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A. M. Kinghorn

Two Scots Literary Historians: David Irving and John Merry Ross

When did the idea of writing a full history of Scots poetry originate? One of the earliest expressions of the need was Allan Ramsay's. In his 1724 Preface to *The Evergreen* Ramsay confessed that he had delayed an account of the old *makars* because of a dearth of information. Ramsay's conviction that Scottish literature was closely bound up with a national identity made manifest through native language and landscape would have been the main argument of this account had he written it. Fifty years later Thomas Warton, following up a suggestion by Gray, pleaded for "a well-executed history of the Scottish poetry from the thirteenth century."¹

Thus did Scots literary historiography begin, as a by-product of the antiquarian movement. Although serious investigation into the so-called "Dark Ages" had been established in England during the seventeenth century (until the 1688 Revolution chiefly under the *aegis* of the Anglican Church), the mild stigma attached to all antiquarian pursuits compelled students of early literature and balladry to apologize in advance for such activity by themselves and others. The image of the dusty enthusiast "with toothless gums"

¹*The History of English Poetry from the Twelfth to the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 3 vols. (1774-81), II, 334-5. Warton hoped that David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, might write it, but the editor of *Ancient Scottish Poems* (the Bannatyne MS) found the task too daunting. John Pinkerton's "Essay on the Origin of Scottish Poetry" in *Ancient Scottish Poems* was only a sketch, and his comments on the poets not enlightening. For further information see Patrick O'Flaherty, "John Pinkerton (1758-1826) Champion of the Makars," *SSL*, 13 (1978), 166-72.

evoked by Walpole was persistent in England though Scots antiquaries were inclined to justify themselves by claiming patriotic motives.²

Leading Enlightenment historians, from Bolingbroke and Voltaire to Gibbon, Robertson and Hume, were governed by two principles. The first involved the traditional belief, held by all chroniclers after Bede and articulated in North's *Plutarch*, that history was essentially instruction, information about the past to be taken as a guide to future conduct, and that human nature was stable and constant. These eighteenth-century writers did little or no original research. Their second principle involved the Baconian aim to synthesize different disciplines such as Bacon himself made clear in his unfinished *Advancement of Learning* and to communicate the result to reach as wide a public as possible through an attractive style of writing. What these men examined is now called "history of civilization," which they explained in a linear chronology designed to include social, economic, ethnographic and intellectual history. Their method was to systematize and generalize from approved facts as transmitted by accepted "erudite" authorities working from records. Rejecting unwarranted speculation on undocumented times, they affected to despise the visible machinery of scholarship. Voltaire rarely bothered to give references and Bolingbroke, a powerful influence on the Frenchman, thought it "mere antiquarianism" to study remote and politically unsophisticated periods. Neither Gibbon nor Hume had much taste for original research and used only printed sources, which they listed. Though he himself cited authorities at length Robertson was equally contemptuous of "the industry and credulity of antiquaries."

Scott's novels were a strong influence in bringing antiquary and narrator closer together. Scott knew how to employ his extensive historical knowledge creatively and Carlyle, Macaulay and von Ranke each acknowledged his effect on popular interest in the past. He had wide-ranging if somewhat indiscriminate antiquarian interests but shared with the gentlemanly historians their distaste for grubbing after facts. The epistle prefacing *Ivanhoe* and dedicated to the Rev. Doctor Dryasdust may be taken as his manifesto on that subject. In a biographical memoir written in 1808 Scott suggested, excluding himself with gentle cynicism, that "from the lives of some poets a most im-

²Many examples remain from Addison and Steele onwards; Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* and Samuel Johnson in *Rambler* No 117 are typical. Even a high-caste collector like Percy was impelled to join the chorus of regrets that "Skaldic poetry" should have fallen into the clutches of antiquaries. In his Preface to *Ancient Scottish Poems* (2 vols., 1786) the irascible Pinkerton hoped "that the reader will allow . . . that the editor has in no instance sacrificed the character of a man of taste to that of an antiquary; as of all characters he should the least chuse that of an hoarder of ancient dirt" (I, xv).

portant moral lesson may doubtless be derived, and few sermons may be read with so much profit as the *Memoirs of Burns*, of *Chatterton*, or of *Savage*."

