murngin Rite and Myth', Forms of Symbolic Action, ed R. Spencer, (Seattle, 1969), p.178-207.

### Part Three: In the Valhalla

'In "The Akimbo Arms", where he drank, Gus McPhater was paid court to in a way that was only half-jocular. He had more than once declared himself to be in the tradition of the Scottish autodidacts. Even the word was typical. It was natural that he would prefer it to "self-taught". It was that preference for fancy words that sometimes made people defensively try to outmanoeuvre him. But that wasn't an easy thing to do, for besides being well-read he could think fast on his feet.'

(William McIlvanney, Walking Wounded, 1989, 5th impression, (Sevenoaks, Kent, 1993), pp.130-31).

## Chapter Nine: Uneducated Poets

'It is evident that there could be no versifiers of this class in early times.... The distinction between the language of high and low life could not be broadly marked, till our language was fully formed, in the Elizabethan age: then the mother tongue of the lower classes ceased to be the language of composition; that of the peasantry was antiquated, that of the inferior citizens had become vulgar. It was not necessary that a poet should be learned in Greek and Latin, but it was that he should speak the language of polished society.'

(Robert Southey, The Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets, 1831, rpt ed J.S. Childers, (London, 1925), p.13.)



This chapter explores the autodidactic tradition as it developed among Hogg's near contemporaries on both sides of the Border. Younger peasant poets, such as Allan Cunningham, Robert Tannahill and John Clare, all drew inspiration from Hogg's success. They imitated his poetic styles and adapted the (by now well-developed) image of the Ettrick Shepherd to their own creative ends. Hogg, equally, enjoyed contact with his fellow autodidacts, and was influenced by the work of the younger Borderer Allan Cunningham.

Allan Cunningham (1784-1842) was well endowed with autodidactic credentials. A factor's son (later seen, like the remade Ramsay, as being 'descended from an ancient family'), Cunningham underwent a basic education at school in Quarrelwood, then was apprenticed as a stonemason to his brother James. Cunningham's autobiographical writings stress his autodidactic pedigree, by emphasising direct links with Burns and Hogg. For example, Cunningham described how his father, John Cunningham, hosted the first recital of 'Tam o' Shanter' at Sandbed Farm. Aged twelve, Cunningham witnessed Burns's funeral. Cunningham was equally careful to describe how, in 1806, he and his brother visited the Ettrick Shepherd, establishing a firm friendship based on (the stonemason suggests) the pastoral upbringing which they had in common.<sup>1</sup>

In dealing with potential patrons, from an early age,

Cunningham emphasised his 'Gentle Shepherd' pursuits. He profiled his self education, for instance, in an 1806 letter to the Kirkmahoe poet, the Rev Mr Wightman, mentioning his 'delight' in the work of Milton, Thomson and Pope:

After public worship is over on the Sabbath, you may find me reading in some sequestered spot, far from the usual haunts of bustling mankind, where I retire by myself to be more at liberty in my reflections and contemplations upon the works and goodness of Him who made me.... I am certainly much in want of education. I was taken from school and put to learn my trade at eleven years of age, and I really begin to feel the want of it much. English grammar I never learned.

Wightman did not appreciate Cunningham's frame of reference, and warned that poetry fostered 'morbid sensibility', recommending science, history and theology as preferable fields of study. Adapting his position accordingly, Cunningham replied that poetry 'softens the mind' but sent Wightman a pastoral, 'The Nith', modelled on Burns' 'Afton Water' (Poems, 257).<sup>2</sup>

Demonstrating his ability to assimilate specific aspects of the peasant poet stereotype, from 1807 Cunningham wrote as the Ossianic hero Hidallan, a 'self-taught genius' in Eugenius Roche's Literary Recreations.

He purposefully satisfied the demands of potential patrons. In 1809 Robert Cromek and Thomas Stothart, preparing their Burns edition, visited Cunningham. Amazed that one in the Stonemason's 'condition' should know so much about song, Cromek scoffed at Cunningham's own work: "no one should try to write Songs after Robert Burns unless he could either write like him or some of the old minstrels". Cunningham recalls how, like the arch liar Odysseus, he then resolved to pander to the incomers' greed for Nithsdale traditions:

"Gad, Sir!" said Cromek; "if we could but make a volume--Gad, Sir!--see what Percy has done, and Ritson, and Mr. Scott more recently with his *Border Minstrelsy*." The idea of a volume of imitations passed upon Cromek as genuine remains flashed across the poet's mind.... A few fragments were soon submitted. "Gad, Sir! these are the things;" and, like Polyphemus, he cried for more. "More, give me more; this is divine!" He never suspected a cheat, or, if at all, not at this time.<sup>3</sup>

Cunningham's account of his conscious deception may be intended to parallel his collaboration with Cromek, which resulted in Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song (1810), with that between Macpherson and the Edinburgh Literati to produce Ossianic 'fragments'. The Borders writer, too, is placing himself within a tradition of cooperation between



autodidacts and the Literati, exemplified by Hogg's relationship with Scott during the making of The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802-03).

Following, then, in the footsteps of Hogg and Scott, Cunningham and Cromek's Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song (1810) claimed to exemplify Scottish 'unlettered rusticity', uncontaminated by English pastoral, where 'swains and nymphs resemble lords and ladies parading among their vassals at the rental time, who never smear sheep'. The collection is arranged into 'classes' of songs: Sentimental, Humorous, Jacobite Ballads (1715 and 1745), Old Ballads and Fragments. Informants included Mrs Copland of Dalbeattie, her niece, Catherine Macartney, and Cunningham's fiancée Jean Walker. Cunningham later boasted of writing all bar two 'scraps' himself: 'I could cheat a whole General Assembly of Antiquarians with my original manner of writing and forging'. Furthermore, Cunningham quipped to George M<sup>c</sup>Ghie in 1810, regarding Jean Walker: 'the poets of the last century have, by the divine gift of inspiration, anticipated and commemorated the beauties of this'.<sup>4</sup>

Cunningham, and Cromek acting on his behalf, stressed that his status as an authority on oral traditions was based on his position as an autodidact. In this respect, Cunningham seems to have closely observed Hogg's recent 'Memoir' which introduced the figure of The Mountain Bard (1807). He learnt to stress his peasant poet status, too,

from the gradual remaking of Hogg's identity as the exemplary 'Ettrick Shepherd'. Remains opens with 'The Lord's Marie' which supposedly exemplified the 'native dignity of affection which belongs to an unlettered rustic' even though, in attributing the piece to Mrs Copland, 'modern' interpolations were admitted. Cunningham's autodidactic skill at reworking traditions did not, however, always convince. Just as Hogg's reliability was initially doubted by Scott, so Cunningham aroused some reservations in Cromek. In 1809 Cromek found the 'owre pure' heroine of 'She's gane to dwell in heaven' too abstract, using words like 'Fell' which were not from 'poets of Nature'. Perhaps this woman, and technique, offered a prototype for Hogg's 'Kilmeny'; certainly the two poets shared some thematic and stylistic concerns, as seen below. Cunningham seems to have learnt to present himself in an acceptable manner, as an autodidact, from Hogg's example and was even, on occasion, more sophisticated than his mentor. To defuse fears that he was forging songs Cunningham, as he told his brother James in 1810, sometimes incorporated the 'coarseness, and severity, and negligence' which contemporary collectors associated with antiquity.<sup>5</sup>

The writer was skilled, like Hogg, at replicating the style and content of oral songs. 'The Mermaid of Galloway', for instance, is highly convincing as ballad, not least because of its structural symmetry. Maxwell of



Cowiehill, bewitched by a mermaid, offers to wash her in milk, bind her brow with gold and give her wine. She knots her 'wat yellow hair' three times in his. Maxwell's betrothed, who waits for him in vain, is warned by talking birds to loose the bride-knots in her hair. In macabre style, she behaves towards the birds exactly as her lover had towards the mermaid, offering them bread, wine and a gold cage. Cowiehill makes a final appearance as revenant, advising his lover to seek another.<sup>6</sup>

Remains claimed to outdo the work of previous autodidacts, particularly Burns, by offering fresh 'Originals' of pieces including 'Carle of Kelly-burn braes' and 'Gude Ale Comes'. Although many, including The Scots Magazine, Scott and William Motherwell, suspected the Remains were not genuine, the work did influence other autodidacts. Showing the dialogue between autodidacts, even Hogg seems to have taken note. Cunningham's 'The Pawky Auld Kimmer', in theme and tone, anticipates the supernatural night raid of the 1813 'Witch of Fife'. The Jacobite grouping of songs from 1715 and 1745, too, offered a conceptual model for Hogg's Jacobite Relics (1819-21) which was, perhaps, as important as the precedent of Scott's collecting enterprise with the Minstrelsy. John Wilson, in his reappraisal of Remains in Blackwood's of 1819, recognised Cunningham as one of Scotland's 'most original poets' (according to Cunningham's son, the statement performed a valuable 'service' for



Cunningham, enhancing his literary status).<sup>7</sup> Although Cunningham never quite equalled Hogg's creative achievements, he does seem to have sometimes exerted a formative influence on the older and better-known poet. Hogg used Cunningham's work, at times, as a source of oral style themes and even as a model for their treatment.

Despite being a recognised autodidact, Cunningham found it financially impossible to be a full-time poet. Ignoring advice to study architecture, in spring 1810 he left Leith to seek 'fame' in London. But Cromek did not fulfil expectations of patronage, offering only 'something handsome' on a new edition of Remains. The Stonemason later remembered Cromek '"if not with gratitude, at least with feelings of affection and esteem"', but his feelings at the time were different. In September 1820 Cunningham wrote to James Cunningham, regarding Cromek: 'the bravery of the lips, and the generosity of words, are the current coin with which naked bards are ever paid'. Referring to Cromek's failure to recognise a 'Song of Fashionable Sin' as Cunningham's: 'I never heeded him, but marked it down as a precept, that a man may talk about the thing he does not understand, and be reckoned a wise fellow too.'<sup>8</sup> The implication patrons could be obtuse, and complimentary without offering practical help, recalls Hogg's statements about Wilson as patron (discussed in Chapter Three).

Cunningham both conformed to, and resented, his role as a typically Scottish autodidact. Cunningham found work

in London with Bubb's sculpture studio, as parliamentary reporter for the Day and, later, as supervisor for Cromek's sculptor friend, Chantrey. Incidentally, when Chantrey died he left Cunningham a £100 annuity but the writer, with autodidactic pride, declined the supposed honour of sharing Chantrey's mausoleum. Contrary to David Hogg's suggestion that his acquaintance with Chantrey gave Cunningham access to society 'beyond his reach', perhaps, as a peasant poet, Cunningham attracted Literati to Chantrey's studio; Mrs S.C. Hall responded to Cunningham very much as to a model autodidact, who resembled Hogg:

a stout man, somewhat high-shouldered, broad-chested, and altogether strongly proportioned; his head was firm and erect, his mouth close, yet full, the lips large, his nose thick and broad, his eyes of intense darkness (I could never define their colour), beneath shaggy and flexible eyebrows.... His brow was expansive, indicating...imagination and observation.

Mrs Hall saw Cunningham weep at Scottish songs 'according to nature'. The writer was, it seems, acutely homesick. In 1833, he had a drawing made of yews at his birthplace, Blackwood. As early as 1817, writing to his brother James, Cunningham longed, apparently without irony, for 'the clank of our whinstone hammers'. Happiness was only possible in London if one 'stoops himself in the command

of others', but self-effacement was not one of Cunningham's traits. Apocryphally, when William Jerdan (from Kelso), editor of the Literary Gazette, indicated an 'error' in Cunningham's work the poet responded: '"it must go in as I wrote it, or not at all. What do I care for the gender of pronouns? We care naething for such things in Nithsdale, and I won't in London"'.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time as defending his right to self expression, Cunningham was as adept as Hogg at playing up his peasant poet characteristics. His first major work in London was Songs, chiefly in the Rural Language of Scotland (1813). Many items had already appeared in the Remains. 'To Jean in Heaven' is after Burns' 'Mary in Heaven'; 'My Heart is in Scotland' mirrors 'My heart's in the Highlands'. Songs of Scotland (1825) placed Cunningham within the Scottish tradition of lyrics and pastorals, alongside Ramsay and Hector MacNeil. Reactions were mainly favourable although Motherwell thought that Cunningham, 'ransacks the tomb'. Demonstrating his autodidactic versatility, Cunningham gained new recognition with his Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects (1829-33). His imaginative novels include Paul Jones (1826) and Sir Michael Scott (1828); the latter reworked material from The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) and Hogg's Three Perils of Man (1822). Showing a creative energy similar to Hogg's, Cunningham also wrote biographies of Byron and



the self-taught Crabbe, and worked for periodicals like the Athenaeum. Like Hogg, Cunningham edited a periodical, The Anniversary (1828); it appeared only once, featuring the work of establishment figures like Southey, Wilson and Lockhart alongside that of the autodidacts Hogg and John Clare.<sup>10</sup>

Autodidactic typecasting (especially the contemporary stereotype gelling around Hogg) meant that Cunningham, despite his range, was noticed for traditional-style lyrics. The long poems, which use Nithsdale tradition in an innovative way, to examine relationships between peasants and aristocrats, were neglected. Cunningham intermingles oral and written traditions in a very vivid way in the long poems, drawing on the practices developed by Hogg in earlier pieces like The Queen's Wake (1813). The Stonemason's blank verse play Sir Marmaduke Maxwell (1822) rejects the autodidactic stereotyping which blinded critics to writers' achievements: 'We care not to know of the impediments which are in the way of those who seek to give us delight; the vulgar wonder of a peasant writing verse has no share in the spell which is felt by the admirers of Burns'. Set on the Solway at the end of Richard Cromwell's Commonwealth, Sir Marmaduke opens with a Spirit meeting, as did Hogg's Royal Jubilee which was also published in 1822. While Hogg's spirits rally for the arrival of George IV, Cunningham's fear Sir Halbert Comyne's return from the wars. In this mock-historical

piece the gentle lovers, Sir Marmaduke and Mary Douglas of Cumlongan, are separated by the evil aristocrat Comyne. After terrible conflicts, Marmaduke kills the foe, permitting a happy ending.<sup>11</sup>

Cunningham's approach draws on the eclectic precedent of Hogg's narrative poems, such as The Pilgrims of the Sun (1815), showing his autodidactic ability to assimilate information from diverse sources. Like Macbeth, Comyne wipes 'the milk of kindred mercy from my lips', kills Sir Marmaduke's father, and blames unknown assailants. The hero, Marmaduke, who escapes along with his mother, is an Ossianic warrior-bard. He trysts with Mary like a peasant, after ballad convention. A cast of rustic worthies, with feudal loyalties, includes Simon Graeme of Kittlenaket, Auld Penpont and Mabel Moran the witch.

Cunningham was strongly influenced by Hogg's ambiguous treatments of the supernatural. As in Hogg's work, supernatural elements enhance the imaginative plot and Cunningham, too, presents the supernatural with ambivalence and humour. Mabel, for instance, exploits her fey appearance to misdirect Comyne. Her speech, too, pays tribute to the imagery of Burns' 'Tam o' Shanter':

Mabel. Now look at yon bright star, and mark my  
words,

The tryster tree pass, where the pedlar lad  
Got his neck broke, and by the yellow hair  
Was hung among the branches. Then pass too

The dead man's loup....

Ye'll see a belted huntsman cut in stone,  
A bugle at his belt, which ye maun blow,  
.... God prosper good intents.

(Exeunt Halbert Comyne, &c.)

Mabel Moran, alone. Thank heaven and hamely wit  
for its good riddance!  
(pp.10-11)

More ominously, in Act II, Comyne's followers Dougan and Neal bury Lord Maxwell (anticipating the scene in The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) where Wringhim prepares to attack Blanchard) as 'Cherubim's blades' seem to rise and 'grass seems growing daggers' (p.47).<sup>12</sup> This adds to the dramatic tension as Graeme and Macgee attack the miscreants to avenge Maxwell. Comyne himself is dogged by the 'fearful shape' of dead Maxwell's spirit. It is suggested that the life of a peasant, appreciated by Marmaduke and Mary in their period of exile, is morally far superior to that of a lord.

The Maid of Elvar (1832) also explores relationships between those of high and low degree, drawing on precedents from Macpherson's Ossianic poems to The Queen's Wake (1813). There are elements here, too, of Cunningham's national pride. Following Hogg's royal adventures, Cunningham contrasts illusory nobility, related to wealth, with inherent worth which is independent of rank. The first is represented by the evil



aristocrat Sir Ralph Latoun, sent by Henry VIII to conquer Scotland. The second is exemplified by the 'nobleness of soul', seen in the Scottish peasant leader and shepherd poet, Eustace Graeme, who ultimately defeats Latoun. As well as winning back the kingdom, Eustace proves himself to be worthy of the love of Sybil Lesley, the Maid (she is also the object of Latoun's desire). Reflecting Cunningham's pride as a peasant poet, Graeme points out on more than one occasion that Nithsdale shepherds overcome 'English eagles'. Finding sanctuary from Latoun with Graeme's parents, Miles (a former knight) and Eupheme, Sybil has proof that '"lowly are happier than the lofty"'. Perhaps such sentiments indirectly address Cunningham's experiences with his southern employers.<sup>13</sup>

The outcome of The Maid recalls ballad precedents and The Gentle Shepherd, and is modelled on Hogg's Queen Hynde (1825). After the setback of kidnap by Latoun, and rescue by Eustace, Sybil reveals herself as the Maid: 'Our marriage will read rank a lesson stern: / 'Tis genius and true worth I wed' (XII 11.362-63). However John Lesley, Lord of Elvar, disguised as a Palmer, proclaims himself as Sybil's father: no 'churle's son' will inherit his lands. Miles' subsequent revelation that he is the high ranking Lord Herries facilitates the wedding. However, there are subversive touches. Sybil is irritated that her father left her unprotected. Miles observes: 'the shepherd's wand / With me is worthier far than the lordly brand' (XII

11.422-23).

Cunningham's experience of prejudices against rustics is reflected in the narrator's ironic apology for his 'humble lyre' (reminiscent of Hogg's, discussed above). Contemporaries prefer 'lofty rhymes / Of lords and learning' to 'Scotland's peasant muse' (VI 11.2-6). The narrator is, though, ultimately an unrepentant autodidact, defending his 'rude design': 'May they who read it deem its roughest line / Tastes of fresh nature like well flavoured wine' (XII 11.454-56).

Despite the apology, Cunningham relishes exploring the traditions he knew through his peasant background, many of which had already been treated by Hogg. Peasant life is delineated in detail. There is, for instance, a Burnsian Hallowe'en in Part Ninth. In his accounts of the fairies, though, Cunningham's greatest debt is to Hogg. Part Tenth, for instance, shows the Queen of the Fairies (banished from Earth, as the fairies were according to Hogg), exiled by 'petty lords', giving Graeme a magic wine cup: it is full as long as its powers are trusted. Like the shield of Achilles in the Iliad, it depicts a culture in transition: 'poet shepherds piping airs divine' and fairies. The narrator, on the other hand, often pulls back from his cameos. As the conflict continues, he grows impatient: 'Time hasted on, and so must my story' (X 1.317). The irritated intrusion parallels those in Hogg's 'Russiadde' (discussed in Chapter Eight).



As in the case of Hogg, some critics assumed that the autodidactic Cunningham could not manage long poems.

Scott found Sir Marmaduke over-elaborate, patronisingly praising 'the muse whom you meet by the fireside in your hours of leisure, when you have played your part manfully through a day of labour'. Unkindly, in The Fortunes of Nigel (1822), Scott thought that the plot of Sir Marmaduke was worthy of 'my Culinary Remains'. D.M. Moir was equally scathing: 'I doubt much if any injury would have accrued to Cunningham's fame had he dropped his poetic mantle before crossing the Border, and trusted his reputation to the early ballads published in Cromek's "Remains"'. Sir Marmaduke and The Maid, despite 'sparks of true inspiration' were 'deficient in plot and constructiveness'.<sup>14</sup>

Like Hogg, though, Cunningham was adept at posturing as a peasant poet, blending flattery and emotional blackmail. Thanking Southey (also a friend to Hogg) for a favourable opinion in 1822, Cunningham depicted himself as a man prone to 'despondency', raised 'in a lonely place, [where] painting and sculpture seemed something like the work of sorcery'. Pleased with Southey's praise of his edition of Burns in 1824, Cunningham thanked the man 'at the head of literature', adding, 'I am no scholar and consequently cannot judge wisely or accurately'. Similarly, writing in 1827 to Ritchie, editor of The Scotsman, Cunningham as a man 'without the advantages of



learning', asked 'mercy' for Sir Michael Scott. Sending The Anniversary to Ritchie in 1828, Cunningham complained that critics 'expect as clear and polished narratives from my pen as they receive from men of talent and education too. If they would try me as they have tried other rustic writers by their peers, I should not object'. Thanking Wilson for his 'Edderline', his contribution to The Anniversary in 1828, Cunningham sought lasting support: 'My life has been one continued struggle to maintain my independence and support wife and children'.<sup>15</sup>

Cunningham encouraged his categorisation as an autodidact--in his Life of Burns (1834) he claimed to be 'sprung from ae mother, / I'm but a weakly young half-brother' (ll.49-50)--but wished to be considered as more than merely a peasant poet. He confessed to Robert Chambers in 1822 that some songs were flawed: 'I am unacquainted with any other nature save that of the Nith'. However, as the writer of the Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects (1829-33), Cunningham admitted that he sometimes wrote 'like a man of the world'. In February 1826, the Nithsdale Stonemason told the Ettrick Shepherd why he concentrated on prose:

Poetry is too much its own reward; and one cannot always write for a barren smile, and a thriftless clap on the back.... There is no poet and a wife and six children fed now like the prophet Elijah--they are more likely to be

devoured by critics than fed by ravens.... So  
farewell to song for a season.

Cunningham added, perhaps tongue in cheek, 'I have a good mind to come and commence Shepherd beside you, and aid you in making a yearly pastoral Gazette in prose and verse for our ain native Lowlands'.<sup>16</sup>

The presentation of Cunningham as an autodidact was sustained throughout his life, and continued after his death. When his 'ain folk' gave the poet the freedom of Dumfries in 1831, the poet John M<sup>c</sup>Diarmid of the Dumfries Courier noted 'the might that may slumber in a peasant's mind'. Thomas Carlyle's maiden speech explicitly paralleled Cunningham with Burns. When Cunningham died in London in 1842 only eight people attended his funeral but, at the 1844 Burns Festival, Aytoun honoured Cunningham and Burns together, for bringing 'comfort' to 'the poor'. Cunningham's son Peter sanitised his father's work, severely pruning the collected Poems and Songs (1847). He removed bawdy elements from 'Stars, dinna keek in', 'Tam Bo' and 'Derwentwater', and cut gory parts from 'Lament for Lord Maxwell', 'The Waes of Scotland' and 'The wee, wee German Lairdie'. David Hogg praised this clean-cut work (resembling Victorian Hogg editions for excessive editing) for suiting 'the peasantry of his native land'.<sup>17</sup>

Beneath the 'top layer' of autodidacts, including Burns, Hogg and Cunningham, was a secondary level of well



liked peasant poets and the best known of this group is Robert Tannahill (1774-1810). Born in Paisley, Tannahill attended school from the ages of six to twelve, and then was apprenticed to his weaver father. His lover, 'Jessie the Flower o' Dunblane', married another man in 1798 and a year later, during a period of poor trade, Tannahill left Scotland. He spent two years in Bolton, returning home when his father was dying; 'The Filial Vow' resolves to support the widowed mother. David Semple's 'Life of Tannahill' highlights the poet's autodidactic methods of composition, drawing on the imagery of Hogg's 'Memoir': 'he hung an inkbottle to his loompost, and fixed up a coarse shelf which served as a desk that he might jot down his ideas without rising'. Like other autodidacts, Tannahill benefited from local literary networks. In 1803 Tannahill, who played the German flute, founded a musical and literary society at the Sun Tavern, and attended the Kilbarchan Society. He was first President of the Paisley Burns' Anniversary Society, meeting annually from January 29th 1805, and involved in a subscription Trades' Library from 1806. He exchanged 'Epistles' with other autodidacts like James Barr and James Scadlock which were sometimes hostile to 'colleg'd Bards'.<sup>18</sup>

Tannahill was sensitive to the fact that he was treated as a peasant poet of limited ability. His poems appeared in The Poetical Magazine and (like Hogg's earliest publications) The Scots Magazine. The Caledonian



Musical Repository (1806) included several songs; settings by John Ross from Aberdeen and R.A. Smith (a self-taught Paisley musician) were printed as sheet music. Poems (1807) sold well but 'snarling critics and treacherous friends' thought it immature.<sup>19</sup> Tannahill set Irish as well as Scottish airs, although he was unable to persuade Thomson that these should be included in A Select Collection of Original Scottish Melodies. Both Thomas Stewart of Greenock and Archibald Constable refused to publish an augmented edition of Tannahill's Poems; the writer's consequent depression led to his suicide in 1810.

The weaver poet is best known for lyrics in identifiably 'peasant' styles, modelled on the work of Hogg and Burns. The writer's depressive nature is evident in lyric pieces like 'The Snowstorm' (Poems, 112): here, reversing the situation of Hogg's 'The Moon was a-aning', a woman perishes en route to her exiled lover. 'Away, Gloomy Care' (Poems, 150), ominously, threatens to 'drown' worries. There are, however, a great many joyous songs in Tannahill's repertoire, including oral-style courtship pieces like 'The Lass of Arranteenie' (Poems, 90) and the 'Bonnie Wood O Craigielee' (Poems, 68). Tannahill's success at composing convincing, oral style songs can be seen in the survival of his ebullient 'The Braes o Balquhither' (Poems, 91); the piece is still widely performed, with variations, as 'The Wild Mountain Thyme':

Now the simmer is in prime,  
     Wi the flowers richly bloomin,  
 Wi the wild mountain thyme  
     A the moorland's perfumin;  
 Tae our dear native scenes  
     Let us journey taegither,  
 Whar glad innocence reigns,  
     Mang the braes o Balquhither. (verse 4)

Tannahill then, like Hogg, was capable of producing poignant lyrics with enduring appeal.

As an autodidactic poet, in the manner of Hogg, Tannahill readily assimilated styles into his work, experimenting with diverse poetic voices in sophisticated ways. 'Self-Sufficiency--An Ode' (Poems, 15) convincingly imitates Pindar. 'The Parnassiad' (Poems, 17), which may well have influenced Hogg's later poetic journeys (discussed in Chapter Seven), is a visionary piece where the poet, 'unfledg'd with scholastic law', inspired by 'Fancy', views those who venture to fly beyond 'the vale of Prose'. He dismisses poets who seek patrons. Only the 'Bard of Nature' is worthy, even if copied by 'hackney scribblers, / Imitators, rhyming dabblers' (ll.85-6).

Tannahill, following a typically autodidactic urge to celebrate his nation, especially enjoyed experimenting with Scottish conventions. In this vein, he ranges from straight celebrations of his predecessors, particularly those considered to be peasant poets, to satires of

sentimentalised Scotland. There is an Ossianic flavour to Tannahill's tribute to 'The Wandering Bard' (Poems, 105). Jacobite imitations include 'Bonnie Hielan Laddie' (Poems, 173). 'Lament of Wallace after the Battle of Falkirk' (Poems, 94) uses exile conventions to depict the 'poor outcast' wandering by the 'dark-winding Carron, once pleasing to see'. Tannahill commented to Barr in July 1806: 'the language is too weak for the subject.... to give words suitable to the poignancy of his grief on such a trying occasion of fortune, would require all the fine and soul-melting energy of a Campbell or a Burns'. While Tannahill aimed to express national sentiments, he deplored their sanitisation. See, for instance, his flyting version of Lady Nairne's 'Caller Herrin' (Poems, 169) set to the uproarious 'Cameronian Rant': '"AH, feecheanie! they're no for me! / Guidwife, your herrin's stinkin' (ll.1-2). This 'barmy jade' is drunken; the opposite of the plucky but sentimental fishwives of Lady Nairne's imagination.<sup>20</sup>

Tannahill, like Hogg, was influenced by the work of Ramsay. The Soldier's Return; A Scottish Interlude in Two Acts (1807) is loosely based on The Gentle Shepherd (1725). Tannahill's play is set within 'A range of hills, / o'erhung wi' waving woods'. In a way which resembles The Gentle Shepherd, it is a tale of pastoral courtship, but with one significant difference from Ramsay's drama:



Tannahill does not make his hero a man of forgotten gentle birth. Moral worth is enough to ensure natural dignity in the work of the Paisley poet. Posing self-consciously as an autodidact here, Tannahill introduces his play as the work of 'an unlettered Mechanic, whose hopes, as a poet, extend no further than to be reckoned respectable among the minor Bards of his country'.<sup>20A</sup> He presents a cast of rustic stereotypes. A beautiful country girl, Jean, has two suitors: a virtuous and lyrical shepherd, Highland Harry, and 'an old rich dotard', Muirland Willie. Jean's father, Gaffer, is a canny old farmer, like Hogg's sensible men of the land; her mother, Mirren, is a mercenary and 'foolish old Woman' who favours the richer man as a potential son-in-law.

The Soldier's Return has a somewhat slight plot. As indicated by the title, Highland Harry has been at war, and returns to claim Jean in marriage. There are, of course, Jacobite overtones: the elderly, unappealing wooer named for the Hanoverians, and his younger love-rival after the Highland Harry of Jacobite song. Mirren's opposition fades away when it is revealed that Harry had saved the local Laird's life in battle: the Laird offers him financial recompense. In a tongue-in-cheek way, given this outcome, the moral is proclaimed: '"Virtue ever is its own reward"'. Willie, moreover, is satisfied: he gains a wife more favourably disposed to his wealth.

The play, like The Gentle Shepherd (and Hogg's Royal



until her death.<sup>20B</sup>

Tannahill, expressing the position expected from peasant poets, has Harry sing two ethereal pieces in praise of guileless rural life. In Act II Scene II, when he is reunited with Jean, the couple arrange to meet that night 'down by yon burn side'. This gentle (albeit soldiering) shepherd dismisses those who favour the mundane, preferring the company of supposedly gullible rustics, 'Awa' ye rude unfeeling crew, frae yon burn side, / Those fairy-scenes are no' for you'; Harry prefers to wander through 'the fields alane' at gloaming, to the 'noisy scene' of the world. So, too, when Mirren is convinced by the sight of 'goud' to let Jean and Harry marry, Harry expresses his preference for the 'calm rural plain' (Act II, Scene III).

However, Tannahill does use his light-hearted framework to make serious points about human experiences. The one comic song in the play, for instance, implicitly condemns the idea of marrying for money rather than marrying for love. In Act I Scene III, set to the brisk air 'whistle ower the lave o't', this piece anticipates the 'economic courtship' idioms used by Hogg in 'Birniebouzle' (discussed in Chapter Four), where a man offers 'housin', gear an' lan'' to woo a woman. Muirland Willie's offer of marriage to Jean is overtly financial, expressed in the confident Scots Tannahill associates particularly with his older characters here (perhaps



reflecting the contemporary shift towards using English, mentioned in Chapter One):

I'll buy you claise to busk you braw,  
 A ridin' pouney, pad an' a',  
 On fashion's tap we'll drive awa',  
     Whip, spur, an' a' the lave o't.  
                                     (11.5-8)

For Jean, Willie's offer is worth much less than the charms of her youthful lover. Here, especially given Jean's rejection of Muirland Willie, Tannahill aims to emulate Burns at his most poignantly comic. The Soldier's Return, as a whole, is very much written from the viewpoint of a woman encouraged into marrying for money (a distinct possibility for most of the play). It is infused with the cruelly poignant atmosphere of lyrics in the style of Burns' 'What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man', directed against mismatched love.<sup>20c</sup>

As an autodidact, sharing the same frame of reference as Hogg, Tannahill genuinely admired Burns. Like his predecessor Janet Little (discussed in Chapter Eleven), Tannahill made a walking tour of Ayrshire in 1791, although he probably did not meet Burns. Tannahill's admiration for Burns as the first Scottish autodidact is expressed in pieces such as the 1805 'Burns Anniversary Meeting' (Poems, 6). Here, a gathering of Jove and the

'minor gods' is interrupted by Scotland's guardian, who bears a shield large as Fingal's, decorated with a landscape bordered by thistles. To celebrate his land, 'great in arts and arms', the 'heav'n taught Minstrel' Burns is born. Fame is prevented from blowing her horn prematurely, 'Till Worth should sanction it beyond the critic's pow'r' (l.89). The Burns cult, in which he perceived class hypocrisy at work, wholly repelled Tannahill. In 1808 he complained that the Burns Anniversary attracted 'the better sort, that is those into whose pockets Fortune has thrown (in some cases blindly,) five shillings while she has left others with scarcely one brotherless penny'.<sup>21</sup>

Tannahill often goes beyond Hogg's covert political statements (discussed in Chapter Six). Quiet protest, directed at social injustice abroad and at home, pervades Tannahill's work, particularly against the patron who, as 'Rich Grip-Us' (Poems, 44), oppresses. The 'Epistle to James Buchanan' (Poems, 25), for instance, uses Burnsian imagery to condemn patronage:

I ne'er, as yet, hae found a patron,  
 For, scorn be till't! I hate a flatt'rin,  
 Besides, I never had an itchin  
 Tae slake about a great man's kitchen,  
 An, like a spaniel, lick his dishes,  
 An come an gang just tae his wishes. (ll.73-78)

Tannahill wishes that he could write like Mackenzie or Blair, however, recalling Hogg's peasant Muse of The Spy, 'My Muse is just a Rosinante, / She stammers forth, wi hilchlin canter' (ll.118-19). His inspiration may be 'uncouth in garb and feature'; even so, he feels justified in resenting 'the critic's birsie besom' (ll.118-28).<sup>22</sup> Like Burns, Tannahill often used canine allegories to represent the autodidact's predicament. 'Towser' (Poems, 38) never 'kent the courtier airt, / To fawn wi rancour at his heart' (ll.27-28). 'Tam o' Shanter' is parodied in 'Towser' as a dog, rather than a nag, saves its master from a 'horrid storm'.

