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BOOK REVIEWS

Henry Mackenzie. *Letters to Elizabeth Rose of Kilravock: On Literature, Events, and People (1768-1815)*. Edited by Horst Drescher. Münster. Verlag Aschendorff. 1967. 266 pages. 48 DM.

This well-printed volume accounts for all of the known letters written by Mackenzie to his maternal cousin, Elizabeth Rose, later Baroness of Kilravock. Drescher has searched out batches of correspondence not known to exist when Harold Thompson was writing Mackenzie's biography, *A Scottish Man of Feeling* (1931). There is no indication as to which of the letters are of Drescher's discovery, but since Thompson printed only portions of the letters that were available to him, perhaps the omission of this interesting bibliographical information is not important. Drescher believes that Thompson used a copy of the letters rather than originals, but the letters I compared in Thompson and Drescher are similar except for Thompson's regularization of Mackenzie's abbreviations, spelling, and punctuation.

Only those letters dealing with "literature, the theater, men and manners" are given in their entirety; the others are paraphrased. Drescher's editorial principle is generally adequate to the purpose; there is no need, and less interest, in reading every word written in informal correspondence by Mackenzie. On the other hand, Drescher's application of this principle deprives us of letters on the deaths of Mackenzie's father and youngest son and of Elizabeth's husband, regrettable because the reader has become as interested in the letter-writers' lives as in their opinions. For no clear reason, the principle is violated in order to print Mackenzie's letter to Elizabeth on the death of *her* father.

The letters in this collection are of peripheral value for any revaluative study of literature or manners in the eighteenth century. There is an easy acquaintance with the issues of the day—university appointments, women's education, political matters such as the independence of the Scottish peerage, and so forth. But in family correspondence like this these matters are seldom discussed in detail, and hardly ever with new judgments. Similarly, discussions of such literary topics as diction

in poetry, coarseness in Smollett, Beattie's 1770 article on Hume, sensibility, or the preference for modern over ancient composition, do not move beyond customary eighteenth century opinions. On such matters these letters inform us only that the Scottish social elite were not isolated from contemporary life and affairs.

These letters are of value for their evidence of the basic quality of Mackenzie's character, pertinent because of the increasing, if still limited, attention being paid to *The Man of Feeling*. Attracted by sentiment in life and exploiter of it in his novels, Mackenzie was never in danger of becoming a Harley; he understood himself too well and had no real inclination to go against eighteenth century seriousness. He was developing his career in law among the best legal minds in the Three Kingdoms at the same time that he was drawing out the emotionalisms of fiction. The brevity of his productive career in fiction is foreshadowed in his comment when he was 31 that it is only just that he should have increasing difficulty in writing as he grows older and becomes more involved in the legal profession: "Our Judgements should be more matured, our Fancies are certainly less vivid; besides that the Cares of advanced Man & Womanhood, while they exercise One, lie heavy on the Other."

What interests us most is, as might be expected, Mackenzie's account of writing *The Man of Feeling*. (*The Man of the World* and *Julia de Roubigné* are referred to only after their publication.) Mackenzie's feeling for his first novel is hard to deduce, but the general attitude is one of whimsical fondness. He takes pleasure in the writing; he sends chapters to Cousin Elizabeth for her "amusement"; and while he is fond of Aitkins and his daughter (Chapter XXVIII), he is proudest of the Story of Old Edwards (Chapters XXXIV-XXXV). He admits to his cousin that he selected the topics that are the easiest for him—and "hence my Propensity to the pathetic." Nonetheless, he was conscious of the demands of "propriety" that he avoid describing emotions "obtrusively"—even though his concept of aesthetic propriety hardly resembles ours. Readers sceptical of the novel's art will probably be pleased to learn that the chapters were not written in the order in which they appear in the book; but this is of small moment. As Mackenzie says, the novel is best read at intervals anyway, because of the lack of connection among the parts. The strongest evidence for Mackenzie's detachment from his hero is his wryly witty remark that Harley needs someone to speak to who can understand him: quite obviously, Mackenzie did not expect Harley to appeal in a realistic, empathic sense to his readers.

Drescher's notes are among the most succinct but inclusive I have seen in an edition of letters. Especially notable are those giving substance to Mackenzie's innumerable references to Edinburgh and provincial theatrical productions, actors, and writers. Mackenzie's references and Drescher's annotations make this edition a veritable treasure-trove of data on the Scottish and English theater during the days of the Licensing Act. Nearly as useful are, among others, the notes on Lavater's physiognomy-studies (Mackenzie was a physiognomist), and on the prose translations of *Fingal*, in 1770. The notes on the Rose family are adequate for following the text in most instances, but, unsurprisingly, Drescher is unable to trace many of the family references in the letters.

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