Romantic historiographers, particularly in Scotland, reacted against the rationalism of the Renaissance and sought to restore a warm mediaeval past, summed up in affection for the Gothic, popular ballads and romances accepted as illuminations of "our ancient martial manners" (as Pinkerton said of Lady Wardlaw's imitation *Hardiknute*), poetry in an earlier form of the language and other objects of national nostalgia of the kind drawn together in Walter Scott's historical romances.³ Reliable textual foundations took some time to lay down so that relationships first perceived by Ramsay might be demonstrated and the "hills and valleys" denoted by the biographers of "brief lives" put into individual perspective.⁴ However, before the end of the eighteenth century what had been "shrouded in the mists of antiquity" and despised as an age of ignorance and superstition unworthy of serious attention had taken on a definite chronology and distinct form, even though that form was still bony and unclothed.

After several false starts, the first solid history of Scots poetry began to take shape, moulded by David Irving.⁵ Irving, editor and biographer of

³Early poetry or "ancient" poetry as it was then called was thought to furnish accurate facts about contemporary society and to be a handmaid to the historian proper. Bishop Percy had revealed a similar interest in contemporary social conditions in "On the Ancient Metrical Romances." Richard Hurd in *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* and Hugh Blair in his *Critical Dissertation on Ossian and Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* talked expansively about the customs of "ancient minstrels" and extolled the purity of uncorrupted nature.

⁴In 1780 Hailes became a founder-member of the Edinburgh Society of Antiquaries but though Constable the publisher was himself an enthusiast, the Society produced only one substantial literary publication—William Tytler's 1783 edition of James I's poems with *A Critical Dissertation*. On the popular level the Morisons of Perth performed useful service by issuing near reprints of earlier volumes by Hailes, Herd, Percy, Pinkerton and William Tytler. Plans for a literary history were made, e.g. by Alexander Thomson and Joseph Ritson, the first printed in *The Scots Magazine* for April, 1802, but remained undeveloped. Alexander Campbell's *Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland* (1798) included a thirty-page catalogue of "lives" based on information extracted from earlier authors.

⁵Appointed against considerable opposition to the post of Principal Librarian to the Faculty of Advocates in 1820, Irving edited several works, wrote prefaces and biographical notices and issued a reproduction of Dempster's *Historia Ecclesiastica sive De Scriptoribus Scotis*. The narrative items were to make up part of his *History*. His two volumes of *Lives of Scottish Writers* contained thirty-nine "lives," of which twenty-seven had appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in an earlier form. Irving claimed his compilation to be a literary biography of Scotland. Several of the major names in early Scottish literature were, how-

Buchanan, Henryson, Montgomerie and Fergusson, began on the first of his "Lives of Scottish Authors" in the 1790s. An entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, contributed by "T.W.B." (Thomas Wilson Bayne), referred to Irving's "wide and minute scholarship, exceptional faculty for research, and literary dexterity" and predicted that his *History* would remain the standard authority for many years to come.

The final version of the *History* was published in 1861, a year after Irving's death at the age of 81. The bibliophile David Laing prefaced it with a "Memoir" of the author, explaining that Irving had first issued his *Lives of the Scottish Poets, with preliminary Dissertations on the Literary History of Scotland, and the early Scottish Drama* in 1804. Laing added:

It was favorably received, yet its success was not remarkable, as, in 1810, the copies that remained unsold were re-issued, without the author's sanction, with a deceptive title, as a "new edition."⁶

Dr. John Aitken Carlyle saw the work through the press. It bore the title *The History of Scottish Poetry*. In an *Advertisement* Carlyle explained, not very flatteringly, that he had received the MS only six months earlier and recommended it for publication "because it was the only work of its kind and for its pioneering character."⁷ True to Mr. Bayne's prediction, it remained the standard authority for at least fifty years.

Carlyle made no changes in the text but he did note that although Irving possessed all the careful and accurate editions published by Laing and the Bannatyne Club he "had seldom made use of them" so that he, Carlyle, had to substitute improved readings and *addenda* (which he enclosed in brackets) and accept Laing's latest collations of *The Kingis Quair*, made the year before. The sections on Barbour, Wyntoun and Henry the Minstrel needed, according to Carlyle, no alteration.

Irving admired history-writing as seen through the spectacles of Scott, that is to say, he was sympathetically involved with the past, desiring to know and to inform others how their forebears lived, with precise details acquired

ever, not included, since Irving intended that they should be the mainstay of the full *History* to come.

⁶Laing, *op. cit.* (1861 edn.), p. xvi.

⁷In his introductions to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion* Scott gave out the time-honored antiquary's *apologia*, saying that his aim was to discover the "manner of the feudal times." He desired to write a history of Scotland himself but, for various reasons, notably conventional dislike of the tedium of research, decided against the project. Instead, he encouraged Patrick Fraser Tytler to undertake it, subtitled "from the accession of Alexander III to the Union." It was published between 1828 and 1843.

from knowledge derived from antiquarian authority.⁸ His method was Robertsonian, or rather Johnsonian, related to fact and document, producing a chronology emerging through a succession of biographies and carried forward over an historical background divided into periods. He referred to sources in long footnotes.