The writer's consciousness of his autodidactic status, and its limitations, is especially apparent in his 'Prologue' (Poems, 2) to The Gentle Shepherd, probably acted in the Paisley theatre of his friend, the actor-manager Archibald Pollock. As in A Midsummer Night's Dream (Act 5, Scene I), rustic and autodidactic actors ask a 'truce to criticism': 'We don't pretend to speak by square and rule, / Like yon wise chaps bred up in Thespian school' (ll.37-38). The self-effacing statement, in all probability, is meant to be taken as ironic; but such apologies for a lack of learning are typical of the Scottish autodidactic tradition after Hogg.

Despite his range of sources and the strength of his poetic voice, like Hogg and Cunningham, the weaver poet was appreciated almost solely as a lyricist. He seems to



have been grateful, at least, for this limited recognition. In an oft-quoted letter of 1809, addressed to James King, Tannahill relished 'hearing, as I walked down the pavement at night, a girl within doors rattling away' at his songs. Tannahill did, though, have encouragement from his fellow autodidacts; he corresponded with Hogg, and the two autodidacts spent at least one evening together in the Paisley Sun Tavern in March 1810. Barr, who was present, recalled: 'The contrast was striking--the one healthy, lively, and off-hand; the other delicate, quiet and unassuming'. In Motherwell's version, Tannahill bade a poignant, tearful adieu to Hogg: '"Farewell, we shall never meet again"'.<sup>23</sup>

Although his songs sold well, Tannahill was largely neglected by the literati. In death, he was mourned mainly by autodidacts, notably in the verse appreciations of his fellow weaver poets Alexander Borland and Robert Allan. His fate appalled Cunningham. In Songs of Scotland (1825) the Stonemason claimed with passion and a touch, no doubt, of wry self-awareness, to be 'one of the last to ask for genius the protection of the great'. Still, 'a little patronage' would have helped Tannahill, and 'the shame of sending him in poverty and in sorrow to an untimely grave would not then have added to the national reproach which the history of the inimitable Burns has brought on our country'.<sup>24</sup>

As in the case of Hogg, Tannahill was posthumously

celebrated as an outstanding local writer. In 1866, the town erected a monument; the 1874 centenary was marked by a splendid procession to the Braes of Gleniffer where a choir performed his work. However Tannahill was consistently portrayed as a second level peasant poet. An account in the The Evening Citizen highlighted the poet's 'secondary rank' to Burns, and pointed out Tannahill's supposedly 'feminine' qualities. The Glasgow News marvelled that: 'the Power which evolved "the mossy rosebud down the howe" came down, no doubt, on the brain of the poor weaver, and inspired it'. The Daily Mail allowed that Tannahill was 'no mere echo of the great master' but, while praising the 'fidelity of his sketches of nature', patronisingly (and unjustly) noted the writer's lack of creative 'vigour'. An annual Paisley Concert, which took place from 1876 to 1936, ranked Tannahill below Burns when paying for statues of the two poets. The link with Burns was thereby stressed, at the expense of a more balanced view of Tannahill's role within the Scottish autodidactic tradition discussed in the present work.<sup>25</sup>

The peasant poet phenomenon, of course, was not solely Scottish. The English tradition, however, was more sporadic than the Scottish. Southey's study, The Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets (1831), exploited the interest generated by Hogg's success to profile 'certain low and untaught rhymers' from the seventeenth century on.

These include the 'water poet' John Taylor (who died by suicide, by drowning like Tannahill), Ann Yeardsley the Bristol milkwoman, the ploughboy clergyman Stephen Duck, and Southey's own servant protegé, John Jones. Rayner Unwin, in The Rural Muse (1954), claimed that 'the English peasant-poet sings in a distinctly minor key' compared to the Scottish autodidact. However, Southey's group deserve the positive reappraisal they have received from H. Gustav Klaus in The Literature of Labour (1985).<sup>26</sup>

Cunningham and Tannahill shared a frame of reference which placed them firmly within an autodidactic tradition of writing, within Scotland and beyond. While, in some respects, they were creatively limited by being typecast as peasant poets, they gained creative confidence from their predecessors and contemporaries within the autodidactic tradition, especially from Hogg. The following chapters continue to explore the dualistic tradition of autodidacticism in Scottish literature, manifested by diverse poets from various backgrounds.



## Notes

1. The Cunningham and Hogg families were close friends. Allan Cunningham's fiancée, Jean Walker, stayed with Hogg's brother in law James Gray in 1811 and Hogg saw Walker off, to join Cunningham in London, from Leith. James Cunningham's daughter Jane (later Mrs McBryde) lived for three years with the Hoggs at Altrive and Allan Cunningham cared for Hogg's nephew in London. Hogg paid Cunningham the ultimate autodidactic compliment of being '"the very model of Burns"'. See David Hogg, The Life of Allan Cunningham, With selections from his Works and Correspondence, (Dumfries, Edinburgh and London, 1875), pp.5, 30-40. Thomas Mouncey Cunningham (1766-1834), Allan's brother, was a self taught poet whose 'The Hills o' Gallowa' is in James Hogg, The Forest Minstrel; A Selection of Songs, Adapted to the most favourite Scottish Airs, (Edinburgh and London, 1810), pp.65-67.
2. Qtd David Hogg, pp.33-41.
3. Qtd Peter Cunningham, ed, The Poems and Songs of Allan Cunningham, (London, 1847), pp.xi-xii.
4. Qtd David Hogg, pp.79, 83. See too Peter Cunningham, p.xix.
5. R.H. Cromek, Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song, (London, 1810), pp.xxi-xxvi; 56; xxx-xxxi; See Frank Miller, 'Allan Cunningham's Contributions to Cromek's "Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song."', (Annan, 1923), rpt from Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society, 12 Nov 1920. Allan Cunningham letter to James Cunningham, qtd David Hogg, p.58.
6. Cromek, p.13.
7. See Thomas Murray, The Literary History of Galloway, 2nd ed (Edinburgh, Dublin and London, 1832), on

- Cunningham's 'detestable' effrontery, p.274. John Wilson, 'Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 6, 1819, pp.314-21.
8. See Cromek, pp.244, 230, 247; Qtd David Hogg, pp.104-07; Peter Cunnningham, p.xxxi. Cunningham's 'Gyre Carle' influenced Hogg's, 'The Gyre Caryl', The Poetical Works of James Hogg, 4 vols, (Edinburgh and London, 1822), vol II, pp.167-78. Cunningham tells of the brownie of Liethen Hall in Dumfriesshire, there for three hundred years before leaving for Bodsbeck: this influenced Hogg's The Brownie of Bodsbeck, (Edinburgh and London, 1818), See Cromek pp.332-34. The brownie who helped the howdie to Lady Maxwell of Dalswinton may be Hogg's source for 'Seeking the Houdie', Forget-Me-Not, (1830), pp.399-413.
  9. See Peter Cunningham, p.xxviii; David Hogg, pp.165-67; pp.172-73; Allan Cunningham Songs of Scotland, Ancient and Modern, 4 vols, (London, 1825), vol I, pp.6, 240.
  10. See Motherwell, qtd Mary Ellen Brown, 'The Study of Folk Tradition', The History of Scottish Literature, vol 3, ed Douglas Gifford, (Aberdeen, 1988), p.405.
  11. Allan Cunningham, Sir Marmaduke Maxwell, A Dramatic Poem; The Mermaid of Galloway; The Legend of Richard Faulden; and Twenty Scottish Songs, (London, 1822), p.vi, p.iii. All page references, given within the text in parentheses, are to this edition.
  12. See James Hogg, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, 1824, rpt (Oxford, 1981), ed John Carey, p.138.
  13. See Allan Cunningham, The Maid of Elvar, (London, 1832). All page references, given within the text in parentheses, are to this edition.
  14. See 'Letters to Scott', NLS MS 851, f.96; Scott, pompously, told Cunningham on 25th June 1813 that he



would like to remain anonymous as a subscriber:

'there is nothing I dread so much as being supposed to give myself the airs of literary patronage. My secluded life and limited fortune make it impossible for me to support such a character to advantage'.

Scott's help (from songs in 1821 to gaining commissions for Cunningham's eldest sons) was double-edged: equipping his sons for India made Cunningham 'far from rich' and broke his health through overwork. Cunningham did not bear grudges though: in his library (made in 1838 for two thousand books) Cunningham celebrated his 'benefactors' with a picture of Chantrey and a bust of Scott. See D.M. Moir, [delta] Sketches of the Poetical Literature of the Past Half-Century, (Edinburgh, 1851), pp.110-11.

15. See 'Small Collections', NLS MS 2257, f.217. Qtd David Hogg, pp.203, 223, 330, 224-25, 209, 266, 278-79.
16. See The Works of Robert Burns; With his Life, ed Allan Cunningham, 8 vols, (London, 1834); 'Miscellaneous Letters. Aikin-Lyttelton', NLS MS 1002, f.75.
17. See David Hogg, pp.303-10 and Cunningham, Poems and Songs, ed Peter Cunningham. A dissenting note, however, is struck in Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, 6 (1832) in an article which notes that although Cunningham, Burns and Hogg: 'are all three Scotch, and all three makers of verse...there the similarity ends', p.249.
18. Robert Tannahill, The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill, ed David Semple, 1874, new ed (Paisley, 1900), 75, 10, 20, 19, xli. All references to Tannahill's Poems are to this edition, given within the text in parentheses.
19. Qtd Tannahill Poems, p.lxi.
20. See the Tannahill manuscripts, 'Robertson MSS', GUL



1/1-52 , f.5.

- 20A. See Robert Tannahill, The Soldier's Return; A Scottish Interlude in Two Acts: with other Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, (Paisley, 1807).
- 20B 'The College Boy' is supposedly based on the marriage, for economic gain, of Young Urquhart of Craigston to Elizabeth Innes, c.1633; it is recorded by Jean Redpath on Song of the Seals, (Kirkintilloch, 1977), Scottish SRCM 160. 'The Lowlands of Holland' is recorded by Anita Best and Pamela Morgan on The Colour of Amber, (St John's, Newfoundland, 1991), ACD 9008.
- 20C Robert Burns, 'What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man', The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, ed James Kinsley, 3 vols, (Oxford, 1968), no.347.
- 21. See 'Robertson MSS', f.10.
- 22. Tannahill allegedly disliked aristocrats: without 'such an antipathy to the society of his superiors in point of rank, information, and learning, he might have enjoyed opportunities for correcting the defects of his education'; see The Works of Robert Tannahill. With Life of the Author, ed Philip A. Ramsay, (London, nd), pp.xxxviii-xxxix.
- 23. See Tannahill, Poems, p.xlix.
- 24. Cunningham, 'Robert Tannahill', Songs, vol I, pp.236-40.
- 25. See Tannahill, Poems, pp.1, lxiii, lxvi-lxvii.
- 26. See Robert Southey, The Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets, 1831, rpt ed J.S. Childers, (London, 1825); Rayner Unwin, The Rural Muse, (London, 1954), pp.115, p.9. H. Gustav Klaus, The Literature of Labour. Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing, (Brighton, 1985).

## Chapter Ten: The Educated Autodidact

'With the inmates of his father's house dwelt intelligence, cheerful content, and piety; and in this scene of the domestic virtues Leyden was taught to read by his grandmother, under whom he soon acquired a familiar acquaintance with the events recorded in the sacred volume, the historical passages in the Old Testament having first attracted his attention. His taste for reading, once kindled, spread like the moorburn on his native heaths, first over the books in his father's possession, and then to the shelves of the neighbours. Some popular works on Scottish history supplied the inspiring recital of the deeds of Wallace and Bruce, which, beyond their immediate benefit, have continued as examples through succeeding ages to cherish sentiments of independence in every generous bosom. Among the other productions with which he was greatly delighted, have been enumerated the poems of Sir David Lindsay, Paradise Lost, Chapman's translation of Homer and the Arabian Night's Entertainments.'

('John Leyden', Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen, ed Robert Chambers, rev Thomas Thomson, (London, 1875), vol IV.)



The label of autodidact was difficult to transcend, even for 'peasants' who were formally educated. Hogg's pervasive image as the 'Ettrick Shepherd' was a powerful factor in creating this situation. In the post-Hogg critical climate, all poets of peasant origin were classified as autodidacts. This chapter focuses on three peasant poets who attended Scottish universities: the 'educated autodidacts' John Leyden (1775-1811), William Tennant (1784-1848) and Henry Scott Riddell (1798-1870). All three poets were influenced by Hogg, and contributed to the developing Scottish autodidactic tradition.

The peasant upbringing of John Leyden, like Hogg's in the Borders, fascinated his contemporaries. Scott's 'Biographical Memoir' in the Edinburgh Annual Register (1811) noted: 'Leyden used often to impute the extraordinary facility which he possessed in the acquisition of languages to the unassisted exercises of his juvenile years'. The Rev James Morton, in 1819, profiled the poet's childhood at Ruberslaw, 'a wild pastoral spot' where he learnt his Bible and oral traditions. In the typical way of autodidactics, Leyden faced real obstacles in his quests for knowledge. As an eleven year old boy, he crossed deep snow, to borrow a blacksmith's Arabian Nights. He even rode an ass provided by his father to school, despite fearing that he would be ridiculed, when bribed with a copy of the Dictionarum Octo



linguarum of Ambrogio Calepino (1435-1511). The poet's boyhood reading included autodidactic standards: histories of the Wallace and Bruce for patriotic reasons, and Chapman's Homer for bardic sustenance.<sup>1</sup>

Leyden's biographers, while acknowledging his learning, stress the poet's typically peasant behaviour. Scott, for instance, presents Leyden as a wild figure when he arrived at Edinburgh University in 1790. Leyden, having spent only three winters at school, supplemented by Latin and Greek tuition from the Rev James Duncan at Denholm, was unfamiliar with academic environments. However, Scott's account of Leyden's appearance in Andrew Dalzell's Greek class at least partly depends on autodidactic stereotypes:

The rustic, yet undaunted manner, the high harsh tone of his voice, joined to the broad provincial accent of Teviotdale, discomposed on this first occasion the gravity of the professor, and totally routed that of the students. But it was soon perceived that these uncouth attributes were joined to qualities which commanded respect and admiration.<sup>2</sup>

As a student Leyden is often portrayed, after Hogg in the Noctes Ambrosianae, as a contemplative buffoon. He studied Divinity, joining groups like the Literary Society and Academy of Physics. His friends included William

Erskine, Thomas Brown (later Professor of Moral Philosophy), and Francis Jeffrey. Morton includes romantic accounts of Leyden's first summer holiday at home, which included attempts (like Hogg's and Clare's al fresco studies) to read in a 'rude sort of bower, partly scooped out of the earth, and covered with ferns and rushes'. In 1792 Leyden became a University tutor and, during the long vacations of 1794 and 1795, used the library at Cavers House, studying in the quiet Cavers church. James Douglas' Traditions and Recollections of Dr Leyden, (1875), portrays Leyden as a practical joker: the locals thought he practised black arts. Morton prefers to depict the poet as 'pious', a quality generally expected from autodidacts who were usually seen as passive.<sup>3</sup>

The poet's self-image was rather different. In a letter to Heber of 1803, Leyden is open and even proud of his autodidactic learning, implying that self-reliance could be a virtue rather than a handicap. Moreover, confounding critical assumptions that he had endured an impoverished upbringing, Leyden placed himself a little above the lowest social grouping:

Since the age of fifteen my studies and researches have been carried on at my own expense. I have hitherto educated my second brother, and have contrived to make some arrangements for him to prosecute his studies.... My father for a peasant is what we



may call a moderate man neither poor nor rich, but besides a brother very young I have likewise a sister who is still very young, but being placed in that critical situation between the lower and middle classes of society, I am anxious she should not become extremely dependent.... My father whose abilities are great either as a farmer or steward is still superior as a man, and having in my infancy imbibed from him not only my morals but the stamina of my opinions on general subjects, I confess the recollection of him has always reduced the character of Socrates in my estimation.<sup>4</sup>

Plainly, this autodidact valued the education of the homestead more highly than did the average critic.

Leyden, as an educated autodidact, did of course enjoy some advantages over his compeers. Given his academic distinctions, he was more readily welcomed into polite society and patronage circles. Robert Anderson, the editor of the Edinburgh Literary Magazine (Leyden had published in this from 1795 onwards), introduced Leyden to distinguished members of the Literati, including the linguist Alexander Murray (himself from a poor Borders family). In 1796, with Dalzell's help, Leyden became tutor to Campbell of Fairfield's sons for three years. He attended Medical lectures and, in 1797, accompanied his charges to St Andrews University. There he befriended academics like Professor Hunter, but belittled the social



circles of St Andrews: 'Edinburgh for learning & Aberdeen for Masonry, but for good-eating, drinking and playing cards St Andrews has no rivals'. Like Hogg and Cunningham, Leyden was keenly aware of distinctions between social worth and inherent rank; in St Andrews, he encountered 'the irksomeness and insignificance of a Company who thought themselves great'.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps prejudices against peasants are reflected in the judgements of Leyden when he became a licensed preacher in 1798. His delivery was considered to be, 'not graceful, and the tones of his voice, when extended so as to be heard by a large audience, were harsh'. He had a certain curiosity value, as an educated autodidact, but this had to be balanced against the notion he was coarse. However, with the Duchess of Gordon and Lady Charlotte Campbell: 'notwithstanding the repulsive sharpness of his native accent, and upon most occasions, his almost studied neglect of fashionable manners, [Leyden] made himself highly agreeable'.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps Leyden's marginal status, as an educated autodidact poet, fostered the suspicions which prevented him from obtaining a religious living. Despite Scott's intervention, Leyden was considered to be unorthodox. There may, too, have been some truth in the belief that he was not wholly pious. In Bombay, after Leyden's death, Erskine recalled the poet as being 'on the brink of heresy...startling the bigots by bold positions'. In

private, Leyden mocked orthodoxy. In 1798, for instance, he wrote to his close friend Thomas Brown:

I have not advanced so far in clericality as to think that every heterodox son of a \_\_\_\_\_ church or state, ought not only to be hanged drawn and quartered but to be offered a whole burnt-offering to the God of Mercy as our good brethren and allies of Portugal do--therein overstepping by two or three inches over trusty lieges of the town suburbs and dependencies of St Andrews.... as my cloak was certainly beginning to look threadbare what did I but wheel dexterously round to the right alias the wrong side and for a mantle large and broad close-wrapt me in religion. Viz. In one of my trial discourses preached in the open church, I commenced a brilliant cannonade on modern atheism which had a glorious effect. The Presb<sup>y</sup>t were taken by surprize [sic], and I had at the clerical dinner, my health drunk with thanks for my excellent doctrines!--excellent doctrines! mark that! Who will now doubt the orthodoxy of John Leyden. So no more of your soul and body infidel Atheist but plain John Leyden the orthodox.

The next year, writing to Erskine, Leyden described his own preaching in Ratho. The educated peasant poet, paradoxically, had failed to satisfy a genuinely rural congregation:

How long do you think I continued--56 minutes in my lecture and 50 minutes in my sermon--I could not believe that it was half an hour. I made the people both hunger and thirst after the word was spoken. An honest farmer to whom I had formerly been introduced told me quietly that I was too many for him, and he would not venture a second time upon one of my sermons.'

Leyden, as an educated man of rural origins, seems to have been unable to fit comfortably into either polite or rustic circles.

As an educated autodidact, mixing among supposedly polite circles, Leyden was in an uncomfortably marginalised position. His lack of success as a minister was, perhaps, compounded by an affair which I have discovered between Leyden and Janet, Thomas Brown's sister. To her lover she was Jesse, and sometimes Jane. The relationship, with his social superior, was initially clandestine. In February 1801 he wrote to Janet (she was then staying with Brown at Balmaclellan Manse) of the 'chagrining situation of one who writes to the person who is dearest to him without any hope of an answer'. He resolved to make his fortune in India, after gaining an M.D. in 1802 through intensive study. 'To Aurellia', bids a spiritual 'long adieu' to Janet, on leaving Scotland. There are suggestions this was a physical relationship. Waiting to leave for India from Portsmouth in 1803,



'agitated' Leyden thought of 'nothing but clasping you in my arms, all the tedious & lonely night', and 'I am happy to think no persecution can possibly arise from your own family.... You are mine soul & body'. Janet did not write to Leyden in India, to his great distress. The thought 'of hastening our union', as Leyden wrote in 1805, had sustained him.<sup>8</sup>

In a colonial setting, Leyden seems to have at least partially transcended his typecasting as an educated autodidact, although he was noted for peasant quirks. From his arrival in Madras in August 1803 Leyden served in various medical and official capacities, from Surgeon and Naturalist, to Professor of Hindustani at Calcutta and, from 1810, Assay Master of the Mint. Latterly he benefited from the patronage of Lord Minto, the Governor General. Leyden travelled widely, writing on local culture and languages. In 1805 he wrote to his father, John Leyden, of having learnt ten new languages; after five more and Chinese 'I mean to stop--at which time I shall nearly be able to speak to any man in the whole world in his own language'. Liver problems, begun in Scotland, and fevers, plagued Leyden; when bedbound, he studied for ten hours daily. Adventures included escaping from the French off Sumatra, recounted in 'Address to my Malay Krees' (pp.166-67). Leyden was part of the expedition to Java in 1811 where he caught a fatal fever, according to oral traditions, by browsing through Oriental

manuscripts. Endearingly, throughout his time in India he had refused to conform to expectations of polite society. In Calcutta, he responded to Colonel Malcolm's advice: "Learn English!" he exclaimed, "no, never; it was trying to learn that language that spoilt my Scotch, and as to being silent, I will promise to hold my tongue, if you will make fools hold theirs"'.<sup>9</sup>

Leyden, in one respect, was typically autodidactic, showing the breadth of interest, and willingness to assimilate new information, which characterised the work of Hogg. However, the depth and detail of his publications outstripped those without access to the finest Scottish libraries. Leyden's publications included A Historical and Philosophical Sketch of the Discoveries and Settlements of the Europeans in Northern and Western Africa (1799), a scholarly edition of the 1548 Complaynt of Scotland (1801), Scottish Descriptive Poems (1802), and a Journal of a Tour in the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland in 1800, edited by James Sinton (1803). He aided Richard Heber in investigating Scottish literature and, like Hogg, did groundwork for Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802-03).

As a collector with a profound knowledge of oral traditions, Leyden's contribution to The Minstrelsy was immense. While he was a constant, and affectionate, correspondent of Scott's, Leyden was also alert to



sanitising aspects of The Minstrelsy. Leyden joked with Heber, shortly before The Minstrelsy's publication:

The Border Ballads, which Scott (in my opinion with some degree of affectation) persists in stiling [sic] Minstrelsy of the Border I have urged the claim of a similar composition Spinstrelsy!! without effect, tho' I think the one not much inferior to the other either in propriety or in affectation.

Drawing on his early grounding in oral traditions, Leyden wrote ballad imitations for The Minstrelsy, reworking Borders legends. They include racy ballad-style pieces like 'The Cout of Keeldar' (pp.73-90) and 'Lord Soulis' (pp.52-72). The latter recounts the traditional tale of the Hermitage noble boiled in lead after a wilfully misunderstood command from the Bruce; this tale is also told in the Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805).<sup>10</sup> Like Hogg, Leyden was profoundly influenced by his experience with The Minstrelsy; the connexion with Scott no doubt encouraged these poets to compose ballad-style pieces.

Showing the enduring influence of orally acquired knowledge on educated autodidacts, Leyden is at his poetic best when working with familiar Borders traditions. Local ingenuity overcomes an aristocratic villain in 'Lord Soulis'. Assisted by his spirit helper, Old Redcap, not 'lance and arrow, sword and knife' nor 'forged steel, nor



hempen band' can harm Soulis (verses 2-3). However, when he steals the lover of the heir to Branxholm, Soulis is overcome, with the help of Thomas the Rhymer and Michael Scott's 'spae-book'. Thomas discovers ropes of sand can bind Soulis, but Redcap foils attempts to make these. After consulting the book again, the macabre solution is found; a brass pot is heated on a circle of nine stones:

They roll'd him up in a sheet of lead,  
A sheet of lead for a funeral pall;  
They plunged him in the cauldron red,  
And melted him, lead, bones and all.  
(verse 60)

Leyden, at least in his early career, seems to have been willing to co operate with peasant poet stereotyping. Certainly, he moves easily between the supernaturalism of 'Lord Soullis' and pious, nationalistic pieces like 'On the Sabbath Morning' (p.144), after 'The Cottar's Saturday Night'. Both styles, as has been seen above, were associated with autodidacts. Scenes of Infancy (1808), developed from 'Ruberslaw' in the Edinburgh Magazine (1795), eulogises Teviotdale (pp.295-415). Natural beauties of 'SWEET scenes of youth' are considered, from 'tiny heath-flowers' to the 'russett moor'. Local legends are recounted with ease: combats of Scotts and Douglasses; Eugenia's son (a pilgrim's child like Eustace Graeme) stolen by an eagle and dashed into the sea. Scott's

literary prowess is praised as is Thomson's. Covenanters are recalled: 'Cold are the selfish hearts, that would controul / The simple peasant's grateful glow of soul'; Leyden appreciated such 'reverend faith' (III.11.269-70).

Leyden was, however, equally comfortable in more 'polite' pieces, such as the deeply melancholic 'To the Yew' (p.17). He manages, in elegaic pieces like this, to combine formal competence with enduring loyalties to his rustic upbringing:

Now more I love thee, melancholy Yew,  
     Whose still green leaves in solemn silence  
                                 wave  
 Above the peasant's red unhonour'd grave.  
                                 (11.5-7)

In complete contrast, there are pieces of lighter weight like 'Epistle to a lady, From a Dancing Bear. Sent to Lady \_\_\_\_\_, after dancing with her in 1810' (pp.130-35). Recalling Burns's convention of canine allegories for autodidacts (discussed in Chapter Two), this treats social ineptness with humour, without conceding priority to the practised 'simper' of 'beaux and foplings'.

A far cry from the clumsiness often associated with autodidacts, Leyden is elegant in translating diverse languages: Latin, Greek, Persian, Arabic, Portuguese, Malay, Bengali, Canara. Given his formal learning, Leyden enjoyed a level of skill, inaccessible to the wholly



peasant poet, of using translation as a poetic springboard inspired, perhaps, by his early reading of Chapman.

'Greenland Elegy. A Father on the Death of his son' (pp.126-27) imaginatively enters an exotic realm of polar bears (which may have influenced Hogg in his polar tale of the 'Surpassing Adventures of Allan Gordon').<sup>11</sup> 'Song of a Telinga Dancing Girl. Addressed to an European Gentleman, in the company of some European ladies, in 1803' shows the impossibility of love between natives and colonisers (pp.155-56). This was not included in the 1858 Poems and Ballads. Classical and Scottish elements combine in 'The Dream, from the Latin of J. Leoch. Addressed to Drummond of Hawthornden' (pp.199-204). The lucid translation treats an appropriate theme for an 'inspired' peasant. Drummond is asked to explain a dream of Venus (later invoked in Hogg's 'Russiadde') bearing the poet to 'sweet Tempe's vale'. She gracefully commands him to pay homage.

Like Hogg, though, Leyden enjoyed experimenting in longer narratives, based on Scottish tradition. For instance, 'Ode To Phantasy. Written 1796' (pp.1-11) draws, darkly, on the visionary poetry of Ramsay and Burns. This verges on parody. This narrator rejects 'the lark's clear thrilling note' and demands: 'Let me hear the raven croak, / And her sooty pinions flap' (ll.7-8). The visionary seeks places of fairies and phantom funerals beside the 'unhallowed grave' of a suicide. Similar to



the figure of Mabel in Cunningham's Sir Marmaduke, the speaker satirises Gothic excesses in novels such as Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) or Matthew Lewis' The Monk (1796). Incidentally, Leyden's 'The Elfin King' (pp.29-39) first appeared in Lewis' Tales of Wonder (1801):

Or, in some haunted Gothic hall  
 Whose roof is moulder'd, damp, and hoar,  
 Where figur'd tapestry shrouds the wall,  
 And murder oft has dy'd the floor;  
 With frantic fancies sore opprest....  
 A spirit then seems the floor to trace,  
 With hollow-sounding, measur'd pace.

(verse 7)

Three calls presage the appearance of a 'visage grim'. Apocalyptically, in a more gruesome version of Hogg's The Pilgrims of the Sun, the writer travels with Phantasy around the earth and witnesses the last trumpet call. While 'frightful shrieks the welkin rive', fortunately, 'I, with rapture, wake alive'. After the 'dream of life be o'er' then 'I awake to sleep no more' (verse 10-13).

Despite the ambitious nature, and imaginative range, of Leyden's work, critics failed to see him as anything other than a limited autodidact. The poet resented this immensely, writing to Scott in 1805 of 'the critics who have mangled me furiously'. The Scots Magazine (1806)

referred to 'Scenes of Infancy' as 'a delightful poem' but implied Leyden's limitations as an autodidact when he inappropriately used terms like 'deplore'. After Leyden's death, the Gentleman's Magazine of May 1812 acknowledged the typically peasant 'inspiration' of his work; as an educated autodidact Leyden was: 'Nowhere laboured, studied, or affected, he writes in a stream of natural eloquence, which shews the entire predominance of his emotion and art'. Leyden, though, lacked 'unity of design', typically associated with autodidacts. Hogg admired Leyden as a Borderer, 'With dauntless heart'. Scott, who mentioned Leyden's death in The Lord of the Isles (1815, canto IV), summed up the peasant poet's achievement in a particularly patronising way:

he was sometimes a little too ambitious in introducing scientific allusions or terms of art, which embarrassed instead of exalting the simplicity of his descriptions. But when he is contented with a pure and natural tone of feeling and expressions, his poetical powers claim the admiration and sympathy.

Further, 'An external manner, certainly not agreeable, and a disposition to egotism, were his only defects', although these were 'trivial' compared to that 'rare combination of virtues, learning and genius'. In The Bombay Courier John Malcolm, now a general, noted 'he rose by the power of



native genius from the humblest origin to a very distinguished rank in the literary world'.<sup>12</sup>

William Erskine, in the address to the Bombay Literary Society quoted above, made much of Leyden's peasant descent: 'Perhaps a mind that felt the full pride of talents, would indulge more vanity in such an origin than in the most princely extraction'. The sentiment is well meant, but should be compared with Leyden's horror at his background. He advised his parents in 1798 not to send his younger brother to harvest: 'That kind of business utterly ruins a literary man and destroys the tone of his mind.... I found to my cost that it is no joke.' Still, critics found overcoming obstacles ennobling. The association with Scott, too, became dominant in Leyden's portrayal. In 1833 Cunningham found the 'Mermaid' and 'Keeldar' comparable with Scott's best work but, with some justification, noticed a lack of 'original nerve' in 'Scenes of Infancy'.<sup>13</sup>

By the time of the republication of Leyden's works in 1858, the poet's considerable achievements were superseded by the desire to acclaim him as a regional Scottish autodidact. The Teviotdale Record portrayed Leyden as a local son, including the (by now standard) anecdotes of his early thirst for knowledge. During the inauguration of the Leyden monument in 1861, the poet was remembered for his immense scholarship and compositions loved in his 'locality'. The Galashiels Telegraph of 1896 identified



an inspirational figure for the Young Men's Literary Society. In 1903 J.H. Millar found 'good' qualities in contributions to The Minstrelsy, but little else. By 1909, for Florence MacCunn, Leyden was a minor member of Scott's circle: 'A son of the soil' who 'drew his wiry frame and indomitable character from peasant ancestors'. Paul Scott, in Blackwood's (1978), thought Leyden's poetry 'trite and sentimental. To modern taste, it is unreadable.... in English, in a poetic diction of the most tired and hackneyed kind, and this by a man who insisted on speaking Scots'.<sup>14</sup> Such judgements, shaped by expectations of educated autodidacts, failing to take account of the range of Leyden's work, are unfair to the stylistically diverse poet.

