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*Patricia J. Wilson*

John Galt at Work:  
Comments on the MS. of *Ringan Gilhaize*



In 1969 Ian Gordon discovered the MS. of John Galt's novel *Ringan Gilhaize* in the Edinburgh offices of the publishers Oliver & Boyd.<sup>1</sup> There it had probably lain since the publication of the three volumes on 2 May 1823. By arrangement with Oliver & Boyd the MS. on its rediscovery was deposited in the National Library of Scotland where I have been able to consult it.

The MS. is incomplete but illuminating about Galt's method of composition. He was a practised writer and novelist by the time he was working on *Ringan* and the novel, or "theoretical history of society," as he preferred to call it, bears witness to that skill; always the alterations Galt makes are improvements.

The novel is subtitled *The Covenanters* but covers in fact the period of the Reformation as well. Galt rightly disclaims the sentiments Ringan, his eponymous Covenanting hero, expresses as not being the author's but nevertheless the sentiments are ones he understands in the marrow of his bones. Two of Galt's ancestors had suffered for their beliefs in the period known in Covenanting lore as the Killing Times, and the novel is Galt's tribute to his ancestors. It deals with a peculiarly Scottish subject and the tale is narrated by Ringan Gilhaize, a native of

Ayrshire. Some of the best things in the novel are therefore in Scots, but the broadest dialect is spoken by only a few of the minor characters. Galt wanted the novel to be popular and promised his publisher as he was writing it that it would not be "so full of Scotch as some of my other things" (Letter of 3.2.1823 Galt to George Boyd, held in NLS). Ringan is made therefore to narrate the story in a rhythm and syntax that make a Scot aware that a Scots voice is speaking, but this should prove no obstacle to a non-Scot, for, as Galt pointed out in his Postscript to *Ringan Gilhaize*, it can be done without the need to have any but English words on the page. Where Scots is used the sound often conveys the sense, and where the onomatopoeic effect is absent, the meaning can usually be deduced from the context.

Interestingly enough it was not always the Scots word that came first from Galt's pen, but when it came he gave it the preference and deleted the English word. John Knox is for example described as "no common man nor mean personage, though in stature he was [sca[r]cely (deleted)] jimp the ordinary size."<sup>2</sup> Lord James Stuart peruses a confidential letter, "but . . . [crumpled (deleted)] runkled it up in his hand" (I, 189). With the news of the long-awaited arrival of John Knox in town "the church began to [empty (deleted)] skail,—the session was adjourned,—and the people ran in all directions" (I, 192).

A longer example from an unused MS. page perhaps indicates better the effect of the change. During the Reformation the Earl of Glencairn and other Lords of the Congregation set their men to "cleanse" the abbeys and priories of their images and instruments of worship. Galt writes first: "When the earl had executed his edifying commission by dispersing the friars and tearing their nests" and changes it to "by skyling (i.e. skailing) the friars, and riving their byke"—"skailing" is much less respectful, and "riving" more vigorous than the original, and any connotations of coziness that might have clung to "nests" are quite absent from byke (a wasp's nest).

The earl then goes off with his men to execute elsewhere "[other equally godly (deleted)] the like godly exploits." In the latter version the reader should detect an irony of which the narrator is unaware, and which is not present in the first. It is Galt's mastery of such a technique that allows him while "keeping out of sight anything that would recall the separate existence of the author," and without damaging the credibility of

his narrator to let the reader see more than Ringan does. We hear no voice but Ringan's but we see more than he does. He is driven to commit murder and still he retains our sympathy, but we do not identify with him and it is largely Galt's use of the kind of irony illustrated above which allows him to achieve this end.

Ringan narrates the whole story and only once does the mask slip and the tone become uncharacteristic. The reader has often to be referred to histories of the time for "public" history that has no place in Ringan's "household memorial," but on one occasion Galt first writes: "It is far from my hand and intent, to write a history of the tribulations which ensued," which is acceptable, but continues "let it therefore suffice that in this chapter I briefly rehearse . . ." This is formal and brusque in a way that Ringan is not. It smacks of talking down to the reader. The second attempt is more in character: "and therefore I shall proceed with all expedient brevity, to relate what further . . . fell under the eye of my grandfather." This is more characteristic of other instances where we are referred to the annals and chronicles of the time, although on occasion we are warned that "the truth in them has suffered from the alloy of a base servility" (I, 294).

