



ISSN 1754-1514

# The Bottle Imp

Issue 7, May 2010

Book Review

**The Kennedy & Boyd Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literature**

Reviewed by Megan Coyer

The Kennedy & Boyd Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literature (2010), selected and introduced by Caroline McCracken-Flesher, represents the first anthology devoted exclusively to Scottish literature of the nineteenth century. The thematic divisions and loosely chronological organization encourage readers to make fruitful connections between the selected texts and the radical social, political, and economic developments of the nineteenth century and to trace literary trends and influences over the course of the century and beyond.

The anthology begins with three thematic sections devoted to literature of the Romantic period: 'Romances of Time and Place', 'Romances of Gender and Nation', and 'Romanticism: Genre and the Journal'. The selection of a transatlantic poem, 'Gertrude of Wyoming; or, The Pennsylvania Cottage' (1809) by Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), to open the anthology is surprising, but befits the volume's expansive, non-canonical outlook and is well balanced by the closing poem's (Alice Clare MacDonell's 'The Weaving of The Tartan' (1896)) lament for the exiled sons of Scotland.

'Romanticism: Genre and the Journal' rightly dominates the first half of the anthology and includes texts by Sir Walter Scott and James Hogg, as well as Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, Lord Byron, and Alexander Rodger. The selections from Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802) highlight Scott's role as an editor and introduce the themes of antiquarianism and ballad collecting. The difficult task of selecting an extract from the Waverley novels is admirably met, as the 'Introductory Epistle' to *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), presents a vibrant picture of the mystery surrounding the authorship of the Waverley novels and the general fascination with the double life of authorship in an age of increasing

mass print culture. The selections from the *Edinburgh Review* emphasize the centrality of the periodical press to literary culture at this time and also point towards the influence of Scotland and Scottish writers on the canonical English Romantics, and Lord Byron is here correctly included as an author within the Scottish tradition.

The theme of the periodical press is continued in the selections from James Hogg, which include 'Strange Letter Of A Lunatic' (first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1830) and an extract from the Blackwoodian *Noctes Ambrosianae*. Problematically, the selection from the *Noctes* is listed under James Hogg, indicating authorship rather than probable puppetry of 'The Ettrick Shepherd' persona. However, the selection of two songs and two periodical pieces gives an accurate depiction of how Hogg would have been known to his contemporaries, while the haunting tale of a 'Strange Letter of a Lunatic' appeals to the modern conception of Hogg as a writer of psychological fiction.

The next three sections are devoted to the literature inspired by the Industrial Revolution – 'The Business of Literature: Commerce and Complicity', 'Literature as Prophecy', and 'Prophecy in the Days of Industry' – and reveal the extent to which Scottish writers engaged with urban, industrial themes at this time. The horrors of slavery and empire, scientific and religious visions of the progressive perfection of mankind, and the degradation of society by the vices of capitalism are subsequently presented, allowing the reader to trace wavering societal hope and despair and the development of new forms of sacred symbolism in the urban environment. The strange visions of the section devoted to 'Other Worlds and Different Visions', which includes selections from George MacDonald (1824–1905), James Thomson (1834–1882), and Andrew Lang (1844–1912), carry forward the overall themes of the fantastic supernatural and the urban Gothic which are evident throughout the anthology, and anticipate current trends in Scottish writing.

Perhaps the most important section for the re-evaluation of the traditional assumptions regarding Scottish literature of the nineteenth century is 'Kailyard Dis/Comforts'. The extracts from the writing of S. R. Crockett (1860–1914) and George Douglas Brown (1869–1902) work against the purely sentimental and nostalgic associations of the 'Kailyard'. The rural settings are in contrast to the urbanity of the previous sections devoted to the literature of industry, but the darkness of the characters and their portrayals carries forward the theme of degra-

[www.thebottleimp.org.uk](http://www.thebottleimp.org.uk)

The Bottle Imp is the ezine of the Scottish Writing Exhibition [www.scottishwriting.org.uk](http://www.scottishwriting.org.uk) and is published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies [www.asls.org.uk](http://www.asls.org.uk)

dition and decay. The extract from Maclaren's *Beside The Bonnie Briar Bush* (1894) is the most amenable to the traditional notions of 'Kailyard' and provides a useful context against which to read the Crockett and Brown extracts. The absence of J. M. Barrie from this section and the anthology as a whole is lamentable, but is in keeping with the non-canonical ethos.

The paradoxical extreme confidence and doubt in visual signifiers in the nineteenth century is highlighted in 'Crime, Detection, and Literary Control'. Conan Doyle's 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' (1891) is representative of his gripping style and depicts Sherlock Holmes as the privileged spectator – able to unmask the false facades of criminality – while James McLevy's *Curiosity of Crime in Edinburgh* reveals that Holmes was not singular amongst the detectives of Scottish fiction. Oliphant's 'The Library Window' (1896) conversely highlights the subjectivity of perceptions and carries forward the fantastic supernaturalism of Scottish writing in a more modern context.

The final section, 'Views of Modernity', has less apparent thematic consistency, but fruitfully reveals the development of a narrative voice closer to that of James Joyce than the extreme objectivity of the Scottish ballads. Many of the extracts look forward to the emphasis on Scots language early in the twentieth century, and Stevenson's 'Thrawn Janet' (1881) reminds the reader of Stevenson's Scottishness despite his international scope and reception.

This text should be of great use to both students and teachers of Scottish literature, and in particular, gives sufficient flavour of certain authors, texts, and genres to encourage further reading. Inevitably, some extracts from longer texts work better than others, and in some cases a short introductory paragraph prefacing the extract could be useful. This limitation is addressed in the very informative introduction and list of further background reading and by no means decreases the text's value as a teaching edition. The footnoting in the volume can be slightly confusing, as it is unclear whether some footnotes are authorial or editorial and all footnotes appear at the end of the selection necessitating distracting page flipping. However, the provision of an index of source texts enables any interested readers to answer this question for themselves.



ASLS is a registered charity no. SC006535  
ASLS is supported by the Scottish Arts Council



[www.thebottleimp.org.uk](http://www.thebottleimp.org.uk)

*The Bottle Imp* is the ezine of the Scottish Writing Exhibition [www.scottishwriting.org.uk](http://www.scottishwriting.org.uk)  
and is published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies [www.asls.org.uk](http://www.asls.org.uk)