Similar comments could be applied to the treatment of Scotland's second great educated autodidact: William Tennant. Like Leyden, Tennant was a hugely able linguist. The son of a small-scale merchant and farmer in Anstruther, Tennant was educated at the Burgh school and raised in the Burgher religious sect. He attended St Andrews University from 1799 but, due to a downturn in family finances, was compelled to leave in 1801 without a degree. The young poet initially found work as his elder brother's clerk. Then, following the delayed success of Anster Fair (1812), he secured a position, from 1813, as schoolmaster in Dunnino. Tennant taught himself to be proficient in several languages including Hebrew, Arabic,

Persian and Hindustani. From 1834 he was Professor of Oriental languages at St Andrews.

Despite this imposing academic background, critical attention focused on Tennant's social origins, stressing his early experiences of 'peasant' poverty. In 1814 Jeffrey paired Tennant with the established autodidact Hogg, in consecutive reviews of The Queen's Wake and the second edition of Anster Fair. Paradoxically invoking comparisons Tennant had made himself in the introduction, to writers such as Ariosto, the critic noted the Scottish poet's lack of finesse. Jeffrey drew attention to Anster Fair's 'enthusiastic gaiety--a certain intoxication and nimbleness of fancy which pours out a profusion of images without much congruity or selection'. He added that the book was more 'lively than graceful'. Tennant's dwelling in peripheral Fife (a joke location for Hogg in 'The Witch of Fife'), and his physical lameness, seemed to enhance his autodidactic status. The critic indicates, subtly varying the peasant poet theme, that Tennant was a particularly educated autodidact:

Mr Tennant is a kind of prodigy as well as Mr Hogg--and his book would be entitled to notice as a curiosity, even if its pretensions were much smaller than they are on the score of its literary merit.

Born in a very humble condition of life, and disabled, by the infirmities of his person, from earning a subsistence by his labour, the



future poet of mirth would probably have perished in helpless penury in any other country of the world. In Scotland, however, education is not very costly,--and no condition is so low, as to exempt a parent from the duty of bestowing it, even upon the most numerous offspring. The youth was early initiated, therefore, in the mysteries of reading and writing;--and after passing some years, as we understand, in the situation of clerk to a little merchant in one of the small towns of Fife, was at length promoted to the dignity of parish schoolmaster in one of the most dreary and thinly peopled parishes in the same district,--where he has ever since remained, in unbroken cheerfulness and measureless content, on an income of less than thirty pounds a-year. In his low and lonely cottage, in this cheerless seclusion,--with no literary society,--with the most scanty materials for study, and the most dim and distant anticipations of literary distinction, he not only made himself a distinguished, [*sic*] proficient in classical learning before his twenty-fifth year, but acquired a familiar acquaintance with the languages and literature of modern Europe,--and cheered his solitude with the composition of such verses as now lie before us. Without any reference to the condition of their author, we have already said, that they are remarkable for spirit and originality;--considered in connexion with his history, we think they are altogether surprising.<sup>15</sup>



Hogg strongly, if mischievously, objected to Jeffrey's patronising observations, refuting the notion of Tennant as autodidact and, simultaneously, insulting the reviewer:

He committed a most horrible blunder, in classing Mr Tenant [sic] the author of Anster Fair, and me together, as two self-taught geniuses; whereas there was not one point of resemblance--Tenant being a better educated man than the reviewer himself, was not a little affronted at being classed with me.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps Hogg resented potential usurpers to his title of national peasant poet, as Burns may have done with Janet Little (as discussed in Chapter Two).

To be fair, there is some validity to Jeffrey's pairing of Hogg and Tennant. Tennant exploited peasant poet conventions in the 1814 edition of Anster Fair considered by the Edinburgh Review. In an apparently plain-speaking preface, the poet poses as an ingenu, subject to the 'diffidence and anxiety' of 'every young author'. Ironically, he adds the erudite qualifications of the educated autodidact, identifying the title piece as being in the 'ottava rima' of Boccaccio, claiming kinship with Fairfax and Spenser. A barbed coda is, perhaps, for the critics: 'In a humorous Poem, partly descriptive of Scottish manners, it was impossible to avoid using

Scottish words. These, however, will, it is hoped, to be found not too many'. Jeffrey was, moreover, correct to indicate creative affinities between Hogg and Tennant. Both share, for instance, an anarchic worldview related to their familiarity with oral tradition. Anster Fair, like Hogg's finest compositions, exhibits a sophistication in mingling oral and literary traditions which was broadly neglected by contemporary critics.<sup>17</sup>

Set in the reign of James V Anster Fair is, on one level, an oral-style humorous tale of love secured by triumphing in contests. A Fife beauty, Maggie Lauder, is wooed by diverse suitors and ends betrothed to a Borderer, Rob the Ranter. Anster Fair could even be considered as an 'origin legend' for the tune 'Maggie Lauder'; the writer encourages this interpretation as Rob reveals he learnt the tune from fairies, to win Maggie. On another level it is a celebratory romp in the tradition of Scottish holiday poems like 'Christis Kirk on the Green', 'Hallowe'en' and 'Leith Races'. The narrator claims to be inspired by James I, 'the poet of the "Quhair"', and draws attention to indigenous artists like 'Davie Lindsay' and 'ballad-singing women' (Canto II, I: LXIII-LXV).

Within his mock-epic frame, the writer postures as a pompous bard of (at times) limited abilities. There are resemblances to Henryson's narratorial persona of The Testament of Cresseid. Witness Tennant's self-important opening for Anster Fair, ineptly rhyming the heroine's



name (with an implicit pun between the 'Anster fair' Maggie and the event):

While some of Troy and pettish heroes sing,  
 And some of Rome and chiefs of pious fame,  
 And some of men that thought it harmless thing  
 To smite off heads in Mars's bloody game,  
 And some of Eden's gardens gay with spring,  
 And Hell's dominions terrible to name,--  
 I sing a theme far livelier, happier, gladder,  
 I sing of ANSTER FAIR, and bonny MAGGIE  
 LAUDER. (Canto I, I).

It is not unlikely that Tennant may be poking fun at the supposedly more 'educated' members of the Scottish Literati. Then again the narrator--perhaps satirising autodidactic sensibilities--denies the rumour he is merely a 'silly poetaster'. He asserts 'my ass-race' is evidence that, 'I'm Homeric stuff--ay, every inch a poet' (Canto IV, I). There is an appealing informality here. Every canto opens with a direct statement. III, for instance, observes: 'I wish I had a cottage snug' from which to greet the 'bright-gown'd morning' and worship 'God who garnish'd out a world so fair and bright' (Canto III, I).

Like the elaborate narratives of Hogg and Cunningham, Anster Fair is carefully constructed. Three main plot elements are intertwined. Along with the main storyline, there is a sub-plot dealing with the separation and reuniting of the lovers' helpers, the Pucks. Then there



is a tale within a tale of scorned Charly Melvil and his revenge on his errant lover (aided by the Pucks). The last is presented within the context of a storytelling contest (perhaps suggesting the idea of this framework to Hogg for his 1813 volume The Queen's Wake). Anster Fair is rounded off neatly as, at Maggie's marriage supper, the Pucks reveal they were key actors in all three stories.

These related plots allow Tennant to display his creative agility. As an man with an autodidactic background, and a formal education, Tennant did have some genuine literary advantages. These include the skill at managing complex plots which, as has been seen, is characteristic of the Scottish autodidactic tradition. In the contests, especially, he flirts with epic prototypes in a detailed way which suggests his classical learning. The first event, an ass race, grotesquely parodies the chariot race which opens the funeral games of Patroklos in Iliad XXIII. Just as Athene intervened in this prototype contest, Tennant's fairies allow Rob to gain a victory. The losers are pelted with 'nauseous rotten eggs' which--with reference to the heroic archer with the long-lasting wound encountered in the Odyssey and Sophocles' Philoktetes--are compared to 'the dribbling pus of Philoctetes' wound' (Canto III, LIII-LV). The second event departs further from its heroic prototypes, being a sack race where competitors are compared to mummies from Cairo or a 'troop of frogs' (Canto IV, X, XXI). Rob again

defeats his rivals, including a cheating Edinburgh advocate and again the losers are pelted with eggs (Canto IV, CLI-XLVI). Before the third contest, Rob's fellow competitors have their instruments destroyed by a celestial 'globe of fire' and the field is open for the Ranter to perform a compelling dance tune (Canto IV, LVI-LXVII).

Tennant's skill in producing plausible, oral-style tales--and providing a verse anticipation of 'Wandering Willie's Tale' (Redgauntlet, 1824)--is apparent in the final single-participant display. Having won three times Rob speaks only for self-aggrandisement. In his story the doubly fictional Susan Scott, like Maggie Lauder, is courted by a 'mob of suitors' (Canto V, XIX). Scott is beautiful but corrupt, described, in a reference back to the defeated contestants, as 'a rotten egg inclos'd in golden shell' (Canto V, XIX). Her uncle and guardian, Michael Scott, is a traditional-style terror figure, surrounded by demons. Here, perhaps, Tennant is drawing attention to the claims of Balwearie, in his native Fife, to have been the birthplace of the wizard Sir Michael Scott (a figure immortalised as a Borderer by Scott in The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) as later by Hogg in The Three Perils of Man of 1822). As Charly Melvil of Carnbee woos Susan with his wealth a bull attacks the couple (a situation explored by Hogg in his 'Marvellous Doctor').<sup>18</sup> Although Susan escapes, Melvil's nose is torn off. She later mocks the disfigured Carnbee, resolving to marry



another rich suitor, Newark, instead. However, Tommy and Mrs Puck help the jilted Melvil, by restoring his nose and advising the maligned lover to use Michael Scott's magic stick against the sinning family. At Susan's wedding, Michael is transformed into a hare; his 'dainty head, with learning so replete' shrunken into animal form (Canto V, LXXXI-LXXIII). Tennant emphasises the traditional flavour of his fable by stating that 'Wieland gives to one of his Fairy Tales a catastrophe somewhat similar' (p.193).

The poet demonstrates a familiarity with formal English verse styles while simultaneously manifesting his affection for the East Neuk (paralleling Hogg's well developed regional loyalties to the Borders). Fife details enhance elevated allusions in Anster Fair:

The saffron-elbow'd Morning up the slope  
                     Of heav'n canaries in her jewell'd shoes,  
 And throws o'er Kelly-law's sheep-nibbled top  
                     Her golden apron dripping kindly dew;  
 And never, since she first began to hop  
                     Up Heav'n's blue causeway, of her beams  
   profuse,  
 Shone there a dawn so glorious and so gay,  
 As shines the merry dawn of ANSTER Market-day.  
   (Canto III, II)

An inspired exponent of Gregory Smith's 'Caledonian antizysygy', Tennant enjoys juxtaposing unlikely elements. Further instances include 'ANSTER'S turnip-bearing vales'



coupled with 'Fairylond's mirac'lous show' (Canto I, VIII).

As in much work within the Scottish autodidactic tradition, a large part of Anster Fair's success is due to Tennant's lightly drawn, albeit idiosyncratic, characters, interweaving oral and literary allusions. Maggie, compared to 'the Morning's blithesome star', with an affectionate allusion to the Hogg of 'The Chaldee Manuscript', attracts the adoration of 'The Chaldee shepherd' (Canto III, verse XIII). Like Hogg's later heroines Queen Hynde (1825) and Margaret of Tales of the Wars of Montrose (1835), Maggie charms by 'the very waving of her arm' (Canto III, l.111). She is at once sanctified and dangerous: her face 'with Heav'n's own roses shone', yet with such 'a thrilling, killing, keen regard--/ May Heav'n from such a look preserve each tender bard!' (Canto III, XV, XVIII). Tennant's Maggie, with her unearthly beauty, may have offered inspiration for Hogg's Kilmeny, in The Queen's Wake, a year later. Maggie is besieged, like Penelope, by a 'pack' of grotesque suitors from the 'powder'd wight' Norman Ray to the 'bookish squire' Cunningham of Barns, with his warty nose and 'rotten breath' (Canto I, XVI-XX). In contrast there is Rob, likened to 'a trim bridegroom' or 'god in bloom'. The Ranter is of 'good degree', wearing 'the flashy Lincoln green' associated with the otherworld. In pseudo-chivalric style, he rides an ass of comically overdone





literary traditions. Tennant presents a comprehensive social gathering at his fair, with elements drawn from the golden age of a thriving oral culture (as presented by Ossian, Burns and Hogg), as well as less savoury elements of peasant life. The Anster fairgoers include 'horny-knuckled kilted Highlandman', Borderers ('Avow'd freebooters') and, from further afield, Scandinavians brave 'krakens'. Local worthies include squires--'huffy' or 'kindly'--their lackies and the 'small-bellied hound' (perhaps equating dogs, as Burns did, with the patronised). Fife peasants are portrayed with compassion and empathy, from 'plowmen, in their coats of hodden gray' to 'bare-foot lasses' (see Canto II, XXXIV-LXXII). This is not to suggest that Tennant, who had seen poverty at close hand, glamourises peasants. His sturdy rustics are balanced against the equally characteristic Fife figures of Dysart miners: 'subterranean men of colour dun' who are 'Cimmerian.... / Gloomy as soot' (Canto II, XXVI).

Tennant's resentment of literary prejudices is evident in his portrait of Edinburgh 'lean-cheek'd tetchy critics', (Canto II, L-LII), as well as the satirical mention of a (presumably peasant) poet with a 'lore-manured brain' (Canto I, ll.455-56). The privileged educated, exemplified by St Andrews' students, are satirically observed as: 'Backwards they scale the steps of honest Plato's ladder' (Canto II, XIII). The writer ironically displays his learning, as an educated



autodidact, in a note to the last remark, referring the reader to 'Plato. Conviv. tom. iii. page 211 of Serrani's Edit' (p.42).

Despite the showpiece qualities of Anster Fair, reactions were mixed. Compartmentalised as an autodidact, Tennant was both appreciated for his achievements, and dismissed as second rate. To 'Delta' (D.M. Moir), in retrospect, Anster Fair was one of the most 'rich and varied' productions of 1812 (along with Childe Harold, Rokeby, The Isle of Palms and The Queen's Wake, the last actually 1813). Drawing attention to Tennant's highly marginal status, as an 'almost self-taught genius', Moir highlights the fact that he considered this educated autodidact to be a bard of Nature's Making:

Tennant's first was, beyond all comparison, also his best poem. The merit of 'Anster Fair' consists in its lively effervescence of animal spirits, and in the various copiousness of its imagery, drawn alike from the gay and the sententious, from the classical and the romantic, from fancy and from observation. There is a good deal of minute painting throughout, evidently after nature, and in several places it rises not only to the dignity and elevation of true poetry, but possesses one image at least, which borders on the sublime.<sup>18</sup>

Even educated autodidacts, it seems, were subject to the critical decision to privilege compositions, by peasants, which dealt with traditional themes in apparently unthreatening ways. Although Moir is right to distinguish Anster Fair as Tennant's greatest work, his other compositions also deserve attention.

Tennant's John Balliol, An Historical Drama. In Five Acts (1825), for instance, is a lengthy parallel to Hogg's Royal Jubilee (1822); it is a royal, if not royalist, play written from a peasant's perspective (see the discussion of the Royal Jubilee in Chapter Six).<sup>19</sup> The reader is left wondering whether Edward's violent invasion is being equated with the recent cultural plundering of Scotland by a royal visitor from the South, in 1822. As in the drama of Hogg and Cunningham, Tennant makes the supernatural a strong feature: there is an Ossianic 'Seer', and (sometimes ludicrous) omens such as 'twenty ghosts, in winding-sheets' appearing on the steeple at St Monan's (Act III, Scene V). Again like Hogg, Tennant has a great deal of pageantry: 'ten thousand nobles' honour the unworthy Balliol as King (Act III Scene I). In contrast to Balliol (a weak, inconsequential leader swayed like Shakespeare's anti-hero Macbeth by the counsel of a woman, here his mother) Bruce makes an extraordinary noble hero, with national pride in Scotland's 'plough-boys' (Act III, Scene I). The writer's regional loyalties (paralleling Hogg, Cunningham and Leyden's feelings for the Borders)



are evident as Fife is presented defying Balliol.

A well developed sense of regional loyalty does seem to be characteristic of all autodidacts. Tennant's symbiotic relationship with Fife is evident in The Thane of Fife (1822) which trades on the regionally-focussed success of Anster Fair with a tale of the ninth century Danish invasion. Unfortunately, as Tennant's biographer Matthew Connolly remarks, this 'is not his Odyssey after his Iliad'. Then there is the St Andrews based Papistry Storm'd; or, the Dingin' Down o' the Cathedral. Ane Poem in Six Sangs (1827). Dedicated to David Lindsay in Latin (to demonstrate or, perhaps, satirise scholarship), Papistry Storm'd is prefaced by a spirited defence of Scots as 'the richest...and the most flexible for humorous purposes, of any dialect of modern Europe'. Contradicting contemporary notions of Scots as regional and debased, Tennant stresses that it is an elevated language associated with 'our pulpits...our tribunals, and...the halls of our nobility'. Moreover, it is the duty of the educated autodidact to expose 'the ears and recollections of our anglicised and prim generation' to the 'terms their forefathers spoke, and jested, and laughed'. Tennant expressed his huge admiration for Dunbar and 'the Chaucer of Scotland', Lindsay, praising 'the facetious strength, fluency and vivacity' of their Scots, and claiming his target of 'Papistry' is a just one, following the illustrious precedent of Knox.<sup>20</sup>



Papistry Storm'd exhibits to an unusually strong degree the religious bias which is characteristic of most Presbyterian autodidacts, and particularly of Tennant's works, contrary to the implications of Maurice Lindsay and Alexander Scott in their selection, The Comic Poems of William Tennant (1989). Other examples include Cardinal Beaton, A Tragedy in Five Acts (1823). The opening lines set a vein of weighty Scots-English which is pursued throughout the piece, and sums up the plot:

I SING the steir, strabush, and strife,  
Whan, bickerin' frae the towns o' Fife,  
Great bangs of bodies, thick and rife,  
                    Gaed to Sanct Androis town,  
And, wi' John Calvin i' their heads,  
And hammers i' their hands and spades,  
Enrag'd at idols, mass, and beads,  
                    Dang the Cathedral down. (11.1-8)

In addition to his explorations of Scottish religious experiences, Tennant was an aficionado of Hebrew poetry. An 'Address' to his Students, of 1843 recommends studying the scriptures in Hebrew as the 'ground-work and foundation' of Christianity, and for 'exhibiting a language, simple, independent, and original'.<sup>21</sup>

In the blank verse Hebrew Dramas ingrained religious notions which are often explored in Hogg's work, such as the idea of an Elect, are evident. The whole,

uncharacteristically, is in stilted English. The last drama, 'The Destruction of Sodom' is particularly vivid, expanding on the account of the city's destruction in Genesis 19: 24, 'Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven'. Something of the dignity of the King James version pervades Tennant's economical account. Through the words of a shepherd (a familiar figure in autodidactic poetry, particularly in the work of Hogg), Tennant describes the city's fall:

All my flocks  
I had collected, and was driving them  
Along, beside the Ellassar gate, when heaven  
Began to thunder, and the fire of God  
Descended from the clouds;--upon the gate,  
Turrets, and ramparts of the city-wall,  
Directly down it fell; the slime-strong gate,  
And rampir'd wall, kiss'd by the heavenly flash,  
Flew up to flame; one moment serv'd t'engird  
The city Sodom with one ring of fire.

As the shepherd recalls the agony of those enclosed, Tennant allows some emotion to be expressed: 'The howl of hopeless anguish,... / Yet ringet hideous in my ears'.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the sophistication, in exploring literary styles and assimilating new information, which is evident in all his works, Tennant's image as naive autodidact persisted. Connolly, who remembered Tennant as town clerk

of their home town, set great store by the writer's achievement in overcoming a humble background:

neither the humble circumstances of Dr. Tennant's birth, nor the difficulties he had to encounter in his early years, could suppress those talents, or subdue that strength of character, with which he was endowed, and by the right use of which he, by the blessing of God, elevated himself from humble life to a position amongst the most distinguished men of his time and country, thereby furnishing a noble example of what early piety, unceasing study, and indomitable perseverance will do to promote one's welfare and prosperity.<sup>23</sup>

An autodidactic framing of Tennant's biography was carefully constructed by Connolly. Anstruther lacked 'lectures and public libraries', but the poet's childhood home was a haven of 'social intercourse and seasonable merriment...and intellectual entertainment'. Tennant's mother, like Hogg's, was possessed of a pawky wit, remarking to a Baillie who complained of losing money, 'ye maun hae had a lang heavy purse when ye began'. Connolly highlights Tennant's idyllic traditional upbringing. Traditional tales and songs 'excited his love of poetry, and perhaps sowed the seeds of his future eminence'. Early influences, apparently, included 'tales of peril and adventure' told by Tennant's uncle, Captain Watson, and local fishermen. Like Leyden, the poet was involved in



boyhood scrapes, from playing truant in an empty hogshead to holding off an irascible smith with his crutches. Connolly completes this picture of an educated autodidact by drawing attention to the poet's time at St Andrews, at the same time that Thomas Chalmers attended. The poet's 'ardour and attention' for study is also mentioned.<sup>24</sup>

Connolly gives an astute account of first reactions to Anster Fair, commenting on the lack of attention the unknown poet suffered in a period dominated by Scott, Wilson and, paradoxically, Hogg: 'it was unlikely...that any space should be permitted to an unpatronised and unpretending son of genius for placing his crutches on the arena of letters'. Noting the 'provincial origin...and perhaps in some degree the startling novelty of manner' which drew attention away from Tennant, a letter is quoted of 1812, from Lord Woodhouselee to the Anstruther publisher, Cockburn. Woodhouselee observed that the then anonymous poet exhibited 'strong original genius'.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps, when it was realised that he was an educated autodidact, Tennant was seen as a dilution of the real thing, exemplified by Hogg, Cunningham and their compeers.

In Chambers' Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen, revised by Thomson (1875), Tennant is classified as an 'accomplished linguist and excellent poet'. Quoting Jeffrey's consideration of Anster Fair, the item draws attention to the writer's progress, against all odds, 'from the lowest to one of the highest grades of

academical distinction'. Patronisingly and unfairly, the article concludes by commenting:

Tennant would have ranked higher as a poet, had he abandoned poetry altogether after his first fortunate hit. It would seem as if he had either poured out all his poetical genius in this one happy attempt, or dried it up in those verbal studies that occupied him wholly.<sup>26</sup>

The notion of the educated autodidact, then, implies mitigated genius: 'studies', according to one school of criticism as least, interfered with natural genius.

The idea of the educated autodidact proved resilient and those labelled as educated autodidacts were, more often than not, compared to Hogg. Even in the late twentieth century parallels were drawn between Tennant and Hogg as autodidacts. In the 1830s the poets engaged in controversy regarding the language of the Psalms of David. Harry D. Watson, considering the event in 1984, could not resist drawing attention to elements which link the poets. His frame of reference maintained peasant poet slants, emphasising their traditional-style knowledge:

Both were of humble origins and from provincial backgrounds and, more importantly, both had had indulgent and lively-minded mothers who from the very first had, even if unconsciously, encouraged their nascent literary fancy.<sup>27</sup>



Hogg was, equally, cited as an inspirational figure by educated autodidacts. James Telfer, the Roxburgh 'Shepherd Poet' and later schoolmaster at Saughtree, Liddesdale, was among those who claimed to have been inspired to write by The Queen's Wake. Henry Scott Riddell (1798-1870), the son of a Dumfriesshire shepherd, memorised many Scottish Pastorals (1801) as a youth. Shanks attributes Riddell's poetic leanings to 'having been thus early brought into contact with his great prototype'. Riddell's publications included The Christian Politician, or the Right Way of Thinking (1844)--a translation of the Gospels of St Matthew into Scots (1855)--and a memoir of Hogg for Hogg's Instructor, but he is best known for his stirringly patriotic 'Scotland Yet'. With the proceeds from 'Scotland Yet', in an intriguing recapitulation of Burns' service for Fergusson, he had constructed a parapet and railing for the Edinburgh Burns monument.<sup>28</sup>

Riddell, despite being educated at various parish schools, by a tutor employed by his father at Langshawburn and, after a legacy stemming from his father's death, at Edinburgh and St Andrews universities, was always considered to be an educated autodidact. He had worked his way up from lamb herd to head shepherd for Scott of Deloraine, subsequently working for Knox of Todrig. Recalling Hogg's relationship with the Laidlaws of Blackhouse, Riddell made contact with Knox's son William,



whose poems included the 'Lonely Hearth'. Like Hogg, Riddell wrote on the hillside. Shanks comments, 'Bred among such scenes, and trained in such a school, the wonder is not so much Riddell became a poet, but that all shepherds should not also be sons of song'.<sup>29</sup>

On the death of his father, Riddell acquired a small inheritance which he spent on attending school at Biggar under Richard Scott, a classical scholar; songs from this period include the well-known 'The Crook and Plaid'. The aspiring writer made personal contact with Hogg and was patronised by the national peasant poet. On the strength of his acquaintance with the Ettrick Shepherd, when Riddell became a divinity student in Edinburgh Wilson had him exempted from his class fee and entertained Riddell in his home. Leaving Edinburgh University in 1830, Riddell spent a year at St Andrews and was then licensed to preach, gaining his first living at Teviothead. He married a Biggar merchant's daughter, Eliza Clark, and had three sons. Their first home at Flex farmhouse is the subject of 'The Emigrant's wish', a sentimental sub-Burnsian piece which is typical of Riddell's corpus:

"I wish we were hame to our ain folk,  
Our kind and true-hearted ain folk,  
Where the gentle are leal, and the semple are  
weal,  
And the hames are the hames o' our ain folk".

(11.1-4)<sup>30</sup>

The sense of community, implicitly linked to peasant society, seems to have been lost by Riddell, on a personal level, as he entered into polite society. After nine years at Teviothead, Riddell succumbed to a 'nervous disease', and was hospitalised in Dumfries. Afterwards, he remained in his manse with a small annuity from Buccleuch, although he never worked again. Riddell stayed active in local antiquarian and literary pursuits, as a member of the Border Counties Association.

For reasons of space, it has only been possible to consider a representative sample of educated autodidacts.<sup>31</sup> However, the strength of the Scottish autodidactic tradition, and its stereotypes, is indicated by the phenomenon of university-educated writers being classed as peasant poets. Educated autodidacts did draw strength, like their compeers, from the oral traditions of their rural upbringings and shared their ability to assimilate information with astonishing rapidity. However, the educated autodidact was exposed to a distinctive critical blend of respect and suspicion, as neither a wholly polite nor wholly peasant poet. The following chapter considers another discrete group of Scottish autodidacts: women peasant poets.



## Notes

1. Walter Scott, 'Biographical Memoir of John Leyden', Edinburgh Annual Register (1811), qtd Poems and Ballads by Dr. John Leyden: With a Memoir of the Author by Sir Walter Scott, Bart., and Supplementary Memoir, (Kelso, 1875), p.7; James Morton, The Poetical Remains of the late Dr John Leyden, (Edinburgh and London, 1819), p.iiff. See too 'John Leyden', NLS MS 3381, ff.18-26, 29-33, 218-19.
2. Scott, qtd Leyden, Poems and Ballads, p.8.
3. Morton, p.vii.
4. James Douglas, Traditions and Recollections of Dr Leyden, (Hawick, 1875), passim.
5. 'Leyden's Letters', NLS MS 939, f.47.
6. See 'John Leyden', NLS MS 3380 ff.11-15.
7. Scott, qtd Leyden, Poems and Ballads, p.8; Morton, p.vii; See Douglas. Leyden wrote in 1804 to Heber about Scott's 'exertions' to find Leyden a living, NLS MS 939 f.4; see 'Leyden's Correspondence &c.', NLS MS 3382 f.122; NLS MS 3380, ff.19-20; [Edinburgh Borders County Association] NLS MS 971, f.7.
8. See NLS MS 3380, ff.33-34, 52-53, 70.
9. See NLS MS 3380 ff.113-14, Leyden wrote that Minto 'treated me...like a son'. Minto admired Leyden for transcending the 'lowest stage of social life', 'Lundie Letters', NLS MS 1722, f.35. Morton, pp.xix, NLS MS 3380, ff.45-46; Morton p.xxiii; xxxi-ii; xl-xli, lxxix. 'To Aurellia', Morton, p.140; all references to Leyden's work are to this edition, hereafter given within the text in parentheses.
10. NLS MS 3380, f.36.
11. James Hogg, 'Surpassing Adventures of Allan Gordon', Tales and Sketches, (Glasgow, 1837), vol I, pp.241-316.
12. Morton, p.xxxii; Qtd Scott, pp.109-11; Scott, pp.32-



- 33, 64-65. NLS MS 3874, f.108; 'Criticism on Leyden's Scenes of Infancy; with etymological remarks', The Scots Magazine, 68 (1806), p.347. The Gentleman's Magazine (May 1812), Scott's account and The Bombay Courier are qtd Leyden, Poems and Ballads, pp.ix-cxxxi. See too 'Scenes of Infancy, Descriptive of Teviotdale', review, The British Critic, 23 (1804), pp.483-85. See 'Leyden's Correspondence &c.' NLS MS 3381, f.196.
13. NLS MS 3382, f.112; NLS MS 3380, f.23; Allan Cunningham, 'Biographical and Critical History of the Literature of the Last Fifty Years', The Athenaeum, 33 (Oct 26 1833), p.769.
14. Teviotdale Record and Jedburgh Advertiser, (Oct 1858), The Scotsman, (22 Oct 1861), Kelso Chronicle, (25 Oct 1861) all NLS MS 3381, ff.197, 200-02; The Galashiels Telegraph, (Nov 3 1896), Selkirk Archives SC/S/10; J.H. Millar, A Literary History of Scotland, (London, 1903), p.437; Florence MacCunn, Sir Walter Scott's Friends, (Edinburgh, 1903), p.111; Paul Henderson Scott, 'John Leyden: Polymath and Border Reiver', Blackwood's Magazine, (Oct 1978), p.288.
15. 'Anster Fair, a Poem in Six Cantos. With other Poems. The Second Edition. By W. Tennant', review, Art. IX, Edinburgh Review, 24 (Nov 1814), pp.174-75.
16. James Hogg, 'Memoir of the Author's Life', The Mountain Bard, (Edinburgh and London, 1821), p.xliiii. See Gioia Angelleti, 'Hogg's debt to William Tennant: the Influence of Anster Fair on Hogg's Poetry', Studies in Hogg and his World, 6 (1995), pp.22-32.
17. Tennant, Anster Fair, pp.v-vi. Hereafter references to Anster Fair are given in parentheses, within the text, from the 1814 edition.
18. Moir 1851, pp.187-88; James Hogg, 'The Marvellous Doctor', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 22 (1827), pp.349-61.

19. William Tennant, John Balliol, An Historical Drama in Five Acts, (Edinburgh, 1825), Act II, Scene II. All further references are given below, within the text, in parentheses.
20. Matthew Forster Connolly, Memoir of the Life and Writings of William Tennant, LL.D., (London and Edinburgh, 1861), p.56. William Tennant, The Thane of Fife, (Edinburgh, 1822); William Tennant, Papistry Storm'd; or, the Dingin' Down o' the Cathedral. Ane Poem in Six Sangs, (Edinbrogh, 1827), pp.vii-ix.
21. See Maurice Lindsay and Alexander Scott, eds, The Comic Poems of William Tennant, (Edinburgh, 1989); qtd Connolly, p.157; William Tennant, Cardinal Beaton. A Tragedy in Five Acts, (Edinburgh, 1823).
22. See William Tennant, Hebrew Dramas: Founded on Bible History, (Edinburgh and London, 1845).
23. Connolly, p.vi.
24. Connolly, pp.14-15, 11-12, 16-17, 29.
25. Connolly, pp.31; Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, qtd Connolly, p.32.
26. See Robert Chambers, A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen, rev Thomas Thomson, (London, 1875), pp.435-37, 430.
27. Harry D. Watson, 'William Tennant, The Ettrick Shepherd and the Psalms of David: A Linguistic Controversy', Scottish Language, 3 (1984), p.60.
28. See Shanks, pp.141, 118, 120.
29. See Shanks, pp.121-22.
30. See Shanks, p.128.
31. Notable educated autodidacts include William Knox (1789-1825) whose work includes The Harp of Zion (1825); Abraham Lincoln memorised Knox's 'Mortality'. James Hislop (1789-1827), patronised by Jeffrey, was a religious and patriotic poet whose fate tragically paralleled Leyden's; a teacher at sea, Hislop died of fever in the Cape de Verde Islands.