Something which Galt always does well in his fiction is to put even a minor character before us in a few swift strokes, each brush stroke designed to contribute to our impression of the character. He therefore finds it useful to name them so that for "a noted stabler at the foot of Leith Wynd," Galt immediately arrows in the name Habby Bridle. A blacksmith at Kilwinning becomes James Coom (coom: coal dust, or very small coals used in smithies) illustrating the way Galt frequently devises a name from the character's occupation. A lawyer bears the name Raphael Doquet (docquet: a summary of a longer legal document). A farmer and horse setter becomes Kenneth Shelty (shelty: a Shetland pony). A man who worked in the King's armoury at Stirling Castle is Thomas Sword, a man who tills the ground, Robin Harrow. Not surprisingly Galt did not approve of Sir Walter Scott's attitude to the Covenanters in *Old Mortality*. "I thought he treated the defenders of the Presbyterian Church with too much levity . . . [and had been] so forgetful of what was due to the spirit of the epoch, as to throw it into what I felt was ridicule,"<sup>3</sup> and whereas Scott's ministers in *Old Mortality* have

names which indicate the degree of their fanaticism—Gabriel Pountext, Epraim Macbriar, Gabriel Kettledrummle, Habakuk Mucklewrath—Galt's have usually what might have been actual names—Swinton, Witherspoon, Semple—and only once when a fanatic preaches stuff which "to a composed mind was melancholious to hear" (II, 254) does Galt call him Mr. Whamle: (wham(m)le or whummle: to overturn), and the preacher is certainly "overturning" good sense.

Only one name gave Galt trouble and that was the name of the lemame of the "papistical" Archbishop of St. Andrews. Marion has been abducted from the home of her husband and children, and Galt for the first nineteen chapters calls her Mistress Merrywill but keeps scoring the name through because the husband she has deserted is a worthy if somewhat timorous bailie, or local councillor, of the burgh of Crail outside St. Andrews, and not a character for whom the connotations of Merrywill would be useful. For a time Galt tried "Flisk" perhaps having seen it as the name of a parish in Perthshire. Again this keeps being deleted, and Galt tries "Fergus," which is at least neutral but for that very reason not memorable, and not contributing any kind of ambience to the character. At last in chapter twenty Galt writes "Kilspinnie," which with its echoes of a Scottish place name is good for the worthy bailie, and which with its short vowel sounds and possible echoes of spinnets and spinneys suits the pleasure-seeking Marian, who, when her sister remonstrates with her, is unrepentant: "Since I hae slippit the tether, I may as well tak a canter o'er the knowes" (I, 257). Galt has provided for the repentance which will follow such bravado. Marian's maiden name, which a married woman in 16th century Scotland would retain, is "Ruet."<sup>4</sup>

More often than making additions to his MS., however, Galt's alterations show him cutting it down. They lead him to detect a redundant clause. The reader should, for example, remember that Ringan has a room in the house of Mrs. Brownlee, and Galt deletes "with whom I was then lodging." Again when Michael Gilhaize, as a very young man, and the cuckolded Bailie Kilspinnie surprise the Archbishop and his mistress, the former is struck down and the latter thinks it best to faint away. Galt says: "But she was soon roused from that fraudulent dwam by my grandfather, who, seizing a flagon of wine, dashed it upon her face (more in anger than to recover her

so much did her vile arts and fraudulent machinations turn his heart against her)" (I, 82), but wisely he omits from the printed text the words beyond "face." This is altogether too self-righteous from a young man who when he is himself the subject of the delectable Marian's advances thinks hastily of her deserted husband and five babes, and the thought acts as "a chaste spell and a restraining grace" (I,77).

Earlier we hear that Gilhaize puts on "the look of a losel and roister" to make a supposed assignation with Marian. His message indicates "he would be from the gloaming all the night at the Widow Dingwall's, where he would rejoice exceedingly if she would come and spend an hour or two as he had a great deal to say to her" (I, 241). The last ten words are fortunately omitted.