Contemporary historians praised their own time as the superior product of past ages and literary history was to be regarded in the same light, namely, as a narrative describing gradual improvement. The past was idealized as a poetic theme. Though this trend was apparent in other European countries, it was especially evident in Lowland Scotland, which between 1760 and 1860 was caught up in a self-conscious tribalism, wherein near-contemporary literary figures, including Macpherson with his reconstructed Ossian, Burns with his yearning for fame and Scott with his passion for the past, became images of a fully-developed national identity commencing with Bruce and Wallace as heroically portrayed by Barbour and the anonymous "Blyn Hary." Burns looked back (by way of the Morison *Wallace* edition) at this old tribalism, which he claimed fired his blood, while Scott was fascinated by the history of the border country and the balladry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Irving's *History* thus came at a time when Scots historians and biographers considered themselves well equipped to take stock of their literary heritage. He obviously owed a great deal to Warton, to whom he frequently refers, and his opening chapter, with its extensive footnotes, discusses the origins of Scottish poetry in a tone of cautious scepticism. Irving was not given to excessive enthusiasm and did not overpraise, a shortcoming of William Tytler and others whose patriotic zeal rivalled and occasionally exceeded their powers of reasoned judgment.

Irving's style is popular and unpedantic, with a varied vocabulary and narrative flow which carries his audience along on successive waves of apparently well-informed opinion, for example, in his account (in chapter xv) of Lyndsay's contempt for the Roman prelacy:

The Reformation was now advancing with gradual steps; and Sir David Lindsay may certainly be classed among those who contributed to accelerate its progress: his writings tended to prepare the public mind for a systematic attempt to overthrow the papal superstition, and to introduce a more pure and rational form of worship. A species of devotion which rather engages the senses than the understanding, and which substitutes unmeaning observances for the vital power

⁸Laing, pp. 334-5. This view Irving supported by footnoting a 1620 quotation from Dempster, associating Lyndsay with Knox, Buchanan and other authors of "impia scripta". Further reinforcement came from an anecdote taken from Charteris's 1582 Preface to the *Works*, of which the source was also given in a footnote.

of religion, must always be regarded as having proceeded through a polluted channel. But the lives of the ecclesiastics were not less exposed to animadversion than their creed; nor was Lindsay destitute of skill in selecting proper topics of ridicule. His satire, and particularly his dramatic satire, must have had no inconsiderable effect in fostering the rising spirit of contempt for the clergy and their doctrines; and the Papists were long disposed to number his among their most formidable enemies.⁹

Passages like this, of which there are many, must have struck the right note among the Protestant majority of Irving's readers.

Although he, like Warton, provides useful quotations in plenty, much of Irving's detailed criticism of individual writers has become less valuable, being laced with the opaque jargon of the Warton school, which Geddie in his introduction to *A Bibliography of Middle Scots Poets* calls "ceremonious verbiage." Irving talks of "the enthusiasm of genuine poetry," "genuine history," complains of a minor court poet (Sir David Murray), whose "taste is not sufficiently refined" and describes "the sentiment and manners" of *Robyne and Makyne* as being "truly pastoral." Of the *makars*, he puts Dunbar first though his diction is not always free, in Irving's view, from the "vicious and pedantic phraseology with which the English poetry of that period is so deeply infected." *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie* is "an extraordinary effort of unrefined wit." He runs true to the old form when he finds many of Dunbar's comic and satirical works "valuable memorials of ancient manners" which, "if incapable of gratifying the reader of taste, . . . are at least objects of curiosity to the antiquary."¹⁰

In his *Chronicle of Scottish Poetry* (1800), James Sibbald had attacked near-contemporary writing in what he called "the familiar dialects of the meanest vulgar," as preserved in popular anthologies like Watson's *Choice Collection*. Irving avoided this track, which led Pinkerton to argue for the preservation of Scots only as a museum-piece. Instead, he looked back to a trend begun by Thomas Ruddiman, whose glossary to his 1710 edition of Gavin Douglas's *Aeneid* was in effect the first Scots dictionary.¹¹

Irving worked towards Scots through the early languages of Britain, describing their relations with Scandinavian tongues, evident in popular ballad