## Chapter Eleven: 'Danaus' Daughters'

'While you to Sisyphus yourselves compare,  
 With Danaus' daughters we may claim a share;  
 For while he labours hard against the Hill,  
 Bottomless Tubs of Water they must fill.'

(Mary Collier, The Woman's Labour, 1739, rpt with  
 Stephen Duck, The Thresher's Labour, The Augustan  
 Society, no.230, (Los Angeles, 1985), 11.239-42.)  
 [Mary Collier, 'the Hampshire washer-woman', mocks  
 Stephen Duck for suggesting that male autodidacts,  
 like Sisyphus, could not push their weight to the top  
 of the hill. Women autodidacts, she suggests, were  
 worse off. Like the King of Libya's fifty  
 hardworking daughters, the Danaids, women autodidacts  
 also had domestic chores to perform. The reference  
 is barbed as all of Danaus' daughters, except for  
 Hypermnesta, murdered their husbands on their wedding  
 nights.]



Women autodidacts were considered to be a discrete group by patrons and critics, and were rarely treated by male autodidacts as their equals. As Mary Collier suggests in the passage heading this chapter, women autodidacts faced even greater obstacles than their men in their quest for critical recognition. In this respect, following the usage of Collier, they could be termed 'Danaus' Daughters'. While 'Celebrated Female Writers', like the morally and socially upstanding Joanna Baillie, won polite acclaim, autodidactic women were neglected. Paradoxically, some of the most exciting poetry of the nineteenth century was produced by autodidactic women, especially in comparison to the effete compositions of contemporaries like Lady Nairne and Caroline Oliphant the younger. With some exceptions, like Anne Hunter and Anne Grant, poetry by the formally educated was, at best, polite; at worst, insipid.<sup>1</sup>

Autodidactic women wrote primarily for self expression, with passion and skill. In the early nineteenth century, several vigorous women autodidacts (like Burns, Hogg and his followers) explored traditional styles. Isobel Pagan (1741-1821), for instance, was a poet who ran a howff at Muirkirk. Described as a woman of 'unearthly appearance' she had a squint, a tumour on her side and a deformed foot. Pagan was remembered as vivacious, having a child by a man who later deserted her.

She describes her self education, and boisterous present, in a Collection of Poems and Songs (c.1805). Her experiences are typical for autodidacts: occasional lessons, religious instruction, and voracious reading when time permitted:

I was born near four miles from Nith-head,  
 Where fourteen years I got my bread;  
 My learning it can soon be told,  
 Ten weeks, when I was seven years old,  
 With a good old religious wife,  
 Who lived a quiet and sober life....  
 With my attention, and her skill,  
 I read the Bible no that ill;  
 And when I grew a wee thought mair,  
 I read when I had time to spare;  
 But a' the whole tract of my time,  
 I found myself inclined to rhyme;  
 When I see merry company,  
 I sing a song with mirth and glee,  
 And sometimes I the whisky pree  
 And 'deed it's best to let it be.<sup>2</sup>

There is a hint of despair, in the reference to whisky drinking, in Pagan's eloquent expression of her predicament as a dedicated autodidactic writer. The ultimate resignation of her statement, moreover, typifies the tone adopted by many women autodidacts.

Pagan's oral style lyrics include 'Ca' the yowes to the knowes', collected in Johnson's Scots Musical Museum

(1787-1803) by Burns, unattributed. This captures a sentimental type and explores a plaintive air with skill:

Ca' the yowes to the knowes--  
 Ca' them whare the heather grows--  
 Ca' them whare the burnie rows,  
     My bonnie dearie!

As I gaed doun the water side,  
 There I met my shepherd lad;  
 He rowed me sweetly in his plaid,  
     And ca'd me his dearie. (verses 1-2)

The pastoral frame, and soporific air, however, detract attention from subversive aspects. Pagan was no 'proto feminist' but there is an attractive canniness to the heroine who proclaims:

'I was bred up at nae sic schule,  
 My shepherd lad, to play the fule,  
 And a' the day to sit in dule,  
     And naebody to see me'. (verse 4)

This woman is in the tradition of the cautious lover Jenny in The Gentle Shepherd (1725), but she is much more worldly. Pagan's heroine complies with her lover's demands only when assured of gaining 'gowns and ribbons' and 'Cawf-leather shoon'.<sup>3</sup>

As a woman autodidact, Pagan's formal education was



even more limited than that of her male equivalents. She could not write but the tailor William Gemmell transcribed on her behalf. 'Wicked Tibbie' was, moreover, a competent satirist, sharp as her younger compatriot Burns. There is, for instance, the concisely dismissive piece:

Mr \_\_\_\_\_ in the Kyle,  
           Ca'd me a common \_\_\_\_\_:  
 But if he had not tried himsel',  
           He wadna been sae sure!'

In addition to such succinct statements, Pagan enjoys undercutting pastoral imagery with thought-provoking statements. 'The Crook and the Plaid' features a lover who is a hillside scholar, reading 'books of history' while shepherding. She expands this image:

King David was a shepherd, while in the prime o'  
   youth,  
 And following the flocks, he ponder'd upon  
   truth;  
 And when he came to be a king, and left his  
   former trade,  
 'Twas an honour to the laddie that wears the  
   crook and plaid.  
   (verse 6)

The elevation of the lowly shepherd David to the highest social position, and the sacred associations, proved

attractive to later autodidacts (the 'Ettrick Shepherd', as seen above, explored this image in Hebrew Melodies).<sup>5</sup> Despite her creative skills, though, and her anticipation of later autodidactic imagery, Pagan's work has been neglected (except as a footnote to Burnsian studies).

Pagan's treatment parallels that of many women autodidacts. Allowed little critical attention, they were usually portrayed as amoral, ugly or both. Jean Glover (1758-1801), for instance, was a travelling performer from Townhead of Kilmarnock. Burns implied Glover was of bad character, 'strolling through the country with a sleight-of-hand blackguard'. She is represented in the Museum by a near-bawdy lyric about a rendezvous 'O'er the muir among the heather'. However, the finest woman vernacular poet of the period was Janet Little (1759-1813), 'The Scotch Milkmaid'. Born the same year as Burns, at Nether Bogside, Ecclefechan, she was a domestic for the Rev. Mr Johnstone, accompanying his family to Glasgow. Later she served Mrs Dunlop, Burns' patron. Dunlop passed on Little as a servant to her daughter, Susan Henri, in Loudon (modern Loudoun) Ayrshire. Little became head dairymaid, continuing in that post after her mistress' lease of Loudoun expired. The Milkmaid was stepmother to five children after marrying a co-worker, John Richmond. Although lame, after a 1790 accident, Little had great presence, like 'some of Sir Walter Scott's gigantic heroines, but without their impudence'. She belonged to

the Galston Dissenting congregation of Rev. Mr Blackwood.<sup>6</sup>

Dunlop was an active, if ambivalent, patron of Little. Offering to show the works of her 'rustic poetess' to Burns in 1788, Dunlop added: 'not that I admire them except for being hers.... she writes blank verse, which I don't like'. In 1789 Dunlop wrote to Burns about her 'humble poetess' who willingly moved to Loudon on the offchance of seeing Burns:

Her outside promises nothing; her mind only bursts forth on paper, of which I send you a specimen in her own hand. She is industrious, and seems good-temper'd and discreet, but betrays no one indication that I could discover of ever having opened a book or tagged a rhyme; so that I hope she will not be less happy for having tryed it.

Dunlop enclosed 'Upon a Young Lady's Breaking a Looking-Glass', a witty piece which Little had written about vanity 'to convince a young lady who doubted the authenticity of her having wrot something else she had shewed her'. Simultaneously elevating and denigrating her protegée, Dunlop added that this was 'play, not genius'.<sup>7</sup>

However, Little's relationship with her patron Dunlop, and Dunlop's family, was vitally important to the course of her career. She engaged in literary exchanges with Dunlop and, judging from poetic allusions, used



Loudon Castle library (a possibility for favoured servants, as Hogg's use of the Blackhouse library confirms). By 1791 she was transcribing letters and poetry for Dunlop. The Poetical Works of Janet Little, The Scotch Milkmaid (1792) was published in Ayr (with minimal offending 'blank verse'). Assuming the role of 'Milkmaid Poet' was a bid for patronage, as was dedicating Works to the twelve year old 'Countess of Loudon' (pp.25-28). Little flattered her existing patron and made a case for future help as her 'Ever Grateful and Obedient Humble Servant'. These 'humble lines' were written under a Lady's roof where 'moral lessons spoke'. However, despite exploiting autodidactic status, Little deplored those who attacked her because of her lowly status. The companion piece, 'To the Public' (np-p.26 [sic]) describes what Shanks called 'literary trade unionism': self-regulatory behaviour from the Literati.<sup>8</sup>

Little's repertoire is as wide ranging as that of her male counterparts (including Burns and Hogg). There are romantic formulae and formal English pieces like 'On Happiness' (pp.32-36) and 'Upon a Young Lady's leaving Loudon Castle' (pp.37-39):

What means this silent, solitary gloom?  
 All nature in her dishabille appears;  
 Contracted flow'rets yield no sweet perfume,

And ev'ry grove a dismal aspect wears.

(verse 1)

Patronage pieces in the Augustan style include 'To A Lady, A Patroness of the Muses on her Recovery from Sickness' (pp.42-44) and 'Damon and Philander' (pp.50-57). The latter praises the 'cheeks of roseate hue' and 'coral lips ambrosial' of the lady, a rival to 'Juno in her air and mien' (verse 3). Conforming to expectations of melancholic, pastoral lyrics from 'peasant poets', Little's love poems are usually in English, from a male perspective. An 'Acrostic Upon a Young Woman' (p.158), for instance, invokes high-cultural effects for the effusions of a 'humble swain'. However, like Pagan, Little enjoyed subverting conventions. 'The Fickle Pair' (pp.40-41) starts with rustic lovers, 'Damon and Phillis', making their way to 'Hymen's altar' with enthusiasm. It ends, though, with a simultaneous jilting and a shock:

Philander kindly fill'd his place;

To Damon Chloe consented.

That night they wed, O woful case!

And ere next morn repented. (verse 8)

The twist shows Little's rarely fulfilled potential for parody (a strong element in the Scottish autodidactic tradition exemplified by Hogg, as has been seen above).

Her linguistic spectrum ranges from formal English to pseudo-Burnsian in 'From Snipe, A Favourite Dog, to his Master' (pp.129-32), to spirited Scots in 'To My Aunty' (pp.164-66) 'Wha ne'er o' wit nor lear was vaunty' (1.2). Little's finest work is in Scots, following exuberant vernacular precedents in Ramsay and Fergusson. The dishonest trader Rab, in 'On Seeing Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ baking cakes' (pp.171-72), is kin to Ramsay's cynical 'Lucky Spence', and the 'browster wives' of Fergusson's 'Leith Races'. While he is baking oat cakes, 'frugal' Rab sees a 'crazy scribbling lass' approach him:

"I fear," says he, "she'll verses write,  
     An' to her neebors show it:  
 But troth I need na care a doit,  
     Though a' the country knew it.

My cakes are good, none can object;  
     The maids will ca' me thrifty.  
 To save a sixpence on the peck  
     Is just an honest shifty. (verses 2-3)

The reductive 'crazy scribbling lass' recalls Ramsay's self portrait in 'Epistle to Mr Arbuckle', and Burns' posturing as 'a poor hairum-scairum Poet' to Agnes McLehose. Such self doubting statements, in public and private, were expected from autodidacts and frequently expressed, particularly by women autodidacts like Little.<sup>9</sup>

'On Hallowe'en' (pp.167-70) develops the Burnsian



treatment, depicting the 'mirth' of traditional holiday poetry with ease. The style recalls Ramsay's additions to 'Christis Kirk on the Green', Fergusson's ebullient 'Hallow Fair' and 'Farmer's Ingle':

At Hallowe'en, when fairy sprites  
 Perform their mystic gambols,  
 When ilka witch her neebour greets,  
 On their nocturnal rambles;  
 When elves at midnight hour are seen,  
 Near hollow caverns sportin,  
 Then lads and lasses aft convene,  
 In hopes to ken their fortune,  
 By freets that night.  
 (verse 2)<sup>10</sup>

In poems like this, Little's lively ability to communicate her profound knowledge of traditional culture is apparent (a skill she shared with Scottish autodidacts like Hogg).

Little expressed her admiration for Burns in her 1789 'Epistle to Mr Robert Burns' (pp.160-63), in 'standard Habbie'. It opens, after 'To a Haggis' (Poems, 136):

Fair fa' the honest rustic swain,  
 The pride o' a' our Scottish plain;  
 Thou gies us joy to hear thy strain,  
 And notes sae sweet;  
 Old Ramsay's shade, reviv'd again,  
 In thee we greet.  
 (verse 1)

Her familiarity with Burns' corpus is shown by references to 'Caesar and Luath' (verse 4); 'the daisy' (verse 7); and love poetry which would make 'the most frigid dame...relent' (verse 7). Addison, Pope and 'Sam' were enraged at the achievement of a 'plough-boy' (verse 8). Before Burns, 'Lov'd Thallia [sic], that delightful muse, / Seem'd long shut up as a recluse' (ll.7-8). 'Thalia', however, is the muse of comedy and pastoral poetry, used by Ramsay in 'Wealth, or the Woody'. The Burns connexion can, at times, obfuscate Little's debt to the Scottish Augustans. Perhaps encouraged by Dunlop's patronage agenda, Little contributed to the process by stressing her peasant empathy with, and inferiority to, Burns.<sup>11</sup>

Burns, however, showed minimal inclinations to help a woman autodidact like Little, despite his claims to empathise with other Bards of Nature's Making (see Chapter Two). He did not respond to the 'Epistle'. He wrote to Dunlop in 1789 that he had been too busy to address 'your poetess' Little: 'I have heard of her and her compositions in this country...always to the honour of her character.' Dunlop was persistent, possibly from a less than altruistic desire to impress Burns. In September Dunlop sent Burns a copy of her own 'Fragment, Sent with a Crown to J.L.'. In November 1789 Dunlop sent the ploughman poet 'To Jenny Little at Loudon Castle' in which the patron postures as 'the Muses' least scullion' and seeks 'Dr. Jenny' in her 'kitchens of Air'. Such assumed modesty

does not always ring true. Dunlop wrote to Burns in December 1789, 'I have never yet seen what I thought a female poet. I am writing this in the house with Jenny Little, spite of your testimony in her favours...spite of the compliment you paid my own two inimitable lines'.<sup>12</sup>

It seems the patron used Little in a singular way, as bait for Burns' attention. In 1790 Burns asked Dunlop not to send a 'Poem on the King by an English farmer' or the 'Ode to Hope by J.L' (Janet Little) (pp.27-31), insisting he would prefer to see Dunlop's prose. In 1790, according to Dunlop, Little was irritated by Burns not visiting: 'she would not grudge going five times as far to see you'; a prelude to pressing Burns to visit Dunlop. In January 1792, recalcitrantly, Burns promised Dunlop to 'fill up my subscription-bill' for Little. His response to Little's Poetical Works, though, was not satisfactory. Dunlop fumed, after presenting Burns with a copy in 1792, 'How did I upbraid my own conceited folly at that instant that had never subjected one of mine to so haughty an imperious critic'. Perhaps she was justified in portraying Burns as egotistical. As Hilton Brown commented, 'a Scottish Milkmaid was dangerously like a Ploughman Poet.'<sup>13</sup>

Little persevered in trying to contact Burns, making the long journey from Loudon to Ellisland and expressing high expectations 'On a Visit to Mr Burns' (pp.111-12). She encounters 'The charming BURNS, the Muses care' (1.5),



a pleasure 'oft denied'. The Poet's arm is broken after a fall from his horse, Pegasus:

With beating breast I view'd the bard;  
                   All trembling did him greet:  
 With sighs bewail'd his fate so hard,  
                   Whose notes were ever sweet. (verse 8)

In a letter of 30th March 1791, enclosing the 'Poem on Contentment' (discussed below) Dunlop records Little's return, with news of Burns' broken arm and the pain he was suffering. Dunlop appreciated Burns' courtesy to Little, on this occasion: 'I greatly applaud that strength of mind which enables one to surmount bodily pain to such a manly pitch of fortitude as to chat at seeming ease and tranquillity, as Jenny tells me you did'.<sup>14</sup>

While Little relished meeting Burns, she resented the double standards faced by women peasant poets. 'Given to a Lady who asked me to write a poem' (pp.113-16) draws on the satirical tradition of Ramsay and Burns, illuminating the woman autodidact's predicament. The linguistic shift from an Augustan opening, 'In royal Anna's golden days' (1.1) to Scots-English, in considering the 'ploughman chiel' Burns, emphasises her point. In the past it was hard to attain fame--Pope used 'Homer's crutches' to do so--but now 'ilka dunce' pleases with 'uncouth rhymes' (verse 2). A 'ploughman chiel' who 'pretends to write' is

praised by those 'of the highest station' (verse 3).

Burns charms with his 'lesson to the heart', 'Nature' and 'politics' but Little's work is unacceptable:

But then a rustic country quean  
To write--was e're the like o't seen?  
A milk maid poem books to print;  
Mair fit she wad her dairy tent;  
Or labour to her spinning wheel,  
An' do her wark baith swift an' weel.  
Frae that she may some profit share,  
But winna frae her rhyming ware.  
Does she, poor silly thing, pretend  
The manners of our age to mend?  
Mad as we are, we're wise enough  
Still to despise sic paltry stuff....

all this and more, a critic said;  
I heard and slunk behind the shade:  
So much I dread their cruel spite,  
My hand still trembles while I write.

(verses 6, 8)

Little's anguish, tempered with humour, succinctly expresses autodidacts' (particularly women autodidacts') responses to their predicament as typecast Scottish poets.

While Little is not self-confident enough to merit Donna Landry's tag of 'protofeminist' she does advocate solidarity between women autodidacts.<sup>15</sup> 'Epistle to Nell, Wrote from Loudon Castle' (pp.117-19) and 'Nell's Answer' (pp.120-21) recall fruitful discussions in Loudon estate.

Other literary friends included the 'rustic poetess' Jean Murray, from the Muir near Mauchline. Little's 'A Poem on Contentment' (pp.173-79) is dedicated to Janet Nicol, 'a poor old wandering woman' who lived at the Loudon coal-pit. It convincingly evokes female friendship. Little hopes Nicol 'may never feel the pain, / We heedless scribbling fools sustain' (ll.60-61).<sup>16</sup> Despite the sort of setbacks Little suggests, autodidactic women did persevere in writing; much of their work was published, like Little's, by subscription and by local presses like James McKhie of Kilmarnock, William Love of Glasgow and, particularly, Alexander Gardner of Paisley.

There is no evidence to suggest that Little formed an autodidactic model for women poets as Hogg did for male poets. However the concerns she, and her predecessors, had raised were shared by later women autodidacts. In particular, three distinguished poets paralleled Little's dissatisfaction with the status quo: Mary Pyper, Maria Bell and Isabella Craig-Knox. Mary Pyper (1795-1870) was born in Greenock, and was too sickly to attend school. She was raised in Edinburgh by her mother, a single parent and studied literature and history at home. Pyper's favourite poet was Dryden; Burns she thought '"rather coarse"'. She worked for fifteen years in a trimming shop, then as a seamstress, but was later prevented from working when she lost her sight. Latterly she lived on the charity of St. Columba's congregation, Edinburgh.



There is a great deal of wry humour in Pyper's work, given her circumstances, particularly in her Select Pieces (1847). 'On Asking a Lady to Subscribe' observes:

I ask'd a lady to subscribe--  
                   She answer'd--"She would see;"  
 But, Oh! I find she still is blind--  
                   Alas! for her and me!<sup>17</sup>

Such barbed comments go further to criticise contemporary patronage practices, in a public context, than the remarks of any peasant poets of the early nineteenth century.

Pyper's later work, though, adopts a habitual resignation which anticipates, in this respect, the work of Marion Angus and Violet Jacob. 'Epitaph--A Life' in Sacred Poems (1865) is economically poignant:

I came at Morn--'twas Spring, I smiled,  
                   The fields with green were clad;  
 I walked abroad at Noon--and lo!  
                   'Twas Summer--I was glad.  
 I sate me down--'twas Autumn eve,  
                   And I with sadness wept;  
 I laid me down at Night, and then  
                   'Twas Winter--and I slept.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere, Pyper's acceptance of personal and community tragedies as acts of God is difficult to accept, at least from a late twentieth century perspective. 'Lines Written

On the Death of a Little Child' (pp.70-71), for instance, praises death for setting 'free' an infant, to be welcomed in Heaven. 'Thanksgiving. For the Removal of Cholera' (pp.50-52) presents sickness as God-given pestilence.

The succinctness of Pyper's early poems, and their dissatisfaction with the situation of the woman autodidact, resembles the style of Maria Bell (d.1899). Bell is elegantly terse in 'Life', which sums up the human condition as 'A busy way of life that goes / Past many graves that gape and close' (ll.10-11). The religious conclusion, though, 'Content we waken in a place / Where Christ shall show His blessed face / To men' (ll.19-21), typifies conventional, autodidactic piety.<sup>19</sup> Little is known about Bell, other than she wrote a prose work, 'The Country Minister's Love Story', as well as Songs of Two Homes (1899). It may be she is no autodidactic but her desire, 'Just to be all alone and quiet lie / Upon my bed' (ll.1-2), expressed in 'Peace' (p.139) seems to indicate that Bell knew the rigours of labour at first hand. With her over-fervent religion, it is equally possible that she was a minister's daughter.

At times, Bell comes close to a chillingly perverse religiosity. 'An Empty House' (pp.8-9) is disturbing:

A heart I have, God gave it,  
A human heart to love,  
And though no man may crave it,  
Its name is kept above.

God made it, and He knows it,  
 Its emptiness unstored,  
 He asks it all, He chose it  
 Should know no other lord. (11.1-8)

This heart stays empty--'no man desires it' so that 'the great King may enter / To take His pleasure there' (11.15-16). The mood of Bell's piece parallels Emily Dickinson's 'There is another sky' in which the narrator begs 'Prithee my brother, / Into my garden come' (11.13-14).

Bell's 'The Weary Land' (p.24), too, takes a potentially comforting theme (the afterlife) and turns it into a ghastly prospect. This poem is like a dreary coda to Stevenson's 'Requiem':

There is a weary land afar  
 Beyond a weary sea,  
 And Scottish lads go sailing there,  
 Go sailing out so free;  
 But back they come as weary men  
 A weary life to dree,  
 Or find their graves with outland folk  
 Beyond the outland sea.

Such sentiments are far from the nostalgia of the Whistlebinkie school and conventional piety associated with the late nineteenth century and, in particular, with peasant poets.<sup>20</sup>

Another disquieting woman poet is Isabella Craig-



Knox, 'Isa' (1831-1903) of The Scotsman. Craig-Knox was an Edinburgh hosier's daughter, living in London from 1859 where she was the Secretary of the National Association of Social Science. Her fiction appeared in The Quiver and other magazines. The preface to Poems (1856) comments on Craig-Knox's desire for 'the approval of persons of taste and education', which would increase her 'appreciation of the class to which she belongs, and whose elevation and refinement she most earnestly desires'. Much of her work is quietist, such as 'Live and let live':

Heaven with every wind is sowing--  
                     Let not such despair;  
 Everything that lives is growing;  
                     Heaven itself doth care  
 That the feeblest things be nourished;  
 Verdure where the wildling flourished,  
                     Crowns the rock once more. (verse 8)<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, 'The Workman to his Sons' (pp.10-13) accepts the labourer's lot, realising the 'noblest aim' is 'To serve my God in His own way; / Bearing my burden all the day' (verse 7). Her Scots poetry is verging on the sickly, epitomised by the sugary reminiscences of 'My Mary an' Me' (pp.54-56). However, there are glimpses of originality in Craig-Knox's work, especially in her reframing of Biblical and apocryphal stories.

Craig-Knox's 'The Poor Old Jew' (pp.6-9) recycles the

Wandering Jew legend, calming prejudice with reason in the nineteenth century context. The Jew, near-dead from his travels, is treated kindly by a 'saintly Christian', who offers a share of his new made grave:

Then answered him the weary man--

"If all were Christians true,

We soon should build Jerusalem."

That night the poor old Jew,  
On Christian breast, went to his rest,  
Jerusalem the New. (verse 12)

The New Jerusalem theme was, of course, popular near the end of the century (James Young Geddes treated it too, as seen below). In Craig-Knox's treatment, perhaps reflecting her experiences as an autodidact, it becomes a plea against making assumptions about fellow human beings.

Craig-Knox's 'Martha and Mary' (pp.163-62) is a plea for solidarity among women workers (in this respect, recalling Little's work). Reworking the Biblical sisters of Bethany into an industrial parable, framed by the city's 'smoky vapour'. Craig-Knox asserts the need to uphold working people's sense of community; friendship between men prefigures sisterly solidarity here. While this Martha and Mary are not related by blood, their fathers ploughed together:

Poverty, pain and labour,  
 They shrank not to endure--  
 The stay and strength of a nation  
 Are the strong and patient poor. (verse 3)

Martha and Mary fall in love with the same man. He loves Mary, and the jealous Martha shakes off her former friend's soothing hand when she strives for reconciliation in the factory where they work. Mary's braid, tragically, catches in 'the remorseless wheel' and she is blinded. The poem ends, though, with the two reconciled, aged, and blissfully happy. They escape divisive urban life by retreating into a pastoral idyll, sharing a cottage where they are bound as if by a macabre 'wedding vow'.

A significant proportion of Craig-Knox's work is critical of the status quo and the relentlessness of manual labour. She was keenly aware, from personal experience, of the constraints faced by working class writers, as she indicated in the preface to Poems: 'The following Poems have been written in the intervals of leisure afforded by a life of toil' (p.vii). Duchess Agnes etc. (1864) includes highly imaginative pieces such as Craig-Knox's satirical reworking of oral traditions, 'The Ballad of the Brides of Quair' and 'Found Dead', a daring tale of love in a mortuary.<sup>22</sup> Even more daringly, 'Rest: An Ode' (pp.89-93) counters current evocations of industrial strength as desirable, exemplified by the work



of Alexander Anderson ['Surfaceman'] (treated in Chapter Twelve). Craig-Knox observes that 'rest', although the object of labourers, is never achieved:

With grind and groan,  
                     With clank and moan,  
 Their task the prisoned forces ply;--  
                     The great wheels fly  
 As if they wove the web of Fate;  
 And to and fro, amid the roar,  
 Squalid creatures pace the floor;  
 Slaves of those iron wheels that they,  
 Bound their impulse to obey,  
 And upon their bidding wait;  
 While to their service dumb,  
                     Not only men are given,  
                     But childish troops are driven,  
 And women come,  
 Till every heart with weariness is numb.

(verse 8)

This goes beyond the tempered protest of women autodidacts like Pyper. Craig-Knox's description of factory life anticipates the dreary atmosphere of the townscapes of John Davidson and Thomson's City of Dreadful Night (1874). As well as articulating the plight of the industrial poor, Craig-Knox tried to offer concrete relief. Poems: an offering to Lancashire (1863) were intended to aid the distressed Cotton districts. Sadly, her innovative early work gave way to standard pious outpourings like Songs of

Consolation (1874).<sup>23</sup> It is as if the originality of this woman autodidact had, due to lack of critical interest, succumbed to conventional impulses.

Some women autodidacts, however, were consistently experimental. Elizabeth Hartley (b.1844), a gardener's daughter from Dumbarton, for instance, produced long narrative poems with a similar imaginative vision, if not verbal dexterity, to Hogg's. Due to illness, she left school at eight. However she was a voracious reader and, at the age of ten, could recite most of The Lady of the Lake. At sixteen she published Evening Thoughts (1862), reissued as The Prairie Flower (1870). Contemporaries, like Alexander Murdoch in Recent and Living Scottish Poets (1883), considered that 'Mrs Hartley has a fertile fancy, correct and flowing diction, and writes with much beauty, power, and purity of feeling'.<sup>24</sup>

'The Prairie Flower', which moves beyond Scottish prototypes, is a five-part Transatlantic adventure with Emersonian overtones and some similarities with Whittier's 'Song of Slaves in the Desert'.<sup>25</sup> Like Craig-Knox's rustic idyll in 'Martha and Mary', Hartley creates a strange, allegorical landscape. The Prairie is an imagined place where self-fulfillment is possible, although Hartley's women are more isolated than Craig-Knox's. Unlikely connexions abound in Hartley's quasi-Biblical wasteland:

The golden light of morning is awaking in the  
East,  
And dispelling twilight's shadows, with their  
hazy wreaths of mist;  
It tinges now the forest with its changeful  
verdure bright,  
And it dances on the streamlet in its floods of  
bursting light,  
And it breaks upon the prairie as it stretches  
far away,  
Till it meets the dim horizon in a line of  
misty grey.  
O'er its lakes, where floats the lotus, and its  
snow-white blossoms weaves,  
While the Ibis stalks amongst them, and  
seems whiter than their leaves.

(11.1-8)

The narrative line is pleasingly convoluted yet balanced, showing that the autodidactic tradition of managing complicated plots (seen in the work of Hogg and Cunningham but less often in the work of women autodidacts) was being sustained. A mother and child are lost on the prairie. Near death, the woman seeks Heaven's aid 'for her little Prairie Flower'. Her prayer is granted: a youth, Ralph, rescues the 'artless child' Amy. Years later, the prairie is evoked in a way which recalls Scotland, featuring a honeysuckle clad cottage. Amy is now 'sweet' and loved by 'manly' Ralph. Epitomising Victorian suspicions of the urban, a youth from 'the



distant, smoky town' separates the lovers; in despair Ralph goes to sea, '"I have lost my Prairie flower"'. Ralph's ship is wrecked but, heroically, he rescues a young Lady, Isabella. In England, her father offers Ralph Isabella's hand; he declines because of his love for Amy. Isabella's brother, Ralph's former rival, reveals Amy rejected him because of her love for Ralph. Ralph regrets doubting 'my own gentle Prairie Flower' and, in a melodramatic climax, the lovers are reunited and married. Amy is still Ralph's 'little Prairie Flower'.

Demonstrating her autodidactic ability to assimilate information from diverse sources, Hartley makes unusual associations. 'The Violets. An Incident of the Battle of the Wilderness' (pp.75-77) has a dying soldier consoled by flowers. 'The Child and the Sunbeam' (pp.131-33) compares the sunbeam on a child on its mother's knee, with that which will touch its grave. She is particularly at home with wintry landscapes. There is an ebullient praise of 'The Snowdrift' (p.37): 'Covering o'er unsightly places' (l.17). 'The Frost upon the Window' (pp.40-03) similarly creates a 'lovely landscape', even on the 'humblest peasant's cottage', akin to 'life's delusive dreams'. There are quirky pieces, like the Scots 'An Auld Wives Soliloquy on Velocipeding' (pp.54-56) and 'Address to Dunbarton Castle' (pp.59-62), associated with the Wallace and his 'Despising Southern slavery' (l.44). 'The Right of

Way' (pp.79-81) treats a current debate, contrasting the brutal rich with gentle 'green glades' in woods:

The wealthy have mansions, and couches of down--  
                   They have lawns, they have gardens and  
   fountains;  
 While we, when released from the dust of the  
   town,  
 Have naught but the moors and the mountains.  
   (11.13-16)

Striving for originality, Hartley was sometimes unsuccessful. Yet by intent, in bravery of spirit, she belongs in the company of Robert Browning, Arthur Hugh Clough, and especially her national prototype James Hogg.