Another deletion occurs when Elspa reproaches her sister: "O, Marian how could ye quit them [your children] till they were able to do for themselves" (I, 255). The last eight words are left out. Galt had obviously had a Homeric nod! Another beneficial reduction occurs when Galt writes:

O Charles Stuart, King of Scotland! and thou, James Sharp!—false and cruel men—[But ye are both called to your great audit are before your judge, and it becomes not me in the darkness of the flesh, they are called to their account and to restrain the childless father's grief that is bursting upon me I will proceed no farther with this portion of history]

This becomes: "But ye are called to your account; and what avails it now to the childless father to rail upon your memory?" (III, 99-100).

Changes are often made when Galt envisages a better way of bringing about a course of action he wishes to set in motion. Early in Vol. I Galt writes: "In the course of the evening as the Earl of Glencairn, [Gilhaize's patron] sat at supper, the earl of Argyle with the Lord James Stuart being his only guests he for some cause seemingly of no moment to indicate that there was something which," but then he sees the economical and more likely way of achieving his aim of having the nobleman give confidential instructions to his new servant: "One evening as the Earl sat alone at supper, he ordered my grandfather to be

brought again before him, and desired him to be cup-bearer for that night" (I, 14). This honor is a mark of the earl's favor and does away with the need for further explanation. Similarly Galt had first written: "the knight spoke [to a fair damsel in the garb of a handmaid] in such a manner as made it evident to my grandfather that the pair were on a familiar footing", but then he adds the action which gives away more than mere assertion can do: "the knight spoke in familiarity, and kittling her under the chin, made her giggle in a wanton manner" (I, 30).

Galt has a long period of time to cover (1558-1696), so characters cannot be permitted to indulge in retrospective speculation. Their thoughts are usually directed forward so that when Ringan and his family do not suffer as much persecution as their neighbors, Ringan thinks the lack of molestation a device of the Enemy of man "to lure me into forgetfulness of the trials" he has already suffered, but Galt alters this to "to make me think myself more deserving of favor" (II, 111). The point of the change is always to keep the narrative moving forward. For example Michael Gilhaize on his way to the west country to learn the strength of the Reformed there finds himself pursued by Winterton, an ex-servant of Glencairn's, and, on one occasion, almost trapped by him. We hear that

Gilhaize was both afraid and perplexed he knew not wherefore; (he could not imagine what cause he had given that Winterton should be in pursuit of him as an offender against justice, save only the part he had taken with Master Merrywill and his wife and that he thought the archbishop would not be forward to make public, yet was he anxious and afraid,) and he was prompted by a power that he durst not and could not reason with to rise and escape (I, 127).

Galt has obviously been groping for a motivation here for Winterton's pursuit and as there is no very compelling reason for his spying and prying it is better that the emphasis is kept on Gilhaize's apparent danger and apparent rescue by Providence. Another example of such a change of emphasis occurs in Vol. III when there is no need to emphasize the folly of sending a stripling to war. Ringan consecrates his last remaining child, his son Joseph, to the Cameronian cause. He dares not believe it was frenzy that drove him to to it: "but when I heard of

Cameronians shot on the hills or brought to the scaffold, [I sought in vain to find any wisdom in the act of sending a stripling to war (*deleted*)] I prayed that I might receive some [testimony (*deleted*)] token of an accepted offering in what I had done" (III, 185). From the more skillful second version the reader is probably confirmed in his impression that frenzy or obsession had everything to do with the father's conduct and the fact that he dare not even to himself acknowledge this indicates the growing power of his obsession to affect his actions.

Where it is unwise to be specific Galt can resort to something very bland and general. In response to a petition from the Reformed read by Sir James Sandilands, the Queen Regent, for example, "read a prepared answer, [assuring Sir James that everything what (*sic*) could be legally granted would be allowed to the Reformed, and that they might pray in their" (*deleted*)]. This becomes "in which she was made to deliver many comforting assurances" (I, 176). However, where it will pay to be specific Galt makes the necessary addition. We hear: "My grandfather was at the time at Finlayston-house," but the vague "at the time" is removed and Galt substitutes "when this perfidy came to a head" (I, 177).