Autodidactic women frequently wrote about those who defied convention, from necessity or choice. Janet Hamilton (1795-1873), née Thomson, is a splendid example. There is some truth in the patronising reflections of George Eyre-Todd who called Hamilton, in The Glasgow Poets (1906), 'one of those remarkable women in humble life of whom Scotland has produced so strong a crop'. Hamilton worked from the age of seven: her experiences, similar to those of the Inverurie autodidact William Thom (1798-1848), are recounted in Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver (1844). Married at thirteen, Hamilton raised ten children and lived in Langloan, Coatbridge. She was blind from 1855. Poems and Essays (1863), Poems

of Purpose and Sketches in Prose (1865), Poems and Ballads (1868) and Poems, Essays and Sketches (1880) range through topics of local interest to national and international events.<sup>26</sup>

Women autodidacts, it seems, were more consistently concerned with their peers (especially other women) than were their male counterparts. Hamilton, like Little, constantly expresses sympathy for fellow workers, based on her personal experiences. In 'A Lay of the Tambour Frame' (pp.233-34), she profiles the plight of the woman who was 'Slave in all but the name' (l.4). Hamilton is direct in expressing her sympathy for the plight of the embroiderer, who has no union to strike on her behalf:

Selfish, unfeeling men!  
 Have ye not had your will?  
 High pay, short hours; yet your cry, like the  
   leech,  
 Is, Give us, give us still.  
 She who tambours--tambours  
       For fifteen hours a day--  
 Would have shoes on her feet, and dress for  
   church,  
 Had she a third of your pay. (verse 5)

Concrete action for relief is demanded as Hamilton argues for a fund to aid her 'sisters in need'.

Hamilton's concern for women in need is, at least partly, due to her conventional morality and religious



beliefs (the reference to 'virtue' compromised by poverty is a frequent Victorian cry, of course, in aid of its relief). Poems like 'The Fruits of the Spirit' (pp.316-27) suggest that faith can compensate for weariness. Even so, Hamilton expresses a deep hatred of exploitation, which transcends her impulse to quietism. 'Oor Location' (pp.59-60) is primarily a temperance poem but Hamilton is as vivid as Craig-Knox in portraying an urban nightmare. She is eloquent in Scots here, as elsewhere (see, for instance, her explicit defence of the language of Burns and Hogg in 'A Plea for the Doric' (pp.161-62):

A hunner funnels blessin', reekin',  
 Coal an' ironstane, charrin', smeekin';  
 Navvies, miners, keepers, fillers,  
 Puddlers, rollers, iron millers;  
 Reestit, reekit, raggit laddies,  
 Firemen, enginemen, an' Paddies;  
 Boatmen, banksmen, rough and rattlin',  
 'Bout the wecht wi' colliers battlin',  
 Sweatin', swearin', fechtin', drinkin',  
 Change-house bells and' gill-stoups clinkin'.

(11.1-10)

Hamilton, like other women autodidacts from Little to Craig-Knox, was particularly sensitive to the plight of her fellow workers whether they were female or male.

Hamilton was outspoken, too, in her support of liberty abroad, at least if this did not conflict with her

British loyalties. Her poems proclaim, 'Pray for Poland' (pp.116-17) and 'Freedom for Italy--1867' (pp.263-64). The last calls out to Garibaldi for action: 'Slaves of the Papacy! when will ye know / That, to be free, yourselves must strike the blow?' (ll.1-12). Despite such militarism, Hamilton was not wholly comfortable with warfare. 'Night Scene at the Fall of Sebastopol' uses imagery reminiscent of the Iliad: 'Like leaves in autumn, drenched in pools of blood, / Lie dead and dying' (ll.5-6). Faith in Britain and her actions, though, is evident in pieces like 'Lines. Suggested by Seeing the Train Containing the Queen and Suite pass through Coatbridge, on the Caledonian Railway, on her way to the North, May 1, 1862' (pp.36-37). Hamilton's restraint, as a critic of the status quo, is typical of the position adopted by her autodidactic predecessors from Pagan onwards.<sup>27</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, some women autodidacts were more outspoken. For instance the Glasgow poet and piano teacher, Marion Bernstein, in Mirren's Musings (1876), refused to tolerate dismissals of 'The Wretched Sex'.<sup>28</sup> Bernstein deplored assertions like that in The Weekly Mail (to which she contributed): 'Kicking never degrades a woman.... Now, if she had what some call her rights, she would be very seriously degraded indeed'. While there was, perhaps, a touch of irony in







in the work of Burns and Hogg) in pieces like 'A Dream' (pp.101-02):

I dreamt that the nineteenth century  
 Had entirely passed away,  
 And had given place to a more advanced  
 And very much brighter day.

For Woman's Rights were established quite,  
 And man could the fact discern  
 That he'd long been teaching his grandmamma  
 What she didn't require to learn.

(verses 1-2)

Bernstein envisions an ambitious programme for reforming Britain: women control the House of Commons and the House of Lords is abolished; wife-beating becomes a capital offence, and female judges ensure truth is 'The fashion'. Even sectarianism ends, a 'strange idea' which makes the dreamer wake. Her awareness of the limitations of visions, perhaps, is indicative of a greater realism among women autodidacts than in the male flights of fancy discussed above.

There are other aspects to Bernstein's work which complement her attacks on contemporary culture, and emphasise her place within the Scottish autodidactic tradition. For instance, she keenly appreciated Scotland's natural beauties. 'The Heather and the Broom' (p.91) is poignant, given the writer's bed-bound





recurrent theme of rest. Russell hails 'Sleep' (pp.35-36) as 'a universal siren'. There is tremendous dignity in her evocation of the 'wearied labourer, neath his quilt of patches', rudely awakened from his rest:

Then peals the summons to his daily toiling,  
                   Duty must wake  
 To rough-shod labour, all the dream path  
                                   soiling;  
                   With feet that ache,  
                   He must betake  
 Himself to industry, from dreams recoiling.

(verse 3)

The only consolation for the 'waking mind', according to Russell, is the knowledge of eternal rest with Christ, when ultimately, 'we wake from dreamless sleeping'. On an equally conservative level, 'Love's labour light' (p.15) claims family pleasures make domestic drudgery sweet.

However there is another side to Russell, paralleling Bernstein's autodidactic radicalism. 'Woman's Rights versus Woman's Wrongs' (pp.29-31) draws attention to the desperate plight of women 'struggling for daily bread' in shops, mills and 'kitchens underground'. Russell recommends 'the lash', to punish 'the man who kicks or strikes a defenceless woman'. Bernstein's response to this provoked Russell to go further. In 'A Recantation' (p.31), she demands female suffrage. 'A Domestic Dirge'

(p.20) adopts the language of unions to demand, 'Uphaud me, wives o' working men, / We'll "strike" tae git the feck o 't' (11.23-24).

Russell's politics were not violent; 'Intimidation. An Incident of the late "Shipwright's Dispute" on the Clyde' (p.43) shows her ready to support the side of law and order. However, she was outraged when natural justice was violated. 'The Carpenter's Wife's Advice' (pp.28-29) discusses William McKenzie, a Glasgow joiner who was sent to prison for thirty days by Baillie Bannerman, 'for giving away three small pieces of rotten wood to a poor old woman who was picking up firewood, these being the property of the magistrate's son, in whose employment McKenzie was working at the time of his conviction'. In response to this 'kindly' sin, Russell admits:

I'm a carpenter's wife. He brings home, without  
leave,

A sly two three chips to me daily,  
As our "yule log" bleezed, how we "laughed in  
our sleeve,"

At the thought of outwitting the Bailie.  
(11.5-8)

The writer's moral outrage is highly characteristic of the work of autodidactic women writers, from Pagan onwards. However, while Russell's spirited work attracted Bernstein's attention, like that of most women autodidacts

it was largely neglected by mainstream critics.

There are similarities between Hamilton, Russell and Ellen Johnston (c.1835-73) 'The Factory Girl'. Born in Hamilton, Johnston led a singularly hard life. Her mother was unintentionally bigamous. Johnston raised an illegitimate daughter and experienced frequent bouts of illness. She worked in weaving mills in Glasgow, Ireland, Manchester and Dundee, where she was blacklisted for subversiveness. She died in Barony Poorhouse, Glasgow. The 'Testimonial' from Rev George Gilfillan, which prefaces Johnston's Autobiography, Poems and Songs (1867), shows that while women autodidacts might have attract some attention, the prejudices which Janet Little faced almost a hundred years before were alive and well:

She labours, of course, under great disadvantage, but subtracting all the signs of an imperfect education, her rhymes are highly creditable to her heart and head too--are written always with fluency and often with sweetness, and, I see, have attracted the notice and warm praise of many of her own class. I hope she will be encouraged by this to cultivate her mind, to read to correct the faults in her style--arising from her limited opportunities--and so doing, she cannot fail to secure still increased respect and warmer patronage.<sup>32</sup>



Attracting subscribers including the Duke of Buccleuch and Earl of Enniskillen, Johnston celebrates the factory environment, regretting her period outwith 'Thou lovely verdant Factory' as 'The Factory Exile' (pp.25-26).

'Galbraith's Trip' (pp.106-09) and 'Kennedy's Factory for Ever' (pp.217-19) portray happy outings from Glasgow and Belfast. 'Address to the Factory of Messrs. J. and W. I. Scott & Co., John Street, Bridgeton' (pp.97-99) is an appreciation of the 'Royal Sovereign of the Factory race' (l.1). Here 'skilful genius' abounds, and the writer demands that workers are given the respect they deserve:

Give to thy stockers every honour due,  
           Thy pickers, carders, spinners, act their  
   part;  
 Thy engineers, and thy mechanics, too,  
           Are all sufficient in mechanic art.  
 Thy tapers, twisters, tenters, well may boast.  
 Of many honours other men have lost.

(verse 6)

A less attractive side to factory life is suggested in pieces like 'Lines. On Behalf of the Boatbuilders and Boilermakers of Great Britain and Ireland' (pp.83-86):

Ye rich! who gained fortune's heart,  
           How greedy your selfish souls;  
 Though the poor man ne'er spares a part  
           Of pleasure which round ye rolls.

Yet still ye would trample him down;  
 Yes, down to sixpence a day,  
 For work that is well worth a pound,  
 Were justice dealt in his pay.

(verses 14-15)

Johnston's advice, 'Be your watchword--"Union for ever"' lacks the 'sweetness' Gilfillan attributed to 'The Factory Girl'. Johnston speaks strongly on behalf of social and political victims, from 'The Drunkard's Wife' (pp.59-60) stripped of dignity by her husband, to 'The Exile of Poland' (pp.69-70). There is an attractively defiant streak in her work; 'Welcome, Garibaldi' (pp.28-29), for instance, hails the foreign hero as Wallace's spiritual descendant. Her work offers an ambiguous blend of peace-making and incendiary messages.

It should be noted that while a number of women were criticising the status quo, not all autodidacts did so. There is the moving, albeit doggerel, work of women like the Paisley warehouse worker Jeannie Johnstone (b.c.1870), daughter of the gardener-poet Alexander Johnstone. Johnstone's compositions are in the dominant contemporary mode of sentimental poems in praise of family. 'In Loving Memory of Jane B. Johnstone' is for a dead three year old child, 'Weep not, your darling rests secure / On a loving Saviour's breast'. Jessie D.M. Morton (b.1824), a Dunfermline newsagent, is gushing in celebration of 'My

first-born' in Clarkson Gray (1866), although she also wrote 'Her Broken Bowl', a comic piece castigating 'Ane o' the awfu' cleanin' kind' for her wicked household ways.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, attacks on the status quo, subtle or outspoken, were persistent, from Tibbie Pagan and 'The Scotch Milkmaid' to their poetic descendants, Jessie Russell and 'The Factory Girl'. The recurrent expression of 'sisterly' virtues, which united religious and radical sentiments in verse by women like Craig-Knox and Hamilton is, arguably, related to the double isolation of women autodidacts. They were neglected on the one hand for their social status and, on the other, for their gender. Exaggerating the treatment accorded to male autodidacts, women were encouraged to be even more passive. This attitude is seen in the iconography of the period. While male autodidacts, like Burns and Hogg, were allowed a certain ruffled presence, women were portrayed in demure (verging on cowering) poses, with covered heads and, usually, in old age.<sup>34</sup> Even if they complied with demands regarding self presentation, though, autodidactic women preserved their intellectual integrity. Their work offers a vibrant alternative to mainstream contemporary verse. The following and final chapter discusses the Scottish autodidactic tradition, as it developed during the last years of the nineteenth century.



## Notes

1. Mary Collier, The Woman's Labour 1739, rpt with Stephen Duck, The Thresher's Labour, The Augustan Society, no 230, (Los Angeles, 1985). 'Celebrated Female Writers', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 16 (August 1824), p.162. See Caroline Oliphant, Life and Songs of the Baroness Nairne, with a memoir and poems of Caroline Oliphant the Younger, Charles Rogers (ed) (London, 1869); Joanna Baillie, The Dramatic and Poetical Works, 2nd ed, (London, 1853); Anne Hunter, Poems, (London, 1802); Elizabeth Grant, The Harp of Renfrewshire, CXXXIX. Mrs Grant, Laggan, Poems on Various Subjects, (Edinburgh, 1803). Anne Grant, Memoir and Correspondence, ed John D. Grant (London 1844). See too Catherine Kerrigan, ed, An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets, (Edinburgh, 1991).
2. See [James Paterson], The Contemporaries of Burns, and the More Recent Poets of Ayrshire, (Edinburgh, 1840), pp.113-23; The Ballads and Songs of Ayrshire, (Edinburgh, 1847), pp.63-66. Paterson quotes the autobiographical piece, p.115.
3. James Johnson, The Scots Musical Museum, 1787-1803, rpt 6 vols in 2, (Hatboro, Penn, 1962), vol III, Song 264.
4. Paterson, p.122.
5. Paterson, pp.119-20.
6. On Glover see Paterson, pp.35-37; The Ballads and Songs of Ayr, (Ayr, 1846), pp.56-59. Scots Musical Museum, vol IV, Song 328. See Valentina Bold, 'Janet Little "The Scotch Milkmaid" and "Peasant Poetry"', Scottish Literary Journal, 20 (1993), pp.21-30; Hilton Brown, 'Burns and the Scottish Milkmaid', Burns Chronicle, (1950), pp.15-20; Maurice Lindsay,

- The Burns Encyclopaedia, 3rd ed, rev and enl (New York and London, 1980), pp.218-19; Robert T. Fitzhugh, Robert Burns. His Associates and Contemporaries, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1943), p.8; The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature, ed. Claire Buck, (London, 1992), p.751.
7. Qtd William Wallace, ed, Robert Burns and Mrs Dunlop, (London, 1988), pp.288-89, 329, 331, 126-27. The Poetical Works of Janet Little, The Scotch Milkmaid, (Ayr, 1792), pp.155-57; all references to Little's work are to this volume, given below, within the text, in parentheses.
  8. Henry Shanks, The Peasant Poets of Scotland and Musings under the Beeches, (Bathgate, 1881), p.69.
  9. Allan Ramsay, The Works of Allan Ramsay, vols I and II ed B. Martin and J.W. Oliver, Scottish Text Society, (Edinburgh and London, 1945-46); vols III-VI ed A.M. Kinghorn and Alexander Law, vol I, pp.22-6; Robert Fergusson, The Poems of Robert Fergusson, ed M.P. McDiarmid, 2 vols, (Edinburgh and London, 1947-56), vol II, pp.160-7; Robert Burns, The Letters of Robert Burns, ed G. Ross Roy, 2nd ed, 2 vols, (Oxford, 1985), vol I, 186.
  10. Ramsay, Works, vol I, pp.62-83; Fergusson, Poems, vol II, pp.89-95, 136-40; Donna Landry, The Muses of Resistance, (Cambridge, 1990), p.237.
  11. Ramsay, Works, vol I, pp.152-57. Editing Little's poem, Blackie changed a gracefully expressed fear that 'rude unpolish'd strokes' make 'ev'ry passage I would quote / Seem less sublime', to the clumsier 'The attempt would doubtless vex a saint, / And weel may thee' (ll.53-4), qtd John D. Ross, Robert Burns and his Rhyming Friends, (Stirling, 1928), p.83.
  12. Burns, Letters, vol I, 362. Qtd Wallace, pp.211-12, 223-24, 226.
  13. Burns Letters, vol II, 396; qtd Wallace, p.279; Burns



- Letters, vol II, 491; Mrs Dunlop, qtd Lindsay, p.218. Hilton Brown, p.15.
14. Qtd Wallace, pp.307-08.
  15. Landry, p.230.
  16. See Wallace, p.309.
  17. Mary Pyper, Select Pieces (Edinburgh, 1847), p.68.
  18. Mary Pyper, Sacred poems, ed E.B. Ramsay, (Edinburgh, 1865), p.74; subsequent references are to the latter volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  19. Maria Bell, Songs of Two Homes (Edinburgh and London, 1899), p.1; subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  20. Emily Dickinson, The Complete Poems, ed Thomas H. Johnson, (London, 1975), 2. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Requiem' from Underwoods 1887, rpt Collected Poems, ed Janet Adam Smith, 2nd ed (London, 1971), p.130. Whistlebinkie was issued by the Glasgow publisher D. Robertson in 1832, ed J.D. Carrick. There were several series, ed J.D. Carrick, A. Rodger and D. Robertson. In 1846 a separate volume appeared, Songs for the Nursery. The whole was published in one volume (1848), 2 volumes (1853) and, with additions, in 1878 and 1890. Similar material appeared in the Brechin publisher D.H. Edwards' Modern Scottish Poets, 16 series, (1880-1897).
  21. Isa [Craig-Knox], Poems, (Edinburgh, 1856), pp.1-5; subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  22. Isa Craig [Knox], Duchess Agnes etc., (London, 1864), pp.128-30; pp.195-203; subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  23. See Alexander Anderson, Songs of the Rail, 3rd ed, (London and Edinburgh, 1881); John Davidson, The Poems of John Davidson, Andrew Turnbull, ed, (Edinburgh, 1973), 2 vols. Isabella Craig-Knox,



- Songs of Consolation, (London, 1874).
24. Alexander G. Murdoch, The Scottish Poets, (Glasgow, 1887), p.344.
  25. Elizabeth Hartley, The Prairie Flower and other Poems, (Dumbarton, 1870), pp.9-34; subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses. John Greenleaf Whittier, F.O. Matthiessen, ed, The Oxford Book of American Verse, (New York, 1950), pp.156-58. See Robert Buchanan, The Poetical Works, (London, 1884).
  26. James Hamilton, ed, Poems, Essays and Sketches by Janet Hamilton, (Glasgow, 1880); J. Young, ed, Pictures in Prose and Verse, or, Personal Recollections of the late Janet Hamilton, (Glasgow, 1877). David Gray, The Poetical Works, ed Henry Glassford Bell, (Glasgow, 1874), pp.1-62; James Thomson, The City of Dreadful Night, 1874, ed Edwin Morgan, (Edinburgh, 1993). All page references are to Hamilton, Poems, ed James Hamilton, given in the text within parentheses.
  - 27 See Murdoch, pp.334-37; George Eyre-Todd ed, The Glasgow Poets, 2nd ed (Paisley, 1906), 226-27; Sketch of the late Mrs Hamilton, (Glasgow, 1873); see Edwin Morgan, 'Scottish Poetry in the Nineteenth Century' and William Finlay, 'Reclaiming Local Literature: William Thom and Janet Hamilton,' Chapter 19, Douglas Gifford ed, The History of Scottish Literature, Vol 3, (Aberdeen, 1988), Chapters 18 and 19. Hamilton's admiration for Queen Victoria is expressed in 'Lines. Suggested by Seeing the Train Containing the Queen and Suite pass through Coatbridge, on the Caledonian Railway, on her way to the North, May 1, 1862' (pp.36-37). Queen Victoria was, of course, a popular poetic figure celebrated, for instance, in Jean Clerk's 'Victoria' (1840) and Isabella Ledgerwood [Mrs Smith] (b.1866), 'The

- Jubilee Year'. On Clerk and Ledgerwood see Robert Brown ed, Paisley Poets, (Paisley, 1890), 2 vols, II, pp.120, 516-17. On Agnes Stewart Mabon see Kerrigan, 202-05.
28. Marion Bernstein, Mirren's Musings, (Glasgow, 1876), p.8; all subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  29. See Alexander Rodger, Poems and Songs, (Glasgow, 1838).
  30. Robert Tannahill, The Works of Robert Tannahill, Philip A Ramsay ed, (London, n.d.) no. 91.
  31. Jessie Russell, The Blinkin' o the Fire and other Poems, (Glasgow, 1887), p.iii-iv; all subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  32. See 'Testimonial from Rev George Gilfillan, Ellen Johnston', Autobiography, Poems and Songs, (Glasgow, 1867), p.vii; all subsequent references are to this volume, given within the text in parentheses.
  33. On Jeannie Johnstone see Brown II, pp.526-28; on Jessie D.M. Morton see Alexander G. Murdoch, Recent and Living Scottish Poets, (Glasgow and London, 1883), pp.337-43 and Ballads of Bairnhood, pp.187, 353.
  34. See, for instance, the frontispieces to Pyper's Sacred Poems and Hamilton's Poems, Sketches and Essays.

Chapter Twelve: In the Valhalla

'A maker of rhymes? Not I,  
Nothing I know of the tricks of verse,  
Nought of the making of melody,  
Yet I confess, at sundry times,  
When I am idle or work is scarce,  
Thoughts do move within my head--  
Thoughts which seem to rhyme allied,  
Thoughts in music garmented.' (11.1-8)

(James Young Geddes, 'The Man and the Engine', The Spectre Clock of Alyth, (Alyth, 1886), pp.58-64.)



By the late nineteenth century, the autodidactic tradition was in transition. The legacy of Hogg lived on, providing his poetic descendants with models for expression, and offering critics models for analysis. The vigorous oral tradition which had sustained early nineteenth century autodidacts was, however, being superseded and the burgeoning local press was fostering a strain of poetry epitomised by the couthy compositions of Whistlebinkie and multiple regional anthologies. There were, of course, honourable exceptions to the trend. This chapter examines four of the finest poets of the second half of the century: David Gray, David Wingate, Alexander Anderson and James Young Geddes. Their work constitutes the culmination of the peasant poet tradition in Scotland, and a missing link with twentieth century Scottish poetry.

David Gray (1838-1861) was an educated autodidact who studied Divinity at Glasgow University although, like Leyden, he never practised his profession. Gray's background as a handloom weaver's son from Merkland, near Kirkintilloch, attracted autodidactic mythologisers. Henry Glassford Bell, for instance, at the 1865 inauguration of the Gray Monument in Kirkintilloch's Auld Aisle Burying, focused on the poet's rustic credentials as one raised within, 'a simple, rural house, belonging to a simple, honest, and upright family, such a family as Scotland is always proud of--and such families I am proud

to know that Scotland possesses in her thousands'.

Harriet Jay, Robert Buchanan's biographer, mentions their shared reading of Chaucer, Milton, Homer and Virgil, in her profile of the two poets' University friendship. However, she pays more attention to Gray's 'lowly origin' and awkward manner than to his academic achievements.<sup>1</sup>

Like Leyden, Gray sought creative fulfilment by leaving Scotland, following Buchanan to London in 1860. His departure from home, sadly paralleling Leyden's fate, fostered his early demise. As he was unable, initially, to find Buchanan, and too poor to afford lodgings, the writer slept rough in Hyde Park on his arrival and irrevocably damaged his health. He did subsequently locate and lodge with Buchanan but, due to ill health, Gray was soon hospitalised. Despite several courses of treatment, and a period of recuperation in Torquay (financed, like Clare's treatment, by rich friends) the poet's health deteriorated. As the final stages of tuberculosis set in, Gray returned to Scotland to die, anticipating the fate of numerous fictional kailyard lads o' pairts like Barrie's scholar of A Window in Thrums (1889). According to literary legend, Gray expired on the day he finished correcting the proofs of The Luggie and other poems (1862). His tragic death probably encouraged its widespread acclaim. Buchanan remembered the writer in his memorial volume, to help the bereaved family, David Gray and other Essays (1868).



Gray's demise, and the tenor of his poetry, encouraged his typecasting as a romantically sickly autodidact. His editor, Bell, was entranced by the poet's 'refined perception of the beautiful...noble and pure thoughts...he has been enabled to express those noble and pure thoughts in very noble and pure language'. Gray was to be appreciated, primarily, for the 'moral improvement and intellectual benefit' he offered his readers. Gushingly, Bell continued: 'no true poet in this land, be his position in life what it may, be his birth humble or great...will ever find an ungrateful country in Scotland, as long as it remembers its great poets--as long as it knows that it is the land of Burns.'<sup>2</sup>

The depiction of Gray as an unthreatening, national poet does have some credibility. The Poetical Works consists largely of melancholic pieces in praise of innocent love, sited around the Kirkintilloch river, 'The Luggie'. The poet's 'natal' stream is celebrated in a particularly appropriate way for a peasant poet. Meandering along like the low-lying Luggie, Gray takes an imaginative journey through the scenes of his boyhood. He reexperiences personal and community memories, from physical and spiritual perspectives, as he lies 'in sick-room, pent'.<sup>3</sup> There are similarities to Thomson's The Seasons (1726-30) and, more pertinently, to Leyden's nostalgic evocations of the Teviot. Gray equates his river with the pleasures of childhood and a chastely



emotional adolescence.

Showing the strong regional loyalties associated with the Scottish autodidactic tradition, 'The Luggie' charms largely by its conviction that Dunbartonshire is best. Despite a hesitant opening, the exuberance of the piece soon engages the reader's attention. Gray's language is sometimes awkwardly experimental. A hill is 'with umbrage clad'; the Luggie exhibits 'Pellucid luculence'; a laverock is 'little sweet hierophant'. However, the dominant effect is of a heartfelt energy, compounded by breathless, multiple claused lines, reminiscent of Clough's post-romanticism, as the Luggie is described in detail:

The uttered name my inmost being thrills,  
A word beyond a charm; and if this lay  
Could smoothly flow along and wind to the end  
In natural manner, as the Luggie winds  
Her tortuous waters, then the world would list  
In sweet enthrallment. (ll.6-11)<sup>4</sup>

Scottish autodidactic poets, notably Hogg, often used their birthplaces as locations for their poetry, but Gray's imaginative comparison of place and poetic techniques is unusual (see Chapter Six).

Drawing on the visionary tradition of Ramsay, Fergusson, Burns and Hogg, Gray evokes an 'enchanted' scene where he lies, sleeping, on 'A bank of harebells'.

In an elegant manner, he presents a series of finely-drawn cameos, dominated by 'Autumnal' memories. Personal and communal concerns intermingle as the Luggie is followed around the year. Approaching death is associated with the coming winter. The landscape is 'a fair picture'.

Although not from a farming family, Gray is as believably vivid as Constable's Landscape, Ploughing Scene in Suffolk (1814) in his recollection of a ploughing match:

The morn  
 Lighted the east with a dim smoky flare  
 Of leaden purple, as the rumbling wains  
 Each with a plough light-laden (while behind  
 Trotted a horse sleek-comb'd and tall bedight  
 With many coloured ribbons) by our home  
 Went downwards to the rich fat meadow-grounds  
 Bounding the Luggie. (ll.418-25)<sup>5</sup>

Such portraits show the writer's debt to the rustic portraits of earlier autodidacts, although they are more romanticised than those of his vigorous predecessors of the earlier nineteenth century; later autodidacts seem to have lost the sense of personal connexion with the land enjoyed by their poetic ancestors.

His identification with rustic Dunbartonshire, rather than the weaving community, is linked to Gray's presentation of himself as part of the peasant poet tradition, as a latter-day Ettrick Shepherd. Furthermore,

Gray parallels his memories with classical versions of the countryside: the rural scenes of home recalled in The Iliad, Aeneid and Georgics for instance. The Luggie's beauty is compared with that of the 'Lucid Aegean', and the Scottish river found superior (p.6). Such peasant posturing is reinforced, elsewhere, by evocations of idealised country communities. A Mayday memory of a deceased friend, for example, opens with a comradely singing of traditional songs, en route to courting: 'It was upon a Lammas nicht' and 'that sweet thing by gentle Tannahill, / .... The Lowland Lassie'. A cheery cottage scene ensues, with fireside tales and kisses, comparable to a painting by Wilkie or David Allen (pp.30-34).

This is highly regressive, establishment-orientated poetry, developing the more elegant tendencies in poems like Scenes of Infancy, and anticipating A Child's Garden of Verses (1885). The persona is of an ingénu (glossing over the less salubrious life which Gray experienced in London). Gray relishes 'Friendship, prelibation of divine / Enjoyment' above all (p.33). The local lasses elicit a 'wondrous yearning' but are unerotically imagined, even as potentially sensual swimmers who 'uptilt the swelling chest' in the Luggie after work (pp.35, 39). Cheerfully, the writer recalls winter sports as epic contests. Artistic parallels can, again, be drawn: Henry Raeburn's representation of 'The Rev. Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch' (1784) or the 'Winter Landscape' by





prefigured by a beloved uncle's fate. Twelve years on,  
 the deceased is merely a 'happy memory' among his family:  
 'now forgot, / And this his natal valley knows him not'.  
 In anguish, the poet cries out:

The body, blood, and network of the brain  
 Crumbled as a clod crumbles! Is this all?  
 A turf, a date, an epitaph, and then  
 Oblivion and profound nonentity!

Even if, as the narrator asserts, a 'purer life' will follow, the reader is left with the uncomfortable feeling that this poet did not face death as gently as he professed (pp.57-58). The impression which endures is of understated anguish.

Religious doubts, in Gray's work, reflect a contemporary mood (found, for instance, in the ambivalent work of women autodidacts like Maria Bell, discussed in Chapter Eleven). 'In the Shadows', a sonnet sequence, sustains the morbid preoccupations of 'The Luggie', with soulful debts to Buchanan and anticipations of Stevenson at his most ethereal (pp.63-97). This explores 'a dying poet's mind', moving superficially from doubt to acceptance. Fear of death constantly breaks through. Sonnet III claims creative kinship with 'the tear-worthy four' young poets who died from consumption: Pollock, White, Keats and fellow-autodidact Bruce. Poetry, in IV,

is Gray's sole solace, despite his father's 'vain, yet well-meant reprimand' to prefer 'bare theologies'. He reveals the details of his suffering, in a macabre fashion paralleling Keats, in the economical Sonnet V:

Last night, on coughing slightly with sharp  
pain,  
There came arterial blood, and with a sigh  
Of absolute grief I cried in bitter vein,  
That drop is my death-warrant: I must die.  
(11.1-4)

In sonnet VI, Gray begs for Divine mercy with a shockingly modern anger: 'O God, let me not die for years and more!' (1.9). The young poet, then, rages at his fate.

Sonnet VIII continues the religious confusion by asking relief from the 'labyrinthine maze / Of doctrine', and expressing the preference for enduring 'Nature' which might be expected from a peasant poet (p.73). Sonnet XIX shows late Autumn, consoling in 'the Luggie', as a time of 'rot' (p.84). Despair, of the depths felt by Christ in Gethsemane, informs this powerful section:

This season is a dead one, and I die!  
No more, no more for me the spring shall  
make  
A resurrection in the earth and take  
The death from out her heart--O God, I die!  
(11.9-12)



In XXVIII, the words of Lady Nairne's 'Land of the Leal' hold special significance for the dying poet, 'Since I, too, wear [Gray's emphasis] away like the unenduring snow' (p.92, l.14).<sup>7</sup> The sequence ends, though, by shunning doubts. XXX is an earnest prayer for the sinner's repentance and appreciation of 'purity' to come (p.95).

The rest of Poetical Works develops 'The Luggie', reverentially amassing rural associations as the poet develops his autodidactic persona. A three sonnet series, 'The Luggie', for instance, revisits the river as 'the image of my inner life' (pp.188-90). There are few traces of city life in Gray's work. His rare urban ventures, like 'A Vision of Venice' (pp.145-49), depict unfulfilled dreams of travel; even Venice, despite associations with Tasso and Shakespeare, is solely a city of 'pride'. 'Discontent' shows the writer's alignment with pastoral traditions, as he wishes to be some latter-day Gentle Shepherd, 'To dally, like the lover in a song, / And be a luting swain, Arcadian bred!' (p.195, ll.13-14). Gray was less successful, though, in traditional-style songs; by the later nineteenth century, autodidacts seem to have been less skilled at reworking oral traditions than their predecessors Hogg, Leyden and Cunningham. 'The Love-Tryst', for instance, is clumsy, relating a meeting with a maiden, 'tripping up the dewy lea', her tread is 'Light as an antelope' (pp.134-38). Oral style, for Gray, evades, rather than illuminates, contemporary concerns.