Sometimes an initial attempt to describe a scene leads Galt to see the aspects he needs to highlight to convey his impression of it to the reader. The MS. gives first, for example, "As my granfather came in sight of the abbey of Kilwinning, crowning a green peninsula in the widespread sandy wastes of Cuningham [*sic*] it seemed to him as if huge leviathan had come up from the abysses of the deep." Galt must then have realized how he could use the natural colors of green grass and yellow sand, and the monstrous size of the building to suggest that the pre-Reformation abbey grew rich by feeding off the society around it. He does this by likening it from early in the description to a legendary beast, and making it appear to have squatted on the best pasture and laid waste the surrounding area. The passage is re-written to read:

As my grandfather came in sight of Kilwinning and beheld the abbey with its lofty horned towers and spiky pinnacles<sup>5</sup> and the sands of Cuningham between it and the sea, it seemed to him as if a huge leviathan had come up from the depths of the ocean and was devouring the green inland,



having already consumed all the herbage of the wide waste that lay so bare and yellow for many a mile (I, 149).

For his drouthy smith, James Coom, Galt made several changes in the name of the vessel he drank from when he came in to Dame Lugton's inn, and it is worth considering the possible reasons for Galt's choice. He wrote first a "choppin," then a "luggie," and settled for a "mutchkin-cap" of ale (a wooden vessel holding an English pint, or a Scottish quart). Coom blows the froth from the [stoup (*deleted*) "cap" in which Dame Lugton hands him it, and then takes (in a direct quotation from Burns's *Auld Land Syne*) a [draught (*deleted*)] "right good-willy waught." "Cap" is better than "stoup" which was usually the vessel used to measure the mutchkin, and a "right good-willy waught" is more evocative and satisfying than "draught" for an Ayrshire blacksmith, who mischievously delights in reminding Dame Lugton that at Marymas he had the "honour and glory of ca'ing a nail intil the timber hip o' the Virgin Mary . . . when her leg sklintered aff as they were dressing her for the show—[winking as he did so to my grandfather and took another pull of the his luggie" (*deleted*)] becomes "winking, dippet his head up to the lugs in the ale-cap" (I, 153-5). This is better because a "luggie" may have one handle (lug) or two, and the picture Galt wants us to have is not of a lugged or eared dish, but rather of the smith's face disappearing up to his ears (or lugs) in the rapidly emptying ale-cap.

Galt gives James Coom some of the best Scots dialogue in the novel, but is careful to make even the English words he uses appropriate. We hear that the first use that James Coom has made of the liberation of the Reformation is to quench his thirst. "It used to cost me . . . muckle siller for the sin o' getting fu', no aboon three or four times in the year," he claims, and pretends to fear that for his drunkenness now the abbey's cook may roast him over the fire "like a laverock in his collop-tangs." "Cook" is changed to "head-kitchener" which was a term used particularly for one who presided over the kitchen of a monastic establishment. It was therefore fitting, but it also evokes more than "cook" does the space, the staff and the utensils the man reigned over and the ovens and fires he had access to. A little later Galt rejects another unsuitable noun, when Dame Lugton warns Coom that he may find "the de'il's as hard a tax-gatherer

as e'er the kirk was, for ever since thou has refraint frae paying penance, thy weekly calks ahint the door hae been on the increase" (I, 156-7). "Tax-gatherer" is oddly incongruous, when used of the devil, and Galt changes it to "taxer" which he probably coined for the occasion to evoke a more active fiend than one who sat passively at the receipt of custom.

It is not only, however, in the matter of diction that Galt rejects the unsuitable and produces something better, but also in his plot. One of the plot problems in Galt's mind as he worked was the future of Marian Ruet/Kilspinnie. When Gilhaize first meets the bailie's family, one of the little girls tells him of their mother:

A foul friar made my mother an ill-doer [and my father sorry because he can ne'er let her come back to us for fear she would make us all bred-breed us up to be ill-doers too. {But she's But she's come back to Grannie and (deleted)}] and took her away ae night when we were all after she had harkent us just when she had harkent that we said our prayers to her sight (*deleted*)] and took her away ae night when she was just done wi' harkening our prayers (I, 226).

Galt obviously saw the impossibility of total rehabilitation for Marian and settles here for the one clear image the child has of her mother being wiled away just after hearing their bedtime prayers. He also, however, at this stage introduces Marian's gentle sister, Elspa (or Alice, as he calls her to begin with). Elspa is to become the wife of Michael Gilhaize, and Galt experiments with the possibility of making Elspa the means of redeeming Marian "whom soon after my gra she enticed from the snares of Satan, and subdued the proud—sensuality her spirit to the humility of penitence and a religious patience that few could see without compassion and sorrow." This is scored through and all that we hear is that "nothing became Elspa more in all her piety than the part she acted towards her guilty sister." This creates some narrative suspense and reminds the reader of Marian's yet unregenerate state, while shelving the problem of her fate until later.