Other autodidacts addressed the modern environment directly. David Wingate (1828-92), for instance, excelled in portraits drawn from his experiences as a Hamilton miner. Having augmented his minimal formal education by attending evening classes, Wingate became a colliery manager. Retiring early, he had more time to write than most autodidacts and contributed, like Hogg and Cunningham, to Blackwood's Magazine. Even when aligning himself with his pastoral forebears, though, Wingate is one step removed as an industrial poet. In Annie Weir (1866), for instance, 'A Day Amang the Haws' opens amidst a scene of rustic beauty. Recalling Clough's 'Bothy of Tober-na-Vuolich', Wingate describes a 'city callan' enjoying the countryside, alien to his normal experience, on an Autumn Sunday:

Frae the mill where stourie "jennies"  
 Round him aye are whirrin' thrang;....  
 Frae the stench that kens nae sweetenin',  
 And the dun that has nae pause,  
 To the freshness and the freedom  
 O' a day amang the haws.

(11.17-18, 29-32)<sup>8</sup>

This urbanised poet is not a participant-observer peasant but a cultural tourist in the countryside.

Wingate constantly aligns himself with the urban underdog, in a distinctive variation on the sense of rural

community exemplified in the work of 'the Ettrick Shepherd'. 'The Chield oot o' wark' conveys the dehumanising nature of unemployment with immediacy and compassion (pp.188-90). Wingate is, too, as alert to the plight of women labourers as were 'Danaus' Daughters' (see Chapter Eleven). 'Annie Weir' features a girl who, by the age of seventeen, had long toiled 'up the weary stairs wi' her coal-creel' (pp.1-16). In a lyric about woman's beauty, expected from autodidacts, Wingate offers a significant industrial variation, juxtaposing human frailty with the reality of coal mining. He uses the language of the traditional love lyric to quietly emphasise the ghastliness of mining life:

"That her silken auburn hair,  
       Snawy hauns, and face so fair,  
 Should be daily soiled sae sair I aye was  
   mourning;  
 But my Annie at her wark,  
       Aye as lichtsome as the lark,  
 Gaed singing to the stair, and sang returning.  
   (verse 14)

A mining accident traps Annie with her lover Reuben in the mine, anticipating the fevered finale of Zola's Germinal (1885). Although rescued, and married to her betrothed, Annie dies soon afterwards. The exploitation of women in the mines is effectively, and eloquently, condemned.



Tragedy is Wingate's forte. Lily Neil (1879) exemplifies the enduring skill of autodidacts, in the tradition of Hogg, at managing long narratives. Text and frame are cleverly interwoven. This gripping tale of love slighted and divinely revenged, is narrated by Eben (also known as Alston of the Grange) who made his fortune overseas and returned home to marry a widow.<sup>9</sup> Lily, a cottar's daughter, is courted by Willie, above her station as a farmer's son. He jilts Lily who is saved from suicide by her father, Jacob, and Walter (a cottar who secretly loves her). After bearing a child, who dies, Lily passes into seclusion. In a melodramatic climax, Willie returns and drowns, despite Walter's rescue attempt, in the pool where Lily tried suicide. Walter declares he loves Lily but, despite encouragement from her father and Walter's sister, she refuses his proposal. Eben, it transpires, is Walter.

There are visionary moments, recalling Hogg's fantastic journeys (discussed in Chapter Seven). Dreams foreshadow Lily's 'dreadful disappointment', and Lily herself sees sights 'beyond the stars' ranging to 'the Eternal Occupant'. Her guide, in this context, is her mother, a near-Marian 'commissioned messenger of Heaven' full of 'pitying love' (p.107). Nocturnal musings, offering philosophical breaks, include considerations of plural worlds by analogy (the notion that the existence of a populated earth suggests that there are other inhabited

planets), as in The Pilgrims of the Sun (1815). Lily wonders if the planets are 'worlds like ours, so peopled and so vile', or if there is one 'Which sin had not found out' (p.110). Wingate's Lily, like a latter-day Pilgrim, finds the real world harsher than the celestial.

Developing hints, in the work of previous autodidacts, that rustic communities were not wholly idyllic (see, for instance, 'The Russiadde', discussed in Chapter Eight) Wingate suggests that the countryside could be a context for conflict and small-mindedness. Rustics aim 'malice-poisoned shafts' of slander at Lily (p.160). Remaining within one's station is the strongest concern for Wingate's rural people, intertwined with a desire for moderate learning. Jacob Neil exemplifies the autodidact who knows his place. He is: 'a cottar of the noblest kind, /.... A poet almost' (pp.8-9). The owner of three shelves of books, and a writer, Jacob is content: 'he was wise enough to know that some / Are born to serve' (p.10). The heroine, on the other hand, arouses suspicion:

At school she learned far more the neighbours  
said,  
Than it was fit a cottar's child should know;  
And foolishly they prophesied her lear  
Would lead to her ruin. (pp.20-21)

The notion that education could lead to a peasant's ruin is a common downside to autodidacticism, a perception



perhaps related to the sad demise of well known autodidacts like Burns, Leyden and Clare. It is developed here through the person of the morally bankrupt Willie, 'the student', who presents himself as a man who 'studied til his health had failed', and who overcame Jacob's misgivings by his 'wealth of rare book-lore' (pp.44, 66). This type later became standard in Scottish literature, in characters like Tony the Daftie in Sunset Song (1932) and Young Gourlay of The House with the Green Shutters (1901). Barrie, in A Window in Thrums (1889), developed the implication that education can be dangerous, recommending 'A Home for Geniuses' to isolate them for the safety of themselves and others.<sup>10</sup>

Although, in his longer narratives, Wingate strove to emulate the experimental spirit of Hogg, it is as a plain Miner poet that he is remembered. Wingate, in his collected Poems, played up to his critics, and promoted a similar range of autodidactic models to Hogg's, including Burns and the Biblical King David, presented as the 'Ploughman Bard and Psalmist King' (in 'January 25th, 1888').<sup>11</sup> Critics found such straight tributes palatable. The Spectator, in 1862, had praised the 'gifts of heaven' of an 'honest, hard-working miner'. The John o' Groats Journal placed the writer in the tradition of Burns and Tannahill. The Sunderland Herald was enthusiastic, in a convoluted way, about the autodidactic; 'elevation of sentiment and a purity of expression such as



honour to writers moving in circles far removed from scenes like those amid which this Lanarkshire collier has climbed to literary distinction'. The Scotsman, though, was surprised by discrepancies between Wingate's work and their expectations of autodidacts. Despite outstanding 'vigour' and 'thorough genuineness', 'Contrary to what might have been expected, the refinement predominates, as far as the language is concerned'. Such remarks show the enduring influence of peasant poet stereotyping.<sup>12</sup>

Wingate's work, and reception, helped to mould the career of his fellow poet of mechanised labour, Alexander Anderson (1845-1909). Anderson was born in Kirkconnel, according to his biographer and colleague David Cuthbertson, in a cottage 'even more humble and unpretentious' than Burns's'. In 1848, the family moved to Crocketford in Galloway where the poet's father was a quarry foreman. Cuthbertson stresses that Surfaceman's father was highly literate, and familiar with the work of great autodidacts like Burns and Hogg.<sup>13</sup>

An early liking for Burns was expressed by Anderson, stressing his status as a modern autodidact, within the Scottish autodidactic tradition. At times, Anderson was quite sophisticated in his appreciation of Burns.

'Robert Burns. On the Inauguration of the Burns' Monument at Kilmarnock, August, 1879' suggests a connexion between Anderson's liking for Whitman and his notion of Burns as an inspirational figure for peasant writers. The piece

opens by quoting Whitman: 'See projected, through time / For HIM an audience interminable'. The writer's admiration for Burns was, more conventionally, expressed in Burns: an Ode for the 6th of April 1882, when the Dumfries Statue of the Bard by Mrs D.O. Hill is to be unveiled, (1882). There is a strongly autodidactic slant here, as Anderson pays tribute to:

our singer, who behind his plough  
Walk'd, while song-splendours born in fire above  
Fell down like golden rain upon his brow.<sup>14</sup>

The young poet enthusiastically read Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Shelley, and relished adventure fiction by Fenimore Cooper and Bret Harte. Cuthbertson stressed that, despite liking pranks (being, like Leyden, part of a spirited peasant poet tradition), Anderson was a sensitive peasant poet (and visual artist). After various country jobs, at sixteen Anderson returned with his family to Kirkconnel. By 1863 he was a surfaceman, or navvy, for the Glasgow and Southwestern Railway Company. The writer, like his father, was a teetotal Good Templar. In 1873 he joined the Evangelical Union Church in Sanquhar which had the benefit of an attached library.<sup>15</sup>

Anderson, like Leyden, taught himself modern languages, acquiring a reading knowledge of French from Cassell's Popular Educator and German from Ahn's German



Method. Cuthbertson is patronising in depicting the young autodidact at work:

sitting on a railway bank, with his pick and shovel lying by his side, poring over his books, and at the same time learning the all too common habit of outdoor workers of bolting his food.... however, the divine afflatus descended on occasion upon him.

Anderson collaborated to construct his autodidactic image, describing how '"all day long I conjugated verbs to the accomplishment [sic] of the swish and clank of the hammer"' ; such dedication was regularly required from the Scottish autodidact, as has been seen above.<sup>16</sup>

Anderson was among the more successful of the Scottish autodidacts in overcoming the barriers of his lowly social origins. He was encouraged by Hugh Webster, then sub-editor on The People's Journal and later Anderson's superior at Edinburgh University Library. A Song of Labour (1873) and The Two Angels (1875) sold well, winning admirers like Archibald Cameron Corbett, MP for Tradeston, Glasgow, who took Anderson on a trip through Europe. The successful Songs of the Rail (1878) facilitated Anderson's appointment as head assistant at Edinburgh University Library in 1880. Although Alexander Smith (1830-67), the Kilmarnock-born poet and lace-pattern designer, had been appointed Secretary to Edinburgh



University in 1854, there were strong objections from the academic establishment to the appointment of the 'working man' Anderson. Quoted by Cuthbertson, Anderson remarked: "I had never been in a library before, and there was the additional disgrace, of course, of my being a poet".<sup>17</sup>

According to Cuthbertson, Anderson cut an incongruous figure as a 'rough navvy', employing 'the coarse invective', and 'ill qualified for his duties'. Cuthbertson recalls that, while the poet did write at home, he continued the habit, usually associated with autodidacts, of composing his poetry at work:

I have seen him notebook in hand...take a pencil and jot down the terminal word of each line, taking care that it had the same rhythm. He would then write up to each of these, and it is a curious fact--which I have noted--that although he was often interrupted by students wanting books, he never lost the chain of his ideas, but succeeded in completing them.<sup>18</sup>

After five years at the library, Anderson became Secretary to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution but returned to his previous post in 1886, rising to become Librarian with Professor Eggeling as Curator. After a long illness, he died of cancer of the liver.

As a typically entertaining autodidact, Anderson was remembered as convivial but, on occasion, bluff. Rev William C. Fraser remembered Anderson's talent for

conversation: 'he was received into many of the literary and artistic societies. He made many friends, and I used to tell him they wasted his time'. Cuthbertson tells an anecdote of asking Anderson to contribute to John Masson's scheme 'to help an unfortunate licentiate of the Church...a lunatic pauper in an Ayrshire poorhouse'. The response epitomises the frustration of an autodidact at being placed in a category with social misfits. Anderson grudgingly sent a half sovereign: '"Take that to Masson, but allow me to tell you that there is a limit to human goodness, and the Doctor goes beyond the limit"'.<sup>19</sup>

Epistolary evidence suggests the poet possessed a gentle sense of good humour towards his own marginal status as an autodidact. There is, for instance, an hilarious letter of September 24th 1884 from Anderson to his friend Mrs Brown, then in America. The poet includes a selection of related 'correspondence' purporting to be from eminent American writers who had seen Mrs Brown's photograph of the poet. Walt Whitman, for instance, is quoted: 'One photo bears a striking resemblance to all the old 'bus drivers with whom I used to sit on the box-seat when I was a young man loafing about Broadway. Libertad, libertad, I hail in the original a camarado'.<sup>20</sup>

Anderson's work, like Wingate's, often adopts a superficially quietistic tone. A Song of Labour (1873) is dedicated to 'those who, like myself, have to toil for their daily bread', aiming to increase their 'reverence



for the "nobility of labour". However, it introduces a virile and evangelical persona. In the title poem, 'Surfaceman' leads his Elect, 'my fellow-workers with pick and shovel', in their devotions to 'Progress':

Let us sing, my toiling Brothers, with our  
   rough, rude voice a song  
 That shall live behind, nor do us in the after  
   ages wrong....  
 The God above hath made us one in flesh and  
   blood with kings,  
 But the lower use is ours, and all the force of  
   rougher things.<sup>21</sup>

There is a Whitmanesque vigour to the Engine, which anticipates the work of James Young Geddes (discussed below): 'Am I not the unseen symbol giving every moment birth, / Breathing with a finger resting on the iron pulse of earth' (p.6). Rival claims from weavers like Hamilton, or factory workers like Johnson, are dismissed: Anderson's muscular vision has the Engine 'mightier' than the 'the spindle' or the 'furnace' (p.9). Anderson's poetic environment is an industrial equivalent to the (actual and spiritual) prairie landscapes of Cooper, reimagined by poets like Hartley (as discussed in Chapter Eleven). Sacrifice before advancement is implied; the 'monster' Engine is associated with those who suffered to advance knowledge: 'Frankensteins'; 'Prometheus' and the 'serpent'



(p.10). Assertively autodidactic, Anderson characterises Labour as 'a master whose first aim is to unteach'.

Anderson's belief in ennobling Labour is balanced by other elements in his repertoire. There are, for instance, peaceful treatments of family life, in Scots: couthier than Stevenson's A Child's Garden of Verses (1885) and more sentimental than Soutar's later 'bairn rhymes'. 'The Unco Bit Wean' (pp.166-67), for instance, expresses maternal pride in an endearing manner, resembling Hogg's affectionate tribute to his youngest daughter.<sup>22</sup> There was, moreover, a sophisticated side to Anderson, particularly visible in his tributes to poetic heroes. Sonnet XIX 'I Walk with the Stern Dante' (p.199) has Anderson in Virgil's place as spirit guide; the self-mocking 'Recollections of Byron' (pp.46-47) recalls the inspiration of his fellow Scot on the youthful poet. Later, following Carlyle's advice to prefer Goethe, the narrator was filled with 'dim, chaotic fancies'.

Surfaceman foresaw he would be typecast as a minor peasant poet. Sonnet I 'An Unskilled Hand Upon the Strings' (p.181) addresses the frustrating preconception autodidactic work was 'unfitting music, doing wrong / To the pure silence that should be my choice' (ll.1-2). It resolves, though, to use this 'unskilled hand' to produce 'true' songs. Critics emphasised the poet's autodidactic status, treating A Song of Labour as of local, limited, interest. The Chicago Tribune appreciated its 'hearty

earnestness'. The Liverpool Albion thought Anderson, 'a very remarkable man'. George Gilfillan hailed the poet as 'the true "Railway King"', and The Railway News and Joint-Stock Journal agreed: 'the book...may be a subject of pride to sixteen thousand platelayers'. The People's Friend said Anderson was a top class autodidact with 'a culture of intellect, a nobility of mind and heart...astonishing even where the highest training has been received in college halls'. The Scotsman, similarly, admired a 'rare degree of culture'. The Athenaeum perceptively noted Anderson's real autodidactic characteristic: 'a remarkable power in the author of assimilating what he reads'. The Ayr Observer admired the 'educated Surfaceman' as a 'son of toil', and The Dumfriesshire and Galloway Herald enthused that, 'sons of labour should delight to honour one who has done so much to dignify their calling'.<sup>23</sup>

Similar reactions to Anderson, as an autodidact, informed responses to his later work. The Two Angels and Other Poems, (1875) sustains and develops the concerns of Anderson's first volume. It is prefaced by a sketch by George Gilfillan, recalling his opinion of the Song of Labour and the 'well-cultivated mind' of Surfaceman: 'The Ayrshire Ploughman, the Edinburgh Barber, the Paisley Weaver, the Glasgow Pattern-drawer, the Clydesdale Miner, the Aberdeen Policeman are scarcely so wonderful' (referring to, respectively, Robert Burns, Allan Ramsay,



Robert Tannahill, Alexander Smith, David Wingate and William Anderson (1802-67) whose best known poem is 'Jean Findlater's Loun'). Gilfillan believed 'a purer and more simple-minded man does not exist' than Anderson.<sup>24</sup>

In support of Gilfillan's view, there are several childhood pieces but these, though ostensibly sentimental, convey an acute awareness of danger. 'Cuddle Doon' (pp.72-73), for instance, based on Anderson's childhood friends the Maxwell family, deals with the settling down of the 'waukrife rogues', Jamie, Rab and Tam, before their father comes home. Despite the sentimentality of the scene, 'Tam has his airm roun' wee Rab's neck, / An' Rab his airm roun' Tam's' (ll.35-36), there is a disturbing awareness that childhood's security is transient:

The bairnies cuddle doon at nicht  
                   Wi' mirth that's dear to me;  
 But sune the big warl's cark an' care  
                   Will quaten doon their glee.  
 Yet, come what will to ilka ane,  
                   May He who sits aboon  
 Aye whisper, though their pows be bauld,  
                   "O, bairnies, cuddle doon. (verse 6)

Similarly, 'Jenny wi' the Airn Teeth' (pp.61-63) goes beyond the childhood terror figure it invokes, pondering that 'Bigger bowgies, bigger Jennies, / Frichten muckle men' (ll.47-48).<sup>25</sup>



'Daft Ailie' (pp.197-203), in an analogous style, is a disturbing elegy to blighted love, working in the ballad tradition and drawing on the same type of oral material MacDiarmid would later use for 'Empty Vessel'.<sup>26</sup> Years before, her lover was drowned but Ailie, with a light in her eye which 'shouldna hae been there', waits for him. This piece attains a ballad-like clarity of expression, particularly in the dialogue as Ailie invites local children to her bridal:

"An' what is your bonnie bridegroom like?  
 Is he strong, an' braid, an' braw?  
 An' wha is he that will come an' tak'  
 Auld Ailie frae us a'?"

"Oh, my ain bridegroom is tall an' fair,  
 An' straucht as a hazel tree,  
 An' licht is the touch o' his han' in mine,  
 When he speaks in the gloamin' to me.  
 (verses 9-10)

In poems like this, Anderson follows the practice of his autodidactic predecessors, especially Hogg, in using a traditional style to create a modern effect.

Anderson's credo is a version of Christian Darwinism. In 'City and Village' (pp.170-74), he expresses dual allegiances to urban and rural life; the 'educated' and peasants. Anderson predicts the 'apehood' of life being left behind for 'far ages bristling upward' under those

'hearted with the heart of Christ'. The 'toiling, restless city' fosters such thoughts but 'walks at night-time when the village is at rest' are inspiring. There are Carlylean overtones. Anderson greatly admired Carlyle, and had an introduction to him in London; there is an implicit tribute to his hero in the call for a 'poet, prophet, priest' of progress.<sup>27</sup>

As an autodidact with personal experience of industry, though, Anderson is well aware of its potential for destruction. Anderson is sometimes suspicious, for instance in 'A Song of Progress' (pp.51-53), of the 'Messiah' of Science and its 'wild familiar' the Engine (paralleling Geddes' notion of the ambiguities in progress). The engine is a jealous god, usually female, which brooks no rivals. In 'Blood on the Wheel' (pp.58-60) the engine--the 'ring of the engine-wheels had something in them of love'--claims the life of a railwayman's bride. 'Behind Time' (pp.100-02) reverses the situation as the engine kills a railwayman, Harry, widowing his wife of four months.

The Two Angels was perceived as an autodidactic triumph. George Saintsbury, later Professor of English at Edinburgh University, in The Academy, was pleasantly surprised to find 'the more ambitious poems are as good as the more homely'. This led him to make general reflections upon the nature of peasant poetry:

The more perilous effect of culture upon those who are not to the manner born is that they acquire, more or less imperfectly, the language and ideas of the higher classes, while they unlearn their own natural speech and thought. This is not the case with Mr. Anderson.

The Courant succinctly praised 'resolute self-culture', and The Border Advertiser thought Anderson honoured himself, as well as 'the class to which he belongs, and...the age which has the liberality to purchase and the taste to enjoy such productions...[of] a genuine son of toil and a genuine son of song'. Labour News perceived a new champion, 'who can sing of the throbbing impulses of this inquiring age, and...the triumphs of science'. The Saturday Review offered double-edged praises: 'Considering his defective education and his everyday employment, there is a remarkable delicacy and refinement'. At the end of the nineteenth century, then, critics were still treating autodidacts in the patronising manner that had been used to evaluate the work of Hogg and his contemporaries.<sup>28</sup>

Songs of the Rail (1881) rises to the challenge to be typically autodidactic, proclaiming its intent 'to interest my fellow-workers on the railway, and heighten to some degree their pride in the service, however humble'. The Engine is 'the embodiment of a force as noble as gigantic...one of the civilisers of the world'.<sup>29</sup> Previously published items appear with minor word changes,



such as 'On the Engine by Night' (pp.79-82), previously 'On the Engine in the Night-Time'. The theme of the Engine as 'god of fire and steam' is followed through pieces like 'The Engine' (pp.44-48): 'I trust in his strength, and he trusts in me'. A limited class solidarity is expressed in 'A Song for My Fellows' (pp.40-43), variations around Goethe's line 'Ambos oder Hammer sein', translated '"Thou must hammer or anvil be"'. The maxim, no doubt appealing to Anderson for its mechanical slant, incites men to shun an 'ape-like life': '"Here are men who will work at the tasks of men / Or failing, man-like will die"' (ll.79-80).

As in past volumes, Anderson highlights the potential sacrifices involved in progress. There is nostalgia for neglected rural life, epitomised by 'The Violet' which grows 'On the down line', compared to a poet who will 'droop and fade' unnoticed by 'the hoarse world, like the iron trains' (pp.159-60). 'Nottman' (pp.110-13), based on an incident involving an employee of the Glasgow and Southwestern Railway, profiles a brave hero like the frontiersmen of Robert Service and Jack London. This fast paced poem looks ahead to the compositions of the last great Scottish autodidact, James Young Geddes. There are thematic and stylistic connexions between Anderson and Geddes: their concern with industrial environments, for instance, and their adaptation of the direct means of

expression used by American poets, like Whitman, to discuss Scottish cultural issues:

That was Nottman waving at me,  
But the steam fell out, so you could not see;  
He is out to-day with the fast express,  
And running a mile in the minute, I guess.

Danger? none in the least, for the way  
Is good, though the curves are sharp as you say.  
(11.1-6)

Nottman sees a child asleep on the track and, without time to brake, kneels on the front beam of his engine and pushes the child away unscathed. Dramatically, he then discovers the child is '"my own little Tom! "'. The sentimental ending is superfluous, tacked on to please the contemporary audience. The real focus here is the combat between man and the Engine, fighting over a human life. The man and the engine are mighty foes, as Nottman slows down the 'great wheels' of the train to bring the wayward engine 'to a stand' and save a child.<sup>30</sup>

Exemplifying the limited appeal of an autodidactic persona, and the limited interests of readers, reviews of Songs of the Rail were, by now, tiring of the 'Surfaceman' soubriquet (although the volume ran to three editions). Although The Sheffield Telegraph dubbed Anderson, 'the Homer of the Iron Horse', The Scotsman thought his

industrial persona of limited interest. Despite the success of acting as 'minstrel to a machine', Anderson 'seems to have worked this vein quite sufficiently'. The Glasgow Herald, too, found the book 'too great a heap of one particular thing'.<sup>31</sup>

For all his association with the railway, Anderson was, ultimately, remembered as a peasant poet in the tradition of Burns and Hogg at their most sentimental. In reviewing Ballads and Sonnets (1879), The Athenaeum reversed the usual peasant poet quotation. Drawing on the myth that the peasant poet, like Burns and Hogg, neglected his first profession, the critic remarked, 'one would not think a poet to be the most eligible person for the duties of a surfaceman. Yet Alexander Anderson is said by his chiefs to be among the best of the men in their line'. Cuthbertson did note Anderson's debt to Alexander Smith, whose 'Glasgow' includes the line, 'The wild train plunges in the hills', and to Alexander G. Murdoch of Glasgow, with his reference in 'Breeks o' Hodden Grey' to 'The steel-ribb'd engine'. However, the poet's strength was identified as 'domestic lyrics' like 'Cuddle Doon'.<sup>32</sup>

'Surfaceman' was frequently imaginatively grouped with Burns and Hogg. In a letter to Thomas Aird, of December 1875, Gilfillan expressed the opinion Anderson's behaviour was that of 'an unspoiled Burns'. Emphasising the writer's autodidactic pedigree, Cuthbertson notes 'Surfaceman' owned a picture of Burns, by Martin Hardie,



with the eyes modelled on Anderson's. Anderson, moreover, did not discourage the construction of an autodidactic genealogy, tracing his descent through Hogg to Burns. In 1884, he visited the Ettrick Shepherd's daughter, Mrs Garden, at Parsonspool, hearing her sing 'The Skylark' and 'Cam ye by Athole'.<sup>33</sup>

Anderson gained personal honours in his lifetime and beyond. He was given the freedom of Crocketford. In 1891 he was presented, at a dinner chaired by Sheriff Aeneas Mackay at the Douglas Hotel, Edinburgh, with his own portrait by W.S. MacGeorge, R.S.A. This, after exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery, hung in Anderson's Edinburgh home during his lifetime. With a typically double-edged compliment Cuthbertson observes, 'Although it depicts a rather refined individual, still in its main delineations it presents a good likeness of what he was like at that period'. The Anderson (Kirkconnel) Club, founded in 1922, upheld the poet's memory with an annual dinner, literary donations, and an annual June excursion to beauty spots in the Kirkconnel area. Anderson had remembered Kirkconnel by donating books, cash and portraits of himself and of Burns, to be used in the foundation of a public library and reading room for his fellow villagers. The Anderson Institute in Crocketford was founded in 1922, making the schoolhouse the poet had frequented into a public hall for villagers. A sandstone monument to Anderson was erected on the Kirkbrae,

Kirkconnel, designed by T. Duncan Rhind, and featuring a bronze plaque of the poet's head, wreathed in laurel, inscribed 'Alexander Anderson, "Surfaceman". Born 1845. Died 1909. "He Sleeps Among the Hills he knew"'.<sup>34</sup>

'Surfaceman' epitomises the plight of the autodidact caught between progress and tradition, striving to match his desire for a simple pastoral life with his allegiance to industrial growth. His solution to the problem was similar to Wingate's, celebrating the worker within the industrial environment. A more direct solution, of political protest, was advocated by the greatest end-of-century Scottish autodidact: James Young Geddes (1850-1913). Geddes, from Dundee, was a tailor's son who, aged sixteen, took control of the family business in Dundee High Street. Geddes received minimal formal education but, like other autodidacts, followed a rigorous programme of self-education. He was involved with a study group at the Tay Square Presbyterian Church Literary Society and, after his personal Disruption with their minister, the Lindsay Street Congregational Church's debating group.

Like his peasant predecessors, Geddes faced real obstacles in finding the time and energy to write. Following the autodidactic tradition of contribution to periodicals, his early work appeared in The Dundee Advertiser and The People's Journal. His friends included William Reid, principal sub-editor of The Dundee Advertiser, W.F. Black of The People's Journal, and James



Cromb of The Evening Telegraph. In 1874 the poet married Jessie Ballantyne Hendry (1856-1946), moving to Alyth in 1882. The family shop in Airlie Street was a modest success, but Geddes' personal life was tragic. Two of his sisters died in their twenties. Three of his children predeceased him. Agnes' death at the age of three, James Young's demise within five hours of birth, and Andrew's suicide at the age of twenty-five, affected the writer profoundly as he remembered in his desolate verses 'The Dead Children'.<sup>35</sup> Geddes published three collections of poetry: The New Jerusalem (1879), The Spectre Clock of Alyth (1886) and In the Valhalla (1891); he also wrote a Guide to Alyth (1913), essays for the Weekly Sun and Weekly Star, and a children's cantata, The Babes in the Wood, set to music by John Kerr.

Four surviving landscapes testify to Geddes' talent as an amateur painter. Geddes' scenes of Alyth now hang in the council rooms at Alyth, and at least one more painting is in private hands. The council's paintings are approximately three feet by two feet, and they blend urban and rural elements in unusual ways. One depicts the road leading into Alyth with the hills beyond; the church clock, which is a visually dominant element in Alyth, is the central feature of the composition. Another painting shows a group of houses in the centre of Alyth, standing around the river which runs through the town. The houses Geddes painted are still standing, and from the town



bridge, it is possible to recreate the artist's viewpoint. It can be seen that Geddes has subtly altered his landscape to bring town and countryside into a harmonious arrangement. The artist, like the writer, adapted the urban and rural environments to make his own creative points, in a way which parallels the realistic, yet imaginative landscapes of the hillside of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926) or the Highland landscapes of Gunn.<sup>36</sup>

Geddes was Alyth correspondent for The Dundee Advertiser (founded in 1801 by Lord Cockburn and instrumental in Dundee radicalism). He was as outspoken, politically, as female autodidactic contemporaries like Bernstein and Russell. In his Advertiser reports, following the Dundee radical tradition which began with trees of liberty raised in 1792, Geddes assumes the role of champion of the people. He displays, in addition, a capacity for self-eulogy which prefigures Christopher Grieve's reviews of Hugh MacDiarmid's compositions in the early Scottish Chapbook (see, for instance, the October 1922 number in which Grieve identifies 'The Watergaw' as symptomatic of a literary renaissance).<sup>37</sup>

As a writer within an identifiable autodidactic tradition of experimentation in themes and styles, Geddes was well respected in the nineteenth century. The Rev C. Allan's articles on The New Jerusalem, in The Nottingham and Derby Home Reader, drew attention to the Scotsman's

poetry as being, 'in every way satisfactory; the metre trips evenly and gracefully, and the subjects are handled with a light and playful humour, which is as fresh and graceful as anyone could wish'. Allan, however, did not like Geddes' poetry when he was wearing the 'mantle of the censor'. Scottish audiences appreciated the attacks on religious insincerity. The Stirling Observer noted Geddes 'strikes hard at the "unco guid" and in a way that is thoroughly effective'. By characterising Geddes as 'Scotch' and 'satirical', though, reviewers failed to notice significant elements, typecasting the poet as minor and regional. After his death Geddes was largely forgotten, although highly regarded by Douglas Young, writing in Kinsley's Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey (1955) and by Edwin Morgan in the History of Scottish literature (1988).<sup>38</sup>

Geddes, like Hogg, enjoyed using Scottish traditions in innovative ways. Apart from his political heritage, his radical notions of democracy, moral responsibility and community values stem from Presbyterian religious experience. The poet utilises diverse motifs drawn from previous Scottish writers. The New Jerusalem (1879) is set within a national, and at times nationalist, environment. In the title poem, an angel helper takes the protagonist on a tour of heaven, in the tradition of such disparate works as Hogg's 'reverend fere' in 'Kilmeny' (1813) and Cela of Pilgrims of the Sun (1815), or

Pollock's seer in The Course of Time (1827). 'The New Inferno', the companion piece, is a guided journey into hell. Both sections, of course, draw on Dante for their ultimate inspiration. The stranger voices Peter's doubts about heaven's inherent worthiness:

To me an artificial air seems to suffuse  
The whole celestial atmosphere. Throughout the  
place  
One looks instinctively for painter's pots. It  
smells  
Of pasteboard and theatricals. The very bees  
Seem but to buzz a part. Why should they Heaven  
disgrace?  
Bees are not bees which labour not nor store--it  
tells  
Against the whole economy of Heaven.<sup>39</sup>

This journey is significantly different from Dante's, or Hogg's celestial visions, as the earthly world is presented as ultimately more worthy than the otherworld.

As a seceder from the established Church, Geddes adopts a dualistic attitude towards religion. In the tradition of mocking bigotry--associated with autodidactic writing from Burns' 'Holy Willie's Prayer' onwards--he sharply distinguishes between the genuinely religious and those who pretend to be so. The New Jerusalem opens with a quotation from Carlyle which sets the tenor for the collection's attacks on religious hypocrites: 'the



prophets preach to us, Thou shalt be happy; thou shalt love pleasant things and find them. The people clamour, Why have we not found pleasant things?'. Geddes goes much further than his autodidactic predecessors in questioning the basic tenets of the status quo and, in this respect, his work owes a great debt to experimental poets from outside Scotland, notably Clough and Whitman.