At this stage Galt had not made up his mind even on the Christian name of Grandfather Gilhaize. On discarded pages for vol. I, ch. 26, he is referred to as Icener, a form of Alexander.

This happens, however, only once. In the finished novel the old man is referred to always by his grandson Ringan, as "my grandfather." His superiors call him by his surname alone, and when we first hear his Christian name, Michael, the old man is dead and the name used by Ebenezer Muir, almost a coeval of the patriarch (II, 205).

In the discarded chapter 26 it is clear that Galt had not yet decided whom Gilhaize was to marry, for he tries out romantic complications that were to come about as the result of the injury he sustained at the "herrying" of Kilwinning Abbey when he leapt up to pull down the effigy of the Virgin Mary which James Coom had mended. The leg came off so that for a moment Gilhaize was stunned by his fall, and the monks believed they were about to see a miracle of divine intervention. Recovering, however, Gilhaize hurls the timber leg at the fattest of the monks, and drives the breath out of him. In the discarded MS. pages Gilhaize's injury necessitated his being carried on a banner with his broken knee to Tobit Lugton's inn, and being nursed there for a time, so that he fell in love with Tobit's daughter Marjory. In time the pair marry and inherit the inn, but the herrying of the abbey had hurt their trade and nobody came to the town any more "for sin, sorrow or pardon." To have made Gilhaize a vintner—even of a douce and sober nature—has many obvious disadvantages for Galt's purpose, and to have had him succumb to another, of whom we hear reports, would have been worse. Overtures were made to him by a Mistress Nanse Cliffe of whom it was rumored that "Gavin Hamilton the abbot had had more to say . . . than to harken to her shriving . . . . In short, she was in a manner, by report, a papistical concubine." Even the "costliest broidered kirtle" in all the countryside—costlier even than the lady of Eglinton's—could do nothing to make "such a lady potipharian madam" a suitable spouse for "my grandfather" who is fortunately "a young man of Joseph-like temperance." Galt is, one feels, enjoying experimenting with plot possibilities here in almost a spendthrift fashion. Neither could be seriously entertained and the pages were, not surprisingly, discarded.

The union of Gilhaize and Elspa Ruet is more economical on characters—she is the first suitable woman he meets—and because she is Marian's sister, and sister-in-law to Bailie Kilspinnie of Crail, the connection gives Galt a good reason for reintroducing the timorous bailie and for telling what ultimately became of the



wife who deserted him.

From MS. evidence one type of passage exercised Galt a good deal and he was also a little vain of the effects achieved. The first part of Vol. III, ch. 24, reads:

The place where we met was a deep glen, the scroggy sides whereof were as if rocks and trees and brambles, with here and there a yellow primrose and a blue hyacinth between, had been thrown by some wild architect into many a difficult and fantastical form. (III, 222)

Galt quotes the whole paragraph as the preface to an article<sup>6</sup> published in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, September 1823, four months after his novel came out and comments:

. . . if I had not been pleased with our friend Galt's *Ringan Gilhaize* on any other score, I must have delighted to find it contained in a passage, which by the peculiar position of a single word, affords me at once a motto for my sheet, and a key to my principle.

The single word peculiarly placed is "difficult," and it is interesting that the line in which it occurs is almost the only one in that MS. passage which shows no evidence of alterations.

An earlier passage is changed even more before Galt is satisfied with it. He obviously wanted to produce the effect of a lull before the storm, of a halcyon day before the peace is shattered, but he did not immediately succeed as these MS. attempts show:

It was a sunny morning of June as I have heard him tell and all nature was young and renovated (?)—and everthing blithe and blooming. The spirit of life, joy and enjoyment animated the green leaves, the merry buds and the gowans that look with their golden eyes from their green beds—were gladdened with brightness . . . The butterflies like floating lilies sailed from blossom to blossom and the bees like amber beids . . .

A second attempt reads:

5  
 No doubt after the sailor that we a kin  
 to be now thought of, please Providence she'll  
 see again, <sup>soon</sup> ~~darken~~ my door, but I'll be, <sup>soon</sup> ~~also~~  
 her to want. Her mother - poor old afflicted woman, that  
 has seen upant ~~from~~ ~~wrapping~~ ~~in~~ ~~greeting~~ ~~under~~ ~~her~~  
 flight - she'll ~~remember~~ ~~her~~ ~~to~~ ~~take~~ ~~her~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~best~~  
 one there's a dinner given.

By day light ~~in the morning~~ my grand father  
 had his horse to at the door, and ~~there~~ <sup>after</sup> having  
 banished the parents lady's feet, it was ~~walked~~  
 on, and they were soon after in the road. ~~And~~  
~~then~~ ~~the~~ ~~sun~~ ~~was~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~sky~~ ~~and~~ ~~it~~ ~~was~~ ~~very~~ ~~hot~~  
 a <sup>very</sup> ~~great~~ ~~morning~~ ~~of~~ ~~June~~, when all nations was young  
 and ~~rejoiced~~ ~~and~~ ~~very~~ ~~thing~~ ~~blithe~~ ~~and~~ ~~blowing~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~  
 young spirit of life and joy and ~~very~~ ~~great~~ ~~amount~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~young~~  
 The ~~birds~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~young~~ ~~land~~ ~~had~~ ~~been~~ ~~up~~ ~~with~~ ~~their~~ ~~golden~~  
 eyes, ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~sun~~ ~~was~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~sky~~ ~~and~~ ~~it~~ ~~was~~ ~~very~~ ~~hot~~  
 brightest ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~year~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~sun~~ ~~was~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~sky~~ ~~and~~ ~~it~~ ~~was~~ ~~very~~ ~~hot~~  
 floating ~~like~~ ~~white~~ ~~feet~~ ~~of~~ ~~Japan~~ ~~to~~ ~~Japan~~, and the  
 golden ~~like~~ ~~white~~ ~~feet~~ ~~of~~ ~~Japan~~ ~~to~~ ~~Japan~~.

Plate B  
 Galt's third attempt to achieve the intended effect i.e. to show, as Wordsworth did, the influence of natural objects.

It was a sunny morning of June as I have heard him tell and all things were blithe and blooming. The spirits of life, joy and enjoyment were spread abroad on the earth and the pale green leaves glittered and waved (?) with gladness to the sun. The butterflies like floating lilies sailed from blossom to blossom and . . . on every green brae, bright with gladness.

The final version is:

It was a sunny morning in June, and all things were bright, and blithe, and blooming. The spirits of youth, joy and enjoyment, were spread abroad on the earth. The butterflies, like floating lilies, sailed from blossom to blossom, and the gowans, the bright and beautiful eyes of the summer, shone with gladness, as Nature walked on bank and brae, in maiden pride, spreading and showing her new mantle to the sun. The very airs that stirred the glittering trees were soft and genial as the breath of life; and the leaves of the aspine seemed to lap the sunshine like the tongues of young and happy creatures that delight in their food. (I, 235)

The slight awkwardness in the idea of the young creatures lapping their food comes from an earlier attempt at this part which reads:

. . . and the leaves of the aspen were as the delighted tongues of the merry kitten[s] . . . that delight in . . . milk.

A similar passage occurs in Vol. III, ch. 15, when Ringan and his youngest son are returning home at dawn after an absence:

Though my youth was long past, and many things had happened to sadden my spirit, I yet felt on that occasion an unaccountable sense of kindness and joy. The flame of life was as it were renewed, and brightened in the pure and breezy air of the morning, and a bounding gladness rose in my bosom as my eye expatiated around in the freedom of the spacious fields. On the left-hand the living sea seemed

as if the pulses of its moving waters were in unison with the throbbings of my spirit; and, like jocund maidens disporting themselves in the flowing tide, the gentle waves, lifting their heads, and spreading out their arms and raising their white bosoms to the rising sun, came as it were happily to the smooth sands of the sparkling shore. The grace of enjoyment brightened and blithened all things. There was a cheerfulness in the songs of the little birds that enchanted the young heart of my blooming boy to break forth into singing, and his carol was gayer than the melody of the lark. But that morning was the last time that either of us could ever after know pleasure any more in this world. (III, 137)