Drawing on works like Clough's 'New Sinai' (1849), Geddes' 'New Jerusalem' stresses the need to satisfy one's conscience, rather than Establishment dogma. Heaven is ironically presented as a bureaucratic continuation of life on earth, governed by Presbytery records. The neo-Dantean 'New Inferno' depicts Hell as an urban environment, full of purpose and direction:

...mammoth buildings, thickly placed, with  
lanes between,  
Gave to the place a business air. With hurried  
pace  
The denizens went on their way, careless of  
grace  
Or pois'd posture; with faces grimly set they  
looked  
Not to the right or left, as if their errand  
brook'd  
No idling by the way. (11.225-30)

No doubt the scene reflects Geddes' memories of Dundee.

'Tindall's Wynd' (1892) by an unknown Dundee artist, shows

a parallel image. In analogy to the painter's technique, Geddes has an affectionately ironic concept of the industrial environment. Rather than depicting Hell as wholly evil, he presents people in Hades as happy. The worker and the intellectual are miserable in Heaven. Indicating the necessity of labour and rest for all, as Morris did in News from Nowhere (1890), and women autodidacts often stated (see Chapter Eleven), Geddes stresses every individual is responsible for the upkeep of community. His viewpoint combines the notions of the Calvinist godly commonwealth and a constitutional radicalism. The synthesis of a deeply personal Christianity, combined with socialist ideals, constitutes another striking parallel between Geddes and MacDiarmid.

Visionary poems like those discussed above, or 'The Second Advent', are firmly related to the Scottish autodidactic tradition of Hogg's 'Kilmeny' and Ramsay and Burns' 'Visions'. Geddes' vision, though, is in a new tradition of social realism. Furthermore, his polemical expositions draw on contemporary experimental poetry. Browning's 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day' (1856), for instance, may have inspired 'The Second Advent' (pp.139-59).<sup>40</sup> Browning's protagonist, in a dream, is led by Christ to see varieties of Christianity practised around the world. A sense of apocalyptic urgency is communicated by Geddes as the Messiah's return is converted into a blank verse parable for the nineteenth century. The

context is contemporary Scotland: the poem set within an identifiably Victorian, bustling city, filled with journalism, presbyteries and commerce. One sign of the Coming is the temporary healing of the Disruption--a wryly satirical yet optimistic element in a generally bleak outlook (ll.12-19) (using a similar image to that employed by Bernstein in 'A Dream', mentioned in Chapter Eleven). Geddes shows Christ's texts 'amended' and 'explained' by his devotees. In a near-Marxist condemnation of Establishment pie-in-the-sky, he makes short work of 'dainty priests' who 'deal in opiates, gentle laxatives, / And sugar-coated Christianity' (ll.162-63). Geddes equates the religious Elect with class affiliations, condemning the Church as doubly elitist.

Christ's humility is emphasised in contrast to the bustle and grandeur of the civic preparations and expectations. Geddes rejects the romantic notion of pathetic fallacy as, 'Nature preserved her equanimity' (ll.75-81). Christ is no respecter of rank, 'Fireside Philanthropy' does not interest Him and He rejects Scottish Sabbatarianism. As in his first Incarnation, Jesus favours the wretched and rejected. He leads people from the city and its savings banks--in a passage which makes a passing nod to Rodger's 'Shavings Banks'--into the countryside, drawing his lessons from nature. This pastoral slant is indicative of an ambiguity towards Progress, noted above with respect to the poetry of





Scottish dimensions of the poem is the association with Jacobite song, where an insensitive rider often symbolises a Hanoverian, and the persecuted mount the Scottish people. Although this provocative parallel is left unexplored by Geddes, it raises the question of whether his writing in Scots is more satisfactory or at least more resonant than his writing in English. Perhaps this is one direction in which he could have developed. However, as a late nineteenth century autodidact, Geddes was less confident than his predecessors in using Scots in print.

While Geddes may not have fulfilled his potential as an autodidactic poet in Scots for Scots, he continually made innovations in terms of poetic technique, showing his autodidactic ability to assimilate, and utilise, diverse sources of information. Clough had already used the 'Balaam's Ass' image in 'Dipsychus' (1850-51) and, like Clough, Geddes attacks Establishment religious and literary orthodoxy. In so doing, both poets seek a new poetic voice. In Geddes' case, this is part of a wider agenda for national rejuvenation; as MacDiarmid puts it, 'to meddle wi' the Thistle' and to 'pluck the figs'.<sup>42</sup>

Geddes uses locally significant images, like the church clock of Alyth, to draw conclusions on the state of Scotland and nineteenth century society. In a scenario which pays homage to Chaucer's Parlement of the Fowlis, and The Buke of the Howlat, The Spectre Clock (1886) sustains the uniquely caustic vision of Scotland already



seen in The New Jerusalem. In his penultimate work, Geddes draws creatively on ballad tone and style to form a bleak whole. Alyth church clock is a metaphor for nineteenth century stagnation in ecclesiastical and lay life, an image which had been used in a similar way, in The City of Dreadful Night. The Spectre Clock, still extant in Alyth, does have an eerie appearance, perched on Alyth's central hill, as seen in Geddes' painting of the town. In The Spectre Clock, Geddes sustains the uniquely caustic vision of Scotland seen in The New Jerusalem, moving his focus specifically into civic life. Preceded by an ironic disclaimer, 'The Spectre Clock' opens with a blasting attack on the Elders of Alyth.<sup>43</sup> Geddes states, though, that he seeks to incite more reform rather than condemn the Elders, 'just as a horseman is sometimes obliged to dig his spurs even in a willing steed'.

Given Geddes' position as town 'correspondent' and leading radical, the entire piece is an extended in-joke. The opening section (an account of the Alyth Elders' Meeting) mimics the style of an Alyth Advertiser report. A debate between church elders centres on whether the clock should be cleaned, paralleling the local dispute about sanitation in working men's houses, with which Geddes was involved. According to Elder No 1, for instance, there is no need to clean the clock as it can be read when it has been raining. Elder No 5's argument--that a civic clock should not be provided lest



it encourage communist tendencies--and his emphasis on encouraging the harsh Victorian credo of 'thrift, industry and sobriety', which Geddes so hated, should be read as particularly sarcastic. The eventual resolution, to appoint a committee to decide on the affair, reflects the frustration Geddes felt in civic politics.

The central poem of 'The Spectre Clock' sequence is stylistically diverse. Drawing on the rhetorical tradition of sermon and debating society, it is occasionally akin to the stage-struck voice of McGonagall, yet saved from triteness by an authoritative and impersonal stance which shows Geddes in firm control of the narrative. Alyth clock is a metaphor for the failure of ecclesiastical and lay people to move with the times:

For the power that the phantom has is this--  
To benumb with the clock paralysis;  
And the minds which its spell hath barred  
complete  
Are a-simmer with ideas obsolete.

(11.67-70)

Geddes contrasts the Church's paralysis with his own dynamic vision: the need for a 'gifted one' to create a 'renovated disk'. Geddes is implicitly the Warrior who will rescue stagnating Scotland. Here again his work closely parallels the positions of MacDiarmid in The Drunk Man. The stance of catalytic Saviour is important in

Geddes' later poetry. Increasingly he presents himself as Scotland's national poet, a role which far outstrips Hogg's modest claim to be national autodidact.

Geddes' critique of social short-sightedness can be extended into his views on elements in contemporary literature. In this respect, the coda to the 'Spectre Clock' cycle, 'The Steeple Starlings' is particularly significant (pp.15-17). The steeple starlings, like Burns' 'Twa Dogs', share Geddes' opinion of the general ineptitude of mortals. After singing 'MacGregor's Lament' (with its associations of a futile swan-song) the birds, 'shaking the dust of their wings', make for Forfar and Kirriemuir, spiritual home of kailyard. Thirty years later the leaders of the literary renaissance would voice a similar revulsion.

Unthinking nostalgia is anathema to Geddes, and 'The Glenisla Gathering' targets the sentimentalisation of the Highlands found in Scottish literature from Burns to Macpherson onwards, drawing on the Scottish burlesque tradition of Ramsay and Fergusson (pp.32-36). As in the 'Spectre Clock' sequence Geddes dissociates himself from the sentiments embodied in the poem, arguing 'old age is naturally inclined to indulge in regret'. The central character of 'Glenisla' is an 'Old Inhabitant', a reminiscing rustic similar to Hogg's persona in 'Changes in the Habits, Amusements and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry' and a debased version of Macpherson's Ossian.<sup>44</sup>



There is immense local self-importance in the old man's statements, but Geddes' satire is predominantly kindly. He relies on readers' knowledge of the Highlanders: forcibly removed in the Clearances, victims of genocidal policies. The Old Inhabitant presents the Gael as degenerate; demoted from a reiver to a gillie. Nowadays 'the Lowlander lieth in wait', according to the shopkeeper Geddes, 'Not content till the coins in the Highlander's pocket / Fall with a pleasant clink into the till of his counter' (ll.150-51). Just as the reader sympathises with the Old Inhabitant, Geddes changes tone, parodying Glenisla's pride with a regional roll of honour including McCombie, skilled in Euclid and wrestling (like Clough's Hewison). Then the ambience turns again, as Highland heroism is recast in its modern context, recalling Victoria's sports at Balmoral: 'So now the Gael maketh sport for the hosts of the Sassenach' (l.134). Geddes' final refrain is chilling: 'Ichabod! Ichabod! the power of the Gael is departed for ever'. 'Ichabod' is a recurrent image in his poetry, derived from the Hebrew (1 Sam iv 21): 'the glory has departed'. It features, too, in the work of other autodidacts, especially Janet Hamilton who, at times, shares Geddes' sense of despair.

Although his poetry focuses on the Dundee and Alyth districts, in tune with his national and international aspirations, Geddes' message has far wider relevance. For instance, in 'The Man and the Engine' the hero is shackled



to the urban context by a horrific machine, but the machine provides his industrial identity (pp.58-64). A near-lyrical quality is given to the bond between man and engine. In the view of the operator, 'the thing has sense, the thing has a soul'. Lest the reader should think he romanticises the connexion, Geddes explains that this is not a bond of love and implies it is closer to a demonic pact of hate. The engine is a metaphor for working class misery: the masses exploited by their masters and, it is implied, goaded to the point of rebellion. The almost surrealistic imagery gives an early indication of Geddes' Whitmanesque later work:

It is a monster, it is a gnome,  
 Confined beneath this dome,  
 And you see but its skeleton.  
 Did you gaze with me--  
 Gaze out from the twilight dim  
 Till eye and brain saw dizzily  
 Each moving limb--  
 Then would you see as well as I  
 Those skeleton limbs become clothed upon--  
 A form, a personality,  
 Gazing at me with vindictive eyes. (ll.111-21)

The Man hates the Engine as much as vice versa and, in his 'serpent's charm', sees a reflexion of the human condition and himself. Once again Geddes anticipates MacDiarmid, as the man cries ''Tis I, 'Tis I', just as the Drunk Man

discovers the horror he writhes in is his soul.<sup>45</sup> After this, the poem changes tone: the Engine exchanges the role of tormenter for tormented. The Man hides his purpose (weaving) from the engine and, by suggesting his 'whim' makes the engine work, maintains his omnipotence. So too, it is implied, capitalists treat employees. Geddes' people are not 'machines' but beings of flesh and blood. This a more realistic image of working class resentments than the establishment views of living on the breadline satirised in Davidson's ferocious 'Thirty Bob a Week' (1894). The poem is partly a response to the 'industrial kailyard' sometimes produced by Wingate and Anderson ('Surfaceman' was published by Leng, in Dundee, who published two books by Geddes). 'The Man and the Engine' is an incitement to industrial revolt, as provocative as Ewan Tavendale's communist fervour in Grey Granite (1934).

In the Valhalla (1898), Geddes' final and finest collection, explores all his major concerns: class and the establishment; pleas for the workers; erudition as a means to illumination. Here, though, the treatment is new, and hard-edged. Geddes presents himself as a poetic Superman, an ideological ancestor of the Nietzschean Drunk Man and an autodidact who transcends his stereotype. The prime reason for this development is Geddes' progressive adoption of the confessional and assertive style of contemporary American writers, especially Whitman who, as Morgan noted: 'made Geddes'. His admiration of Carlyle

helped Geddes, like MacDiarmid, to adopt Whitman's restless language, and his enumeration of diverse aspects of any given theme. In 'The Farm' he draws attention to a tarnished pastoral vision of Scotland, rejecting the Romantic tradition of rural fulfilment.<sup>46</sup> 'Glendale & Co' describes those exploited in the urban environment, contrasting their predicament with that of their rural forebears (pp.122-35). Glendale, unlike the clan chief of old, feels no responsibility for his employees' misery. The notion of civic leaders being culpable in the face of the masses' deprivation, is recurrent in Geddes' work.

Geddes' finest poem is 'The Glory has Departed' (pp.94-105). This synthesises his beliefs regarding Scotland's literary, political and religious salvation, as Dundee serves as a metaphor for problems in Scotland and beyond. Carlyle's influence is evident in the rejection of the utilitarian, and attacks on urban plutocracies: the 'Lord Provost...or Big Panjadrin', Magistrates and Councillors. Geddes builds intensity with incremental repetition, drawing on the ballad stylistics so typical of the Scottish autodidactic tradition, poignantly to imagine his degenerate Dundee:

Mine own town,  
 Dear old town!  
 Town with the unbroken Radical history;  
 Town that ever stood first for reform and  
 independence;



Town where Wallace declared the national  
 freedom;  
 Town that stood for Knox and the Reformation  
 Town where the tree of liberty was planted;  
 Town where Kinloch stands, menacing even yet in  
 bronze mocking unjust governments.  
 (11.35-42)

Kinloch's appearance is symptomatic of Geddes' profound identification with Dundee radicalism. The Kinloch statue, erected while Geddes was living in Dundee, stands, imposing, in the Market Square. The 'Radical Laird' epitomises all that is best in Dundee's past: pioneering technology; a dedication to radicalism and, crucially, a willingness to sacrifice position for the people.<sup>47</sup> Geddes implies he is the man to fulfil Kinloch's ideals.

Scotland's dormant saviours are invoked, waiting in Valhalla to inspire the present. First Carlyle (VI), but he is too mighty for 'bald-pated' foes. Geddes bids him goodbye, in a modernistic manner: 'So long Carlyle; / I apologise for disturbing you'. Next, Geddes tries Burns (VII), but he is better occupied in the after-life (11.83-94). An active member of the Dundee and Alyth Burns Societies, Geddes found the national bard a source of inspiration but, like MacDiarmid, thought the cult of the Heaven-Taught Ploughman was disturbing. Now Geddes has come full circle from the despairing accusations of New Jerusalem to a warlike position. 'The Glory has

Departed' is a philosophical development and poetic synthesis, fusing local, national and international idioms into a new, conversational, staccato style. For Geddes, the Poet's role is to lead Scotland to literary and national fulfilment. Geddes' radical work provides an assertive escape route for Scottish poetry which bypasses the wistful road of Victorianism. He rejects Smiles' notion of Self-Help (1859), arguing the need for communal responsibility on a practical level, and suggesting the need for a reintegration of Scotland's social orders.<sup>48</sup>

The last wave of Scottish autodidacts, including Gray, Wingate, Anderson and Geddes, is unified by its quest for a regeneration of Scottish literature and life. As Hogg did in an exemplary manner, these autodidacts combined traditional techniques (from ballad stylistics to visionary narratives) with experimental styles. Most spectacularly, Geddes both utilised Scottish autodidactic traditions, and looked beyond Scotland for liberating ideas. Like MacDiarmid, he used poetic rôle-playing to attempt a political and literary renaissance. Perhaps he forms a missing link in Scottish poetic evolution. Perhaps his work is an evolutionary dead end. Probably similarities between Geddes' and the renaissance's agenda are due to common ancestors like Whitman. A direct line of ancestry, however, cannot be discounted. Geddes' work is the culmination of the Scottish autodidactic tradition, opening a door to the twentieth century renaissance.



## Notes

1. See David Gray, The Poetical Works, new ed, ed Henry Glassford Bell, (Glasgow and London, 1874), pp.206-07. See too Harriet Jay, Robert Buchanan. Some Aspects of his life, his life's work and his literary friendships, (London, 1898), pp.38-39.
2. Gray, pp.207, 210.
3. Gray, pp.3-62; hereafter, page references to this volume are given within the text in parentheses.
4. See Donald Thomas, ed, The Post-Romantics, (London, 1990).
5. Private collection, reproduced as Plate 63 in Michael Rosenthal, Constable, (London, 1987), p.80.
6. Both paintings are in the collection of the National Galleries of Scotland. See William Wordsworth, The Prelude and The Excursion, The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed Thomas Hutchinson, rpt ed Ernest de Selincourt, (Oxford, 1946), pp.631-896.
7. See Caroline Oliphant, Life and Songs of the Baroness Nairne, with a memoir and poems of Caroline Oliphant the Younger, ed Charles Rogers, (London, 1869), pp.3-4.
8. David Wingate, Annie Weir and other Poems, (Edinburgh, 1866), pp.13-15; references to this volume are, hereafter, given within the text in parentheses. Arthur Hugh Clough, 'The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich', Selections from the Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough, (London, 1894), pp.1-109.
9. See David Wingate, Lily Neil: A Poem, (Edinburgh, 1879); references to this volume are, hereafter, given within the text in parentheses.
10. See Lewis Grassie Gibbon, A Scots Quair, 3 vols, (London, 1932-34); George Douglas Brown, The House with the Green Shutters, (London, 1901); J.M. Barrie, A Window in Thrums, (London, 1889), Chapter XVII.



11. David Wingate, Select Poems and Songs, (Glasgow, 1890), pp.156-59.
12. These reviews are included in Wingate, Annie Weir.
13. David Cuthbertson, The Life-History of Alexander Anderson, (Roseville, Inveresk, Midlothian, nd), pp.14-15. See too George Gilfillan, 'Introductory Sketch', Alexander Anderson, The Two Angels and other Poems, (London and Edinburgh, 1875).
14. Alexander Anderson, Surfaceman's Later Poems, ed A. Brown, (Glasgow, 1912), pp.20-21; Alexander Anderson, Burns: an Ode, (Dumfries, 1882). Qtd Cuthbertson, p.72.
15. Indicating, perhaps, an affinity between Scottish and American writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Harte was MacDiarmid's childhood hero, as noted in Lucky Poet, (London, 1943). I am grateful to George Bruce for the information that the Good Templars were a temperance association, operating in rural Scotland well into the twentieth century. Bruce remembers the Templars lodge in Fraserburgh, in his childhood, which he associated with the Freemasons. Anderson rose to become Chief Templar of the John Laing Lodge in 1873 but his involvement with the Good Templars ceased soon after he arrived in Edinburgh, see Cuthbertson, pp.27, 45.
16. Cuthbertson, pp.25-26.
17. Alexander Smith, like Anderson, found beauty in industrial environments. Smith's publications include Life Drama (1851) and Sonnets on the War (1855), with Sydney Dobell. Smith was known as a 'spasmodic' poet after the 1854 publication of W.E. Aytoun's satirical poem Firmillian: or the student of Badajoz, a Spasmodic Tragedy by T.Percy Jones, in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. See Alexander Smith, Poetical Works, ed William Sinclair, (Edinburgh, 1909). Anderson qtd Cuthbertson, p.94.

18. Cuthbertson, p.94, 86.
19. See Cuthbertson, pp.88, 126-27.
20. 'Samuel Brown (1859-1920)', NLS MS 1890, f.73; See too NLS MS 1890 ff.68-71; 'Presented Collections', NLS MS 1004; 'Blackie Letters', NLS MS 2633; 'Blackie Papers', NLS MS 2636.
21. Alexander Anderson, A Song of Labour and Other Poems, (Dundee, 1873), p.iv; pp.1-10. References are, hereafter, given within the text in parentheses.
22. See James Hogg, 'A Bard's Address to his Youngest Daughter', Friendship's Offering (1830), pp.312-14.
23. Reviews rpt Alexander Anderson Songs of the Rail, 3rd ed, (London, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1881).
24. Alexander Anderson, The Two Angels and Other Poems, (Edinburgh and London, 1875), p.x. Hereafter, references to the book are given within the text. William Anderson published one volume, Rhymes, Reveries and Reminiscences (1852) and 'Jean Findlater's Loun' is in Robert Ford, Ballads of Bairnhood, 1894, rpt, (Paisley, 1913), pp.32-34.
25. 'Cuddle Doon' and 'Jenny' were set to music in an 1899 Supplement to The People's Friend: A Poetical and Musical Keepsake.
26. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Empty Vessel', The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, 2 vols, ed Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1978), vol I, p.66.
27. See Cuthbertson, pp.77-79.
28. George Saintsbury qtd Cuthbertson, p.41. The other reviews of The Two Angels are rpt, Songs of the Rail.
29. Alexander Anderson, Songs of the Rail, (Edinburgh and London, 1881), p.6. The references which follow are to this edition, given within the text.
30. On Nottman, see Cuthbertson, pp.53-54.
31. Qtd Cuthbertson, pp.47-48.
32. Alexander Anderson, Ballads and Sonnets, (London,



- 1879); Qtd Cuthbertson, pp.108-09; Anderson, Surfaceman's Later Poems, pp.26, 27, 95-98; Qtd Cuthbertson, pp.45-46 and see p.140.
33. Qtd Cuthbertson, p.38; Anderson, Surfaceman's Later Poems, pp.64-67. See Cuthbertson, pp.113-15.
  34. Cuthbertson, pp.83, 68.
  35. See Valentina Bold, 'James Young Geddes (1850-1913)', Scottish Literary Journal, 19 (1992), pp.18-27. See too Henry Dryerre, Blairgowrie, Stormont and Strathmore Worthies, (Blairgowrie, 1903); D.H. Edwards, One hundred modern Scottish Poets, (Breachin, 1880); Robert Ford, The Harp of Perthshire, (Paisley, 1893) and Alan Reid, The Bards of Angus and the Mearns. An Anthology of the Counties, (Paisley, 1907).
  36. I am grateful to Bruce Malcolm, Curator of the Alyth Museum for showing me Geddes' landscapes in the Alyth Town Council rooms.
  37. Hugh MacDiarmid, ed, The Scottish Chapbook, (Oct 1922). With similar verve to MacDiarmid, Geddes praises himself in the Advertiser, anonymously, for fighting for sanitation and rights of way. As Baillie Geddes of Alyth, and founding member of the Liberal Association and of the Alyth Working Men's Political Party, the poet was active in local politics. He was a member of the Alyth Police Commission and School Board. His obituaries remembered Geddes as 'held in the highest estimation by the public', as seen in The Dundee Advertiser, 1 November 1913. See too the obituaries of that date in The Courier and The Blairgowrie Advertiser.
  38. Reviews qtd in James Young Geddes, The Spectre Clock of Alyth and Other Selections, (Alyth, 1886). See Douglas Young, 'Scottish Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey, ed James Kinsley, (London, 1955), pp.236-55;



- Edwin Morgan, 'Scottish Poetry in the Nineteenth Century', The History of Scottish Literature. Vol 3: The Nineteenth Century, ed Douglas Gifford, (Aberdeen, 1988), pp.337-51.
39. James Young Geddes, 'The New Jerusalem'; 'The New Inferno', The New Jerusalem, (Dundee, 1879), pp.1-48. The following references are to this edition, given within the text in parentheses.
40. Robert Browning, 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day', The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, ed Ian Jack, (London, 1970), pp.487-552.
41. Alexander Rodger, Poems and Songs, Humorous and Satirical, (Glasgow, Edinburgh, London and Dublin, 1838), pp.81-93. Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Forsaken', first published in Scottish Scene, or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn, with Hugh MacDiarmid, (1934) and rpt, A Scots Hairst. Essays and Short Stories, ed Ian S. Munro, (London, 1967), pp.52-62.
42. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', The Complete Poems, vol I, p.93.
43. James Young Geddes, 'The Spectre Clock of Alyth', The Spectre Clock of Alyth, (Alyth, 1886), pp.12-15. The references which follow are to this edition, given within the text in parentheses.
44. James Hogg, 'On the Changes in the Habits, Amusements and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', The Quarterly Journal of Agriculture, 3 (1831-32), pp.256-63.
45. Hugh MacDiarmid, Complete Poems, vol I, p.94.
46. James Young Geddes, 'The Farm', In the Valhalla, (Dundee, 1898), pp.33-44; the following references are to this edition, given within the text in parentheses. See Morgan, p.345.
47. See Charles Tennant, The Radical Laird, (Kineton, 1970).
48. See Samuel Smiles, Self-Help, (London, 1859).

### Conclusion

'So rapid and marvellous has been the development of poetic thought among the great body of the people since the time of Burns, that the relative position of the poets of the upper and educated classes to those of the lower and comparatively uneducated classes, which formerly obtained, is now completely reversed.'

(Henry Shanks, The Peasant Poets of Scotland and Musings under the Beeches, (Bathgate, 1881), p.114.)

This thesis has argued that the autodidactic tradition in Scottish poetry produced some of the finest work in nineteenth century Scotland. Beginning with Allan Ramsay, James Macpherson and Robert Burns, a distinctive tradition of Scottish 'peasant poetry' developed. Integrating traditional material with a desire to innovate, this offered a vigorous alternative to the mainstream tradition of Scottish poetry. The public perception of 'the Scottish autodidact' was however two-faced. On one side, it allowed working class writers a limited critical acceptance and, increasingly, the inspiration of being part of a national tradition. On the other, it actively discouraged poets of Nature's Making from experimenting with themes and styles which were perceived as more appropriate for their self-styled superiors.

The central part of the present work has focused on James Hogg, on the grounds that he is the central figure in developing the notion of the Scottish autodidact into its finished form: the exemplary Ettrick Shepherd. Hogg contributed to his critical typecasting as Scotland's national autodidact. As The Mountain Bard and 'heaven-taught poet' of The Queen's Wake, Hogg explored oral styles and literary techniques to create a unique body of work. Ultimately, though, 'the Ettrick Shepherd' was a limiting label, stereotyping Hogg as a sociological 'specimen' and leading to the neglect of his most



experimental work. Hogg, realising this, resented being socially and creatively marginalised, by the 'deils' of Blackwood's. His recurrent use of the image of the disorientated bodyless soul, making celestial journeys but in the end bound to the earth, reflects his own discomfort with the peasant poet image, and the necessity of being dependent on the goodwill of others.

The self-parodic 'The Gude Grey Katte' exemplifies Hogg's attitudes towards his autodidactic image, exposing the apparent 'rustic ingénu's' steel-edged claws. The writer of the Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner was, in poetry as in prose, not afforded much courtesy at his most experimental. The Pilgrims of the Sun, for instance, with its blend of local loyalties, peasant bards, supernatural, national and religious notions, along with scientific ideas, was largely neglected by contemporaries. Neither Queen Hynde, a mock epic with an Ossianic framework, nor the experimental 'Russiadde', gained the attention it deserved. The 'Ettrick Shepherd' image did lasting damage to Hogg's reputation. However the sophisticated Hogg recognised by twentieth century critics will, no doubt, gain increasing attention as the modern Hogg edition makes the work more freely available.

It has been shown that poets of working class origin, after Hogg, used the same autodidactic models that he had perfected. The autodidactic poet was expected to present

ingenuous insights into local and national oral traditions, to express a naive religious faith, and to write in a stumblingly charming fashion. Sophistication was never perceived in the peasant poet. Standard, patronising responses to autodidacticism are manifest, in works as diverse as the popular 'Noctes Ambrosianae', Masson's elitist 'College-Education and Self-Education' and Shanks' hagiographical The Peasant Poets of Scotland. Autodidactic stereotyping had a major effect in determining the ways in which self taught writers presented themselves, creatively and autobiographically, and on critical responses to their work. The autodidact might draw creative strength from the notion of distinguished precedents but, equally, was limited by this stereotyping. Conforming to the image, though, allowed the autodidact (at least a limited version of) patronage and critical acceptance.

The notion of the Scottish autodidact, as exemplified by Hogg, was hugely influential on his younger friends, and imitators, including Allan Cunningham. Equally, Hogg would later draw creative ideas from the work of Cunningham. As the Ossianic 'Hidallan', contributor to Cromek's Remains, collector and composer of traditional-style songs, Cunningham utilised a similar range of models to Hogg's, from Ramsay and McNeil to Burns. As in the case of Hogg, critics preferred the peasant poet type productions, traditional style ballad and lyric items, and



neglected the longer, more innovative pieces such as Sir Marmaduke Maxwell and The Maid of Elvar. These illuminated relationships between high and low ranking individuals, suggesting that nobility of spirit is more important than economic wealth. Critics tended to assume, however, that autodidactic poets were incapable of sustaining lengthy or complex plots or themes. The 'Stonemason Poet', like Hogg, had double-edged help from his patrons. As with Hogg, posterity continued the process of typecasting Cunningham as peasant poet.

Tannahill followed Hogg, as well as Burns, in his traditional style songs. He abhorred the appropriation of traditional idioms by those of high rank, parodying Lady Nairne's sanitised 'Caller Herrin'. Tannahill protested, too, about the unfair treatment of the oppressed overseas, speaking up, amongst others, for 'The Negro Girl'. While calling himself 'uncouth' Tannahill favoured the notion of the 'Bard of Nature' and excelled, too, in visionary poetry like 'The Parnassiad'. Paralleling his earlier encounter with Cunningham, Hogg offered personal encouragement to Tannahill in a near-legendary meeting. Motherwell played a key role in constructing the enduring image of the tragically short-lived poet as an autodidact, neglecting his political rage and forays into theatre. Local celebrations of Tannahill as rustic genius continued the process.

The influence of the autodidactic tradition extended



beyond Scotland. John Clare identified a cross-border community focused on Hogg, Cunningham and himself, seeing education, perceptively, as a potentially inhibiting force. In his Autobiographical Sketches, following Hogg's 'Memoirs', Clare self consciously followed Scottish autodidactic models in framing his life, acknowledging Hogg's direct influence on his first volume, as well as that of Ramsay and Burns, and clearly feeling a kinship with Scottish autodidactic models and rustic concerns. Clare's Village Minstrel draws, in its peasant poet persona, on Hogg's Mountain Bard. Like Hogg, Clare was concerned with the loss of aspects of traditional culture. Ramsayan dialogues and Scottish holiday poetry, Thomson's Seasons, and Hogg's songs, as well as the Scots language, had direct influence on his work. As well as experimenting in Scots, it seems likely that the confidence of Scottish poets in their vernacular encouraged Clare to use his own Northamptonshire dialect in his finest verse. The Blackwood's set, however, objected strongly to a cross-border alliance of peasant poets. Sadly, Clare's greatest success in attracting patronage was in finding funders for his prolonged stay as an asylum patient. However, Clare's authoritative interpretation of local scenes and customs, in the peasant poet tradition, has won this 'obscure genius' lasting recognition and, in recent years, the right to a more measured reevaluation.

A strange offshoot of peasant writers considered as autodidacts is the phenomenon of the 'educated autodidact' with examples including eminent writers and scholars, like Leyden and Tennant. Despite his linguistic prowess, historical publications, and scholarly approach to texts like The Complaynt of Scotland Leyden's poetic works, including Scenes of Infancy, were seen as local and autodidactic. Paradoxically, to Hogg, Leyden was a gentleman whom he first met with Scott. Hogg, too, bristled at Jeffrey's classification of Tennant, along with the Ettrick Shepherd, as a peasant poet, on the evidence of Anster Fair. There are creative similarities of concern between the work of Tennant and Hogg but this was not Jeffrey's point. It would seem that formal learning, and academic achievements, did not serve to mask a writer's original identity as an autodidact.

Women autodidacts, or 'Danaus' daughters', were, perhaps, even more subject to peasant poet typecasting. Women autodidacts might even be seen as forming an autonomous tradition, starting with Burns' contemporaries Glover and Pagan and culminating in Janet Little, 'The Scotch Milkmaid'. Although sharing Burns' patron, Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, Little composed her own distinctive reworkings of Scottish vernacular models. Influenced by Ramsay and Fergusson, her work includes formal English and Scots-English pieces as well as spirited compositions in Scots. Women were among the most vocal autodidacts in



condemning peasant poet stereotyping. Little, for instance, condemns those who treated her as a less worthy, female version of the 'Heaven-Taught Ploughman' Burns.

Autodidactic women, while often quietist in outlook, went beyond their male counterparts in expressing some forms of gender and class solidarity, finding a certain freedom of expression. Pyper, Bell and Craig-Knox wrote compellingly personal verse, with disturbing implications, subverting contemporary notions about woman's rôles. Hartley produced melodramatic, American influenced poetry. Hamilton eloquently highlighted the plight of women workers. Bernstein and Russell refused to tolerate the exploitation of women at work or in the home. Ellen Johnston 'The Factory Girl' exhibited ambivalence towards the factory environment which, on one hand, sustained her but, on the other, was dehumanising.

Autodidacts were sometimes tempted to leave their 'peasant' environment but the stereotype generally remained. Despite his London sojourn, David Gray was forever to be the Scottish 'lad o' pairts' who died young, and immortalised bucolic scenes. The brilliantly expressed religious doubts of Gray's 'Sonnets' were wholly neglected. Alexander Anderson, 'Surfaceman', despite leaving his labours for a library, was primarily seen as a poetical navvy; his children's poetry attracted much more attention than the ambivalent 'Engine' poetry which, like David Wingate's mining pieces, used industrial images to



represent the working man's predicament.

The autodidactic tradition in Scottish poetry culminated in the work of James Young Geddes. The Dundee and Alyth poet, in The New Jerusalem, The Spectre Clock of Alyth and In the Valhalla, demonstrated a startling scope of vision and extensive frame of reference. A skilled landscape painter, and radical politician, Geddes was partly sustained by peasant poet precedents, like Burns, but despised the ploughman cult. He rejected an oversimplistic pastoral Scotland while being wholly aware of the problems of industrial exploitation and contemporary plutocracies. Geddes looked outside Scotland for inspiration, to Browning, Dante and Whitman. He sought a national resurgence through both politics and writing, forming a neglected link with the twentieth century literary renaissance. The new opening afforded by the work of James Young Geddes passed, however, sadly unnoticed.

The autodidactic tradition in Scottish literature has proved remarkably resilient. In 1996, the bicentenary of Burns' death, local and national celebrations drew wholeheartedly on the peasant poet model. Celebrations included a commemoration of eighteenth century ploughing practices at Ellisland. Television tributes included a BBC paralleling of Maya Angelou, black autodidact, and the Scottish peasant poet. For a twentieth century audience, the notion of peasant poetry seems to hold nostalgic

appeal as reflecting a golden age of pastoral community.

It could be asserted, moreover, that modern Scottish writers are now exhibiting a form of inverted snobbery, as they are encouraged to prove their autodidactic credentials. His university education is minimised in Tom Leonard's wonderful poetry in Scots. Irvine Welsh's 1993 novel Trainspotting is hailed as a genuine representation of working class life, from a writer who lives in middle class surroundings. In prose and poetry, from James Kelman to Jackie Kay, writers seem willing to collaborate with critics to construct assertively working class credentials, drawing on an apparently unique, indigenous democratic tradition often set against the English empirical tradition.

Hogg's creation of the archetypal peasant poet 'the Ettrick Shepherd', therefore, had profound influences on Scottish writers in the nineteenth century and beyond. In terms of his contemporaries, and those who immediately followed, I have only been able to offer an outline guide to a vast area of Scottish poetic traditions. Regional anthologies abound with many examples of bards of 'Nature's making' waiting to be rediscovered as individual, and individualistic writers.

## Appendix

### 'An Exile within his own country': John Clare as honorary Scottish autodidact

John Clare (1793-1864), the Northamptonshire thresher poet, can be considered as an honorary Scottish autodidactic poet. Clare, probably the most talented of the English autodidacts, deliberately emulated Scottish prototypes. He saw himself as part of a British autodidactic community including his 'Brother Bard and Fellow Labourer' Allan Cunningham (whom Clare visited in London) and Hogg. Their cross-Border kinship was grounded in the discrimination faced by all autodidacts:

The 'Ettrick Shepherd,' 'The Nithsdale Mason,' and 'The Northamptonshire Peasant,' are looked upon as intruders and stray cattle in the fields of the Muses.... Well, never mind, we will do our best, and as we never went to Oxford or Cambridge, we have no Latin and Greek to boast of, and no bad translations to hazard (whatever our poems may be), and that's one comfort on our side.<sup>1</sup>

Clare's observation that autodidacts avoided the derivative excesses of contemporary poetry is highly perceptive. It is arguable that many members of the



Literati, from John Wilson in The Isle of Palms (1812) to J.G. Lockhart in Ancient Spanish Ballads (1823), were unable to compose innovatory verse. Following fashion rather than being experimental, those inhibited by education might even be termed retrodidacts.

Clare's Sketches in the Life of John Clare, written in 1821 for his publisher John Taylor, and 'More Hints in the Life', collected in 1828 for a projected autobiography, parallel the memoirs of Scottish autodidacts, notably Hogg's. Drawing attention to precedents like Hogarth's Industrious Apprentice, Eric Robinson comments, 'the poet wishes to present himself to his evangelical publisher and to his patrons, Lord Radstock and Mrs Emmerson, as a very proper subject for their support'. The son of a Helpston thresher (himself the abandoned issue of a Scottish schoolmaster) Clare stresses his family illiteracy; his mother thought 'the higher parts of learning was the blackest arts of witchcraft'. Clare's father (with shades of Hogg's grandfather Will o' Phaup), however, read the Bible, enjoyed, 'supersti[tious tales' and was a well known singer with a large repertoire of ballads. Clare's formal education (like Hogg's) consisted of three or four months school a year, first with an elderly village woman, then with a schoolmaster. Aged ten, Clare began work in earnest, relishing summer jobs, like weeding grain, for the opportunity to hear old women tell tales of 'Giants,

Hobgoblins, and faireys [sic']'. He studied between periods of work: 'every winter night our once unletterd hut was wonderfully changd in its appearance to a school room [sic']'.<sup>2</sup>

Clare borrowed heavily from the imagery of the Scottish autodidactic tradition, formulated by Hogg and his critics. For instance, Scottish autodidacts, after Hogg, all stressed that they had experienced a literary epiphany similar to Burns's encounter with Blind Harry's The Wallace. Cunningham, like Hogg, highlighted the experience of having heard 'Tam o'Shanter' read out loud (Cunningham, as mentioned above, said he had heard Burns himself read the poem). Clare describes an inspirational encounter with Thomson's The Seasons (1726-30). After reading a borrowed copy, Clare borrowed the cost of the purchase and, eventually, bought it in Stamford:

On my return the Sun got up and it was a beautiful morning and as I did not like to let any body see me reading on the road of a working day I clumb over the wall into Burghly Park and nestled in a lawn at the wall side the Scenery around me was uncommonly beautiful at that time of the year and what with reading the book and beholding the beautys of artful nature in the park I got into a strain of descriptive ryhming on my journey home this was 'the morning walk' the first thing I committed to paper [sic].



The lyrical description recalls Samuel Palmer's visual image of a labourer, reading while he rests. Clare's account of his first love was equally typical of autodidactic experiences (Burns' infatuation with Nelly Kilpatrick and Hogg's love for his shepherdess for example). Clare fell for his childhood sweetheart, Mary Joyce, while they were at school, because of her 'handsome' face and 'meek modest and quiet disposition'.<sup>3</sup>

There are significant differences, though, between Clare's formative periods and those of the Scottish autodidacts. He seems, for instance, to have been exposed to a narrower (if eclectic) range of educational influences. While appreciating psalms (like Hogg), Clare decried English village learning for over-'dinging' at Bible lessons. He describes, too, a literal devotion to 'Sixpenny Romances', from 'Cinderella' to 'Zig Zag'. Clare's father introduced him to the work of John Pomfret, and a schoolfellow lent Clare Robinson Crusoe (1719). Other favourites included The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) and Paradise Lost (1667) though Clare declined to read the Waverley novels. Reconsidering his life for his projected autobiography, Clare retrospectively developed the scope of his interests to include mathematics, natural history, history, drawing, music and an unfulfilled desire to learn Latin, adding, 'Study always left a sinking sickening pain in my head otherways unaccountable'. Clare, perhaps, faced greater opposition to learning than the Scottish



autodidacts. His employers were not encouraging, except for F. Gregory who (like the Laidlaws for Hogg) offered a 'Nursery for fostering my rustic Song'.<sup>4</sup>

Like his Scottish counterparts, Clare faced real obstacles, throughout his life, to finding the time to write. His work included gardening for a future patron, the Marquis of Exeter, and a brief period in the militia around 1812 (not mentioned in his autobiographies, perhaps because it ended ignominiously, after he attacked a corporal). Back with his parents, Clare worked in the fields and wrote in secret. As his rural musings were seen as 'lunacy' and 'laziness', the writer wrote mainly out of doors, 'in the woods and dingles of thorns in the fields on Sundays' and, at times 'half a days journey from home' (risking being suspected as a poacher from his manner of subterfuge). As might be expected from other autodidacts' experiences, Clare composed with rapidity: 'I always wrote my poems in great haste.... what corrections I made I always made them while writing the poem and never coud [sic] do anything with them after wards'.<sup>5</sup>

The poet's earliest experiences of criticism were unusual. He read out his work to his parents, pretending that they were pieces from a borrowed book. Their reactions were 'very useful', as they 'distinguished Affectation and consiet from nature', and identified 'obscurity from common sense'. Clare respected 'their critisisms [sic]', although his persistence in writing,

rather than applying himself to work, eventually made Clare's family 'dislike my love of books and writing'.<sup>6</sup>

Showing the persistence which characterised the Scottish autodidacts, as Hogg had in 1801, Clare personally approached his first publisher, J.B. Henson, at Deeping Fair. Henson, seeing 'The setting Sun' and the Burnsian 'To a Primrose', offered to sell Clare's work by subscription. Although claiming to consider this 'little better than begging' (encouraging people to 'jeer the writer'), Clare worked as a lime burner at Bridge Casterton to raise £1 for an edition of 300 (although the publisher later raised the price by five shillings), lodging in a public house and composing on his three mile walk to work at the Ryhall lime kiln.<sup>7</sup>

Subscribers to Clare's first volume included men who had already helped autodidacts. The Lincoln bookseller-publisher, Edward Drury, for instance, was cousin to John Taylor (who founded the London Magazine and published Robert Bloomfield as well as Keats, De Quincey and Landor). Drury sought the poet, who was brought out from a meeting in the Burnsian 'Bachelors Hall [sic]', Helpston. Clare's memories of his first meeting with Drury, as a potential patron, are strikingly similar to Hogg's recollections of his first meeting with Scott and Leyden (described in Chapter Three):



on being fetchd home with the news that gentlemen was waiting to see me, I felt very awkward and had a good mind to keep away I always felt and still feel very irksome among superiours so that its nothing now but down right force that hauls me into it however I made my appearance and they both said they had came to become subscribers I thankd them they moreover wished to see some of my MSS what I had I showd them and they was seemlingly pleasd with them [sic].

Paralleling Hogg's, and Cunningham's, experiences with their supposed social superiors, Clare felt that Drury slighted him. However, as a peasant poet of limited means, Clare could not afford the luxury of allowing his personal feelings towards Drury to intrude. He allowed Drury to publish his volume: 'the book printed for no expence on my part and a certain sum gaind by it...was a temptation I could not let slip'.<sup>8</sup>

Clare faced an additional obstacle to his creativity in the form of his recurrent mental illness. His treatment, in this respect, bizarrely parodied patronage practices: as a confined patient Clare, paradoxically, attracted more financial help than as a free poet. Visiting London in 1824, Clare consulted a specialist in literary patients, Dr Darling. In 1837 he became a patient at Dr Matthew Allen's relatively enlightened private asylum at High Beech, Essex, courtesy of Taylor



and the Emmersons. However, the writer was obviously deeply troubled, escaping in July 1841 and in his period of liberation working on 'A New Canto of Don Juan' and 'Child Harold'. In December, he was forcibly placed into St Andrew's Asylum in Northampton, at the expense of Lord Fitzwilliam. Helped by W.F. Knight, he continued to read (from Dante and Blake to The Koran) and planned a fifth book. However, when Knight left the hospital in 1850, future publications became problematic.<sup>9</sup>

Established autodidactic models placed Clare's work into a literary niche which he was, on the whole, prepared to accept. He was considered to be a patriot peasant poet, after Hogg; a Northamptonshire version of the Ettrick Shepherd. Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery (1820), recalls Hogg's lyrical Scottish Pastorals (1801). Subtitled, 'A Rustic's pastime, in leisure hours', it is headed by a quotation from Ramsay's 'Address To the Right Hon. William Earl of Dalhousie': 'all my wish; well pleas'd to sing / Beneath a tree or by a spring'. Clare possessed Ramsay's Poems on Several Occasions (1793), perhaps facilitating his emulation of Scottish pastoral prototypes.<sup>10</sup> The writer presents himself as an authority on country traditions and an innocent within local landscapes. Poems Descriptive is full of rustic eulogies like 'Summer Evening' (I, 5-12). Clare postures as a post-Ossianic ethnographer here (albeit with an agrarian, not martial, bias). His

Ossianic, tearful nostalgia seems to have been filtered through the work of Lowlanders like Burns and Hogg. There are overtones, for instance, of 'Tam o' Shanter'--'Dobson on his greensward seat / Where neighbours often neighbour meet' (ll.161-62)--and of 'Cottar's Saturday Night' as cottagers prepare for bed. Other pieces, from 'The Wagtail's Death' (I, 478-82) to 'Crazy Jane' (I, 184), sustain the wistful, rural, vein which Hogg used in many of his lyrics (discussed in Chapter Four).

Autodidactic predicaments pervade Clare's debut volume. A Gentle Shepherd style address 'To My Oaten Reed' (I, 477-78) apologises for the 'warble wild' in a way which typifies the enforced modesty of peasant poets like Hogg, set against 'the wise the wealthy proud & high'. The poet fears they will find 'presumptuous thy uncultur'd themes'. Nevertheless, in describing his 'simple labourers artless dreams' Clare elevates the modest reed into a sophisticated instrument which (like Hogg's mountain harp in The Queen's Wake) can 'lull the throbbings of a woe worn soul' (l.14). 'The Poet's Wish' (I, 489-92) sets out peasant poet desires, calling for a situation where the writer can 'just get hand to mouth with ease / & read & study as I please' (ll.25-26).

The image of Clare as a Northamptonshire Hogg is encodified in The Village Minstrel (1821), reflecting Hogg's persona as The Mountain Bard (1807). The title poem is semi-autobiographical, with a wealth of rustic



detail in the vein of Hogg's prose Winter Evening Tales (1820).<sup>11</sup> Clare's eponymous spokesman is 'Young Lubin', a 'humble rustic' who 'sings what nature & what truth inspires', enjoying 'artless things'. Clare makes sophisticated use of peasant stereotypes by opposing his rural songster Lubin against country 'louts' who ignore nature. The Village Minstrel delineates community customs and beliefs, observing nature in a way which transforms him from 'lout' to poet. Lubin is, literally, a bard of Nature's Making; he is the creative descendant of Burns and Hogg. 'Lubin's Song' (II, pp.134-35), in the fashion of the Scottish visionaries (discussed in Parts One and Two), with a Keatsian slant, attains a spiritually 'Enraptured' state through the contemplation of Nature (his experiences paralleling, in this respect, Hogg's disembodied souls who leave their bodies behind within country landscapes, as discussed in Chapter Seven). Lubin, as 'rural muse', equally offers Clare the opportunity for self parody (recalling Hogg's Poetic Mirror). There is a cheeky touch, for instance, to Lubin's musings about the female mowers who appear 'coy' when facing 'the rude embrace' of 'swains'. Hidden by 'a cock of hay', however, they 'kiss & toy & likd it monstrous well / & somthing more then what his songs dare say [sic]' (ll.273-74).

The semi-autobiographical Lubin, like Clare, is removed from school because of 'pinching want'. Still the



nascent poet studies in his spare time. Clare's distaste for some aspects of village life is apparent, as he lists local reactions to their Village Minstrel:

Folks much may wonder how the thing may be  
 That lubins taste shoud seek refined joys  
 & court the 'chanting smiles of poesy  
 Bred in a village full of strife & noise  
 Old senseless gossips & blackguarding boys  
 Ploughmen & threshers whose discourses led  
 To nothing more then labours rude employs  
 'Bout work being slack & rise & fall of bread  
 & who were like to dye ere while & who were like  
 to wed [sic]. (verse 40)

Lubin, like Clare, is a gentle peasant, out of place among rustic 'clowns' but, at the same time, an integral member of the country community. Lubin relishes country lore as much as his creator Clare, gleaned (in the manner of the antiquarian) from his rural compeer, including oral legends and 'ancient songs'. In addition, like 'artless maidens' (or Edward Waverley) Lubin is influenced by 'romances'. He constructs his own stories: 'Each ruind heap was castles now discryd / Were other hudsons bore comand & fought as brave & dyd [sic]' (ll.1046-47).

Landscape, for Clare, is living; he follows pastoral convention in equating remembered places with childhood (like John Leyden's Tweed and David Gray's Luggie, discussed below). He is, however, more political than

most of his peers, raging at the 'curst improvment' of enclosure. The scenes of Lubin's youth are now gone, leaving 'naked leas so bleak'. The final verse of 'The Village Minstrel' has the sombre flavour of Shakespearian comic endings, reflecting the autodidactic partiality for the social transformations of A Midsummer Night's Dream:

Thiss far intruded lubins tale shall close  
 Small joy wi whats to come to interfere  
 When he in silent sorrow broods his woes  
 As manhoods painful prime approaches bear  
 & drops on troubles its unheeded tear  
 Tho now & then may hope beguile his way  
 & the low muse his sleepless night may cheer  
 Ere while suffice it to renew the lay  
 When fortune finds him out in some far welcome  
 day [sic]. (verse 133)

Other items in The Village Minstrel follow the title poem's concerns. There are delightful rustic cameos, like 'To an Angry Bee' (II, 364): 'Malicious insect little vengeful bee' (l.1). Nostalgic Northamptonshire rusticism informs pieces like 'Helpston Green' (II, 13-14), hostile to the enclosure of 'injur'd fields'. 'Effusion' (II, 34-36) exhibits the 'deep despair' of the peasant poet whose 'artless ryhmes [sic]' are scorned, particularly with the admission that the writer could not afford to comfort his aged parents (Clare's covert plea for patronage).

Perhaps inspired by the precedent of Hogg, Clare

experimented with diverse styles. Fullblown romanticism informs 'Description of a Thunder Storm' (II, 47-49) with its 'Huge massey clouds mountainious large & grim [sic]' (l.2), as darkly melodramatic as a painting by Fuseli. Broadsheet precedents are chillingly utilised in 'Shipwrecked Ghost' (II, 36-38), a dialogue between a revenant and his lover Mary. Fashionable narrative styles are emulated in the comic cautionary tale, 'The Lodge House. A Gossip's Tale' (II, 233-47). 'The Crazy Maid' (II, 453-57) explores a type known in Scotland as 'Jenny Nettles': the once-lovely woman, abandoned by her lover and deranged: 'Shell chuse wild nettles & go by the rose / & hen bane look & call it sweetest flower [sic]' (ll.66-67).

Specifically Scottish autodidactic influences can be discerned in much of Clare's work. 'Damon and Collin' (II, 15-19), for instance, is a dialogue after The Gentle Shepherd, about rural courtship. Scottish holiday poetry, from 'Leith Races' to Anster Fair, influences 'May-Day' (II, 26-27). 'The Cottar's Saturday Night' informs 'The Wood-Cutters Night Song' (II, 19-20). 'Robs Terror of Night or Courting on Ass Back' (II, 256-68) is a comic narrative directly influenced by 'Tam o' Shanter'. Clare's 'Song' (II, 42) to a 'first love', with its clarity and melancholic twist--'I've felt the hours anguish that parted wi' thee' (l.16)--echoes Hogg's sombre 'The Moon was a-waning'.



Perhaps the achievements of Scottish autodidacts, especially when writing in their national language, gave Clare the poetic confidence to use his own Northamptonshire voice. He is at his creative best when exploring distinctive local idioms. Modern editors, unlike Clare's contemporaries, retain his spelling and orthography: they are crucial elements in reconstructing his poetic ideals. See, for instance, his jovial praises of ale (II, 280-86), an English counterpart to 'burns's whiskey [sic]'. The spirited tone is dependant on local inflexions: 'Ah kill care drug when Ive my gorge / All dumps & cares get their discharge [sic]' (II.31-32). 'Tim Teg' (II, 278-79) goes even further in exploring local language, and oral stylistic idioms, to document love triumphing over the desire for gear:

Oh me muther a'l'ays keeps running her rigs on  
 & s a'l'ays tongue banging poor meg  
 & calling one nicknames 'base baggage' & fixon  
 Becaus' Im in love wi tim teg

Caus' shes an old mizer & hes a poor codger  
 & I am her on'y wench meg  
 But she may keep mouthing bout money & roger  
 Ill neer turn my back on tim teg [sic]

(verses 1-2)

Paralleling the experiences of Scottish poets like Hogg and Cunningham, Clare's consciousness of his own

position as an autodidact developed throughout his work. The title of his third book, The Shepherd's Calendar (1827), directly alludes to Hogg's prose series in Blackwood's, as well as to Spenser's cycle, The Shepheardes Calender (1579).<sup>12</sup> In 'The Parish' (II, 697-779), which was unpublished in Clare's lifetime, equally influenced by Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village' and Crabbe's 'The Parish Register', Clare takes a satirical look at recent, socially distasteful, changes in village life. These are viewed from the perspective of 'The Parish hind oppressions humble slave / Whose only hopes of freedom is the grave [sic]' (11.1-2). Reviewing rustic unworthies, Clare is particularly abusive to those who waste their educational opportunities: the school educated 'Young Brag' and the untalented '"constant reader"' who contributes to local newspapers; the 'Churchwardens Constables & Overseers' (1.1220) who have 'learning just enough to sign a name / ... & cunning deep enough the poor to cheat' (11.1221, 1223). They hang 'the poor sinning starving crown' and leave 'wealthy thieves' unpunished.<sup>13</sup>

As a fiddler, like Hogg, Clare was acutely aware of the importance of a suitable setting and his songs lend themselves well to performance, such as the wistful 'Song' opening 'Here's a health unto thee'. Clare admired Hogg's lyrics exceedingly, writing to Thomas Pringle in July 1831, 'I saw a Song of Hoggs in a newspaper [The Stamford Chronicle] this spring "When the Kye comes home" which

delighted me        it is the sweetest pastoral I have seen  
for many a day [sic']'.<sup>14</sup> Clare seems to have drawn  
creative strength from the example of his Scottish  
counterparts, especially Hogg.

Equally, critics accorded Clare a very similar  
treatment to that given to the Scottish autodidacts,  
blending barely concealed resentment with praise. An  
unsigned notice of Poems descriptive of Rural Life, in the  
Monthly Magazine of March 1820, sums up the general  
attitude towards Clare:

To judge from the sketch given of the humble and  
laborious life of this obscure genius, we are  
surprised to discover such a display of poetical  
talent and force of mind in circumstances so  
little favourable to the development of the  
human faculties. Considered as the productions  
of a common labourer, they are certainly  
remarkable, and deserving of encouragement and  
commendation; but, to maintain that they have  
the smallest pretensions to comparative  
excellence with the writings of others out of  
his own sphere, would be ridiculous and unjust.

Clare, as an autodidact, is compared with his compeers  
Burns and Bloomfield, and found wanting. The same writers  
are evoked in considering The Village Minstrel in The New  
Monthly Magazine of 1821. Clare, it is remarked, 'does  
not bring before us individual pictures, in all their



provincial peculiarities, as Bloomfield does; nor can he awaken in us that deep train of reflections on life which the better educated Burns perpetually lays open'. Clare's main quality, according to the New Monthly Magazine, was to 'teach us to feel for his poverty, and for the privations of that large class of society to which he belongs...to rejoice in the pleasures and enjoyments, scanty as they may be, that fall to their lot...and to extend our charities'.<sup>15</sup>

Clare, though, seems to have been critically segregated, and separated from the Scottish autodidactic tradition. Roy Porter has suggested that Clare was encouraged into diverse roles as 'a peasant true to his roots...who could defer gratefully to those displaying him such a generous condescension...yet also a natural, manly, independent poet, a worthy successor to Thomson, an East Midlands peasant Laker'. The notion of an international, equal alliance between autodidacts was wholly rejected by the Literati. Blackwood's has the fictional Shepherd argue:

Where wull you find in a' England siccan Poets  
o' the People, the Peasantry, that is the  
Children o' the Soil, the Bairns o' Bank and  
Brae, as Robert Burns, Allan Kinningham, and  
Me?... Burns and Bloomfield indeed!...  
Kinningham and Clare indeed!

Such comments established an institutionalised hierarchy of autodidacts. Blackwood's, provocatively, modified their class-structure further: 'Cunningham is far superior to Clare.... He has all, or nearly all, that is good in Hogg--not a twentieth part of the Shepherd's atrocities--and much merit peculiarly his own...beyond the reach of the Ettrick bard'.<sup>16</sup> National pride constructed a Scottish autodidactic elite, with a closed membership.

Later critics had mixed reactions, at least partly shaped by their national affiliations. In The English Peasant (1893) Richard Heath made Clare the quintessential English autodidact: 'John Clare is the poet of English peasant life. He, if any one can, may claim to be a representative man. Bloomfield has not depicted that life with more sympathy, nor Crabbe with a truer touch'. Arthur Symonds, in his introduction to the 1908 edition of Poems by John Clare, unusually remarked that the work was not 'typically peasant poetry'. Comparing Clare to Burns and Hogg he observed, somewhat unfairly, and with a scanty knowledge of farming:

Burns was a great poet, filled with ideas, passions, and every sort of intoxication; but he had no such minute local lore as Clare, nor, indeed, so deep a love of the earth.... Burns or Hogg, however, we can very well imagine at any period following the plough with skill or keeping cattle with care. But Clare was never a good labourer; he pottered on in the fields

feebly, he tried fruitless way after way of making his living. What was strangely sensitive in him might well have been hereditary.... That wandering and strange instinct was in his blood, and it spoiled the peasant in him and made the poet.

Robert Graves, writing about Clare as 'Peasant Poet' in The Hudson Review (1955), noted 'natural simplicity supported by a remarkable sense of language'.

Perceptively, Graves pointed to Clare's technical skills and unique creative qualities: 'His obsession with Nature made him think of a poem as a living thing, rather than an artifact, or a slice cut from the cake of literature'.<sup>17</sup> In these remarks, Graves approaches the position held by the present writer: that autodidacts possessed an unusual ability to assimilate information (oral and literary) and present it in unique, not merely derivative, forms.

Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips sum up the current critical response to Clare by considering him to be 'an exile within his own country'. Edward Storey, denying that Clare's autodidactic status made him a 'literary freak', is perhaps overstating the case when he states that, to appreciate Clare, 'We even have to forget that he was ever a peasant--real or unreal'; Clare's autodidactic experiences profoundly affected his worldview and creative techniques. Storey is correct, however, to highlight the positive aspects of autodidactic stereotyping as they



affected Clare: 'The fashion was to last just long enough into the nineteenth century to give Clare the chance to emerge from the rustic obscurity of Northamptonshire which might otherwise have stifled his voice forever'.<sup>18</sup>

Clare did contribute to his own stereotyping as 'a lowly Clown', but at the same time he resented it. He wrote to John Taylor in 1820, regarding proposed cuts in 'Helpstone': 'd\_\_\_n that canting way of being forced to please I say--I can't abide it & one day or other I will show my Independance [sic]'. The situation is reminiscent of that when Hogg, while using the soubriquet 'Ettrick Shepherd' himself, balked at Scott's suggestion he should stop writing and stick to farming. The personal parallels can be pursued. Just as Scott's patronage, on occasion, annoyed Hogg, Clare was irritated by Scott's refusal to sign his presentation copy of The Lady of the Lake in 1820. Just as Hogg's iconography reinforced his image as the Ettrick Shepherd, so too Clare suffered being painted as a peasant. There are strong similarities between the images of Hogg, discussed above, and that of the peasant Clare, in the William Hilton portrait of 1820 and, more recently, the sculptural cycle by Tom Bates.<sup>19</sup>

The modern Clare society has gone a long way to redress the balance in favour of Clare as a major poet, not solely an autodidactic phenomenon. There are new, intelligent editions of the poet's work, a society Journal and regular conferences considering the poet's work. An

annual festival at Helpstone celebrates Clare's achievements with modern reimaginings of traditional customs, including flower cushions made by local school children in Clare's honour. There is, however, still a long way to go before Clare is accorded credit for his full range of poetic productions. John Goodridge's recent collection of essays in response to The Independent Spirit (1994) of Clare goes some way towards contextualising and reappraising Clare. However, this is within a limited (largely English and autodidactic) company of writers: Ann Yearsley, Stephen Duck and Robert Bloomfield. Hogg, though, is gradually being seen as an influence on, and parallel to Clare (a joint meeting of the Hogg and Clare societies has recently been proposed). Given his self-confessed affinity with the Scottish autodidacts, and as 'An Exile within his own country', John Clare can be classed as a Scottish autodidact in spirit, living outwith the physical nation.



## Notes

1. See The Letters of John Clare, ed Mark Storey, (Oxford, 1985), p.303. See Valentina Bold, 'James Hogg and the Scottish Self-Taught Tradition', paralleling Hogg with Clare, The Independent Spirit, ed John Goodridge, (Nottingham, 1994), pp.69-86; see too R.J. Ellis, 'Plodding plowmen: issues of labour and literacy in Gray's "Elegy"', Goodridge, pp.27-54.
2. See John Clare, Autobiographical Writings, ed Eric Robinson, (Oxford, 1983), pp.xiii, 2-4.
3. Clare, Autobiographical Writings, pp.9-10. Samuel Palmer's wash and ink drawing of a reading labourer is in the Bodleian Museum.
4. Clare, Autobiographical Writings, pp.13, 27, 10.
5. Clare, Autobiographical Writings, passim; pp.85-86.
6. Clare, Autobiographical Writings, pp.12, 14.
7. Clare, Autobiographical Writings, pp.17-20
8. Clare, Autobiographical Writings, pp.21-22, p.24.
9. Clare's illness has been variously diagnosed as depression, schizophrenia or cerebral syphilis. See Kerith Trick, 'Clare's Asylum Experience' in Richard Foulkes, ed, John Clare. A Bicentenary Celebration, (Northampton, 1994), pp.27-41.
10. All references to Poems Descriptive are to John Clare, The Early Poems, vol I, ed Eric Robinson and David Powell, (Oxford, 1989) are within the text, in parentheses, below. Ramsay's volume is item 341 in Clare's library, noted by Robinson and Powell, p.3.
11. John Clare, 'The Village Minstrel', The Early Poems, 2 vols, ed Eric Robinson and David Powell, (Oxford, 1989), vol II, pp.123-87; all references to the poem are to this edition, given within the text in parentheses. 'The Village Minstrel' describes Clare's 'love for rural objects'. Clare regretted it



- did not 'describe the feelings of a rhyming peasant strongly or locally enough'--and began a second part to remedy this, which was not completed. See Clare, Autobiographical Writings, p.106. See James Hogg, Winter Evening Tales, (Edinburgh, 1820).
12. John Clare, The Shepherd's Calendar, 1827, rpt ed Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield, (London, 1964).
  13. John Clare, 'The Parish', The Early Poems, vol II, pp.697-779.
  14. See John Clare, 'Song', The Later Poems of John Clare, 2 vols, ed Eric Robinson and David Powell, (Oxford, 1984), vol I, p.67; recorded, Dream Not of Love. Love Songs from the John Clare Collection Sung by George Deacon, Vintage, VAT 1983. See Ian Bowman, 'Aiblins--John Clare?', Lallans 26 (Whitsuntid, 1986), pp.19-14. See Clare, Letters, p.543.
  15. 'Poems Descriptive of Rural Life', review, The Monthly Magazine, (1820); 'The Village Minstrel', review, The New Monthly Magazine, (1821), qtd Clare. The Critical Heritage, ed Mark Storey, (London, 1973), 16, 59.
  16. See Roy Porter, '"All madness for writing': John Clare and the asylum' Chapter 11 in Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield, eds, John Clare in Context, (Cambridge, 1994), p.289. See John Wilson, ed, Noctes Ambrosianae, 4 vols, (Edinburgh, 1863), vol I, p.218; Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, (August 1824), p.162.
  17. Clare, The Critical Heritage, 114, 117, 141.
  18. Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips, Chapter 1 of Haughton et al, p.1. Edward Storey, A Right to Song. The Life of John Clare, (London, 1982), pp.16, 22-24.
  19. Clare, Letters, pp.69, 86. See the proposals in John Goodridge, ed, The John Clare Cycle. Sculptures by Tom Bates, (Helpston, Cambridge, 1994).

## Bibliography

The bibliography is divided into five sections:

- I. Printed works
- II. Manuscripts
- III. Critical works
- IV. Related Material
- V. Recorded Material

Where more than one work by the same writer appears, they are listed in order of date of publication.

Abbreviations are as follows:

EUL:	Edinburgh University Library
GUL:	Glasgow University Library
HMSO:	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
NLS:	The National Library of Scotland
SA:	Selkirkshire County Archives
SRO:	The Scottish Record Office

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