Again Galt is intent on animating every aspect of the scene so that it is vibrant with life, but these passages are not just examples of fine writing. The point of the first is that as Elspa Ruet and Gilhaize ride along together hoping to redeem the fallen Marian, we are told "they partook of the universal benignity with which all things seemed that morning so graciously adorned" (I, 235). They feel themselves in harmony with God's world, but man's world looms up in the shape of the "papal towers and gorgeous edifices of St. Andrews [raising] their proud heads audaciously to the heavens," and dampens their hopes. In the second passage Ringan has suffered arrest and imprisonment for his beliefs, and after trial, has been released after being bound over to keep the peace. He has known illness and distress, and has been made aware of the perils of his lot, but at the sight of joyous nature and a town in the peacefulness of its morning slumbers, he says:

I felt my heart thaw again into charity with all men and I was thankful for the delight . . . [He tastes again the "luxury of gentle thoughts" and tells his son] Our other feelings are common to a' creatures, but the feeling of charity is divine. It's the only thing in which man partakes of the nature of God. (III, 139)

But man in the shape of the dragoons quartered in Ringan's home have razed it to the ground, and shamed and killed his womenfolk. The contrast between God's world and "what man



has made of man" is traumatic, and Ringan for a time loses his reason. He can never "after know pleasure any more in this world."

The descriptive passages are designed to invoke in the reader the eminently understandable pleasure and pain felt by the characters, and because we have been made to feel in particular the deep pleasure which Ringan experiences when he feels himself in harmony with nature and at one with mankind, we should be all the more aware of the extent of his alienation in the passage mentioned above (III, 222, start of ch. 24) when he has come to a secret meeting at Laswade with the intention of persuading James Renwick and the remaining Cameronians that it is time to wreak vengeance on their oppressors. Now when he looks at the fish in the bright waters of the River Esk, the scene brings him no pleasure but merely mirrors for him the situation of the persecuted remnant of the Covenanters.

. . . in the clear linn the trouts shuttled from stone and crevice [as if they were guilty (*deleted*)], dreading the persecutions of the angler, who in the luxury of his pastime, heedeth not what they in their cool element suffer" (III, 222).

And Galt goes on to indicate the broken and fragmented state of the persecuted remnant, and the complete alienation of Ringan by showing them, and most of all him, resisting the influence of the natural world:

As we assembled one by one, we said little to each other. Some indeed said nothing, nor even shook hands, but went and seated themselves on the rocks, round which the limpid waters were swirling with a soft and pleasant din, as if they solicited tranquillity. For myself, I had come with the sternest of intents, and I neither noticed nor spoke to anyone; but going to the brink of the linn [where the pure water came gushing over the rock (*deleted*)],<sup>7</sup> I sat myself down in a gloomy nook, and was sullen, that the scene was not better troubled into unison with the resentful mood of my spirit (III, 233).

Incomplete as it is, the MS. for *Ringan Gilhaize* shows us enough of what Galt decides to include and what he rejects to banish once and for all the idea he so much resented that he merely copied from nature. Even in the passages which describe scenes he knew well, the artist in Galt was picking out and exploiting those elements which go to create not a photographic likeness but what Kurt Wittig perceptively calls a "subjective vision of reality." Galt was a creative artist and behind *Ringan* lies an informing vision which led him to select the words, the phrases, the plot material which would induce the reader to share that vision and to reject those which lacked the right tone and connotations.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Galt had offered the novel to them because in the course of writing his previous novel *The Entail* he had, if not quarrelled with Blackwood, taken umbrage at his treatment.

<sup>2</sup>John Galt, *Ringan Gilhaize: The Covenanters*, 3 vols., (Edinburgh, 1823), I, 186. Further references will be to this, the first edition, and will appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup>John Galt, *The Literary Life and Miscellanies*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh & London, 1834), I, 254.

<sup>4</sup>The name is unusual but has been recorded.

<sup>5</sup>The epithet "horned" suggests the devil; "spiky" continues the idea of threat, and both might be applied to a dragon.

<sup>6</sup>The article entitled "On the Sources of the Picturesque and the Beautiful," is Galt's but appeared above the initials T.D. and without his name, his usual practice in his non-fiction articles.

<sup>7</sup>Galt may have rejected this clause because it implies possibilities of regeneration and renewal that are out of place for the man that Ringan, in the full grip of his avenging vow, has become.