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 334-5.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹¹The *Aeneid* glossary derived from a desire to instruct Oxford scholars like Bishop Gibson who believed Scots to be largely descended from Anglo-Saxon. Allan Ramsay's glossaries and John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary* of 1808 were grounded in Ruddiman's work.

collections, and went on to describe the gradual separation of Scots from English. His heavy exercise in comparative philology is borrowed but his debts are scrupulously acknowledged in footnotes, citing Douglas's *Aeneid*, Jamieson's *Popular Ballads and Songs*, Scott's *Minstrelcy* and a battery of other authorities, including Danish and German, at first and second hand. John Carlyle, trotting on behind, provided a glossary of Anglo-Saxon, German and Old French words to aid "diligent readers" but made no such concessions to Irving's public in the case of Greek and Latin poetry, with which Irving tries to strengthen the chapter with comments on rhyming.

Like Warton, Irving was attracted to the romances and, starting with Thomas of Erceldoune, drew on dozens of authorities to extract as much factual information and speculation as he could find in order to examine Thomas against a conjectural "social" background. He gives a long account of *Sir Tristrem* and other works ascribed to this shadowy author and continues with descriptions of a number of anonymous Scots romances, including *Gawen and Gologras* and *Galoran of Galway*. He rejects claims for *Sir Orfeo* as Scots on language grounds, quoting from the *Auchinleck MS*. His comments on its classical sources are shrewd. Irving's accounts of the major poets are full and detailed and although they suffer from the "spirit of the age" trend of the time one should remember that he lacked hard biographical fact and made up for this lack by extracts and "social background." Nevertheless, he digresses less often than Warton, his quotations from the *makars* are apt and he is not afraid to commit himself, as for example, when he says that Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* is "somewhat languid and feeble and may have been a production of the author's old age."

His chapters on the drama in Scotland—about which little was known—are informative so far as they go, but, as G. Gregory Smith was later to point out, are of necessity well padded. Irving chooses to go back to two obscure personages, Maximus Tyrius and Gregory Nazianzen, in order to lead up more convincingly to the climax of David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre*. This tendency to inflate in the interests of establishing a developing chronology persisted in subsequent accounts of the Scots stage.

John Merry Ross (1833-83) was inspired by Irving and the growing availability of primary texts and printed sources to attempt a large-scale narrative relating poetry and prose to events in Scottish history. Born in Kilmarnock and educated first at Glasgow University, then in Edinburgh, where for a time he studied theology, Ross became senior English master in the Edinburgh High School in 1866 and developed the subject—traditionally an adjunct to the Classics—to a point where it could claim independent status.¹²

¹²Whilst teaching in Edinburgh, Ross annotated Nelson's texts for secondary schools, edited the *Globe Encyclopedia* and wrote "lives" of Milton and Cowper for Nimmo's series

Ross's *DNB* entry, by "T.F.H." (Thomas Finlayson Henderson, author of *Scottish Vernacular Literature* [1898]) accorded only muted praise to his subject's *magnum opus*. "Although not displaying much independent research," announced Mr. Henderson, "it is of value as a summary of the characterisation of the principal Scottish writers, viewed in relation to the history of the nation."

Henderson was speaking of *Early Scottish History and Literature to the Period of the Reformation*, published posthumously in 1884 and a much more significant work than this biographer allowed, being the first devoted to forging vital links between Scotland's earliest history and her poetry. This had been done piecemeal for English literature by Dryden, Johnson, and Warton, among others. In his *History of Scotland* William Robertson had imposed an evolutionary structure on his account of the way in which the Scottish nation had progressed from feudal darkness to a greater refinement. He ended his narrative at 1603, but it is clear that he regarded the intervening period not only as marking enormous change for the better but as culminating in a coming-together of various elements to achieve unity.

A characteristic method of the contemporary historian and literary biographer was to unite separate items of information and make out of them a coherent story.¹³ *Early Scottish History and Literature*, a work of some 200,000 words, like Irving's volume, conforms to this pattern at least so far as the "history" is concerned. It is divided into eight chronological chapters. A little history and much patriotic propaganda precedes literature; two chapters deal with "The Scottish Nationality" and "The Lives of the Early Saints," starting with Ninian and Kentigern and claiming that Columba's work was the foundation of a distinct national character. Ross could show little solid evidence for opinions derived from scarce literary sources and, like Robertson, did not try to disguise the shortage of reliable material:

Of contemporary literature there was, unfortunately, little or nothing, and the lives of men like Ninian, and Kentigern and Columba have come down to us with halos of imaginative superstition, that make biographical criticism well-nigh impossible.¹⁴

of English poets. In 1874, Glasgow University recognized his literary and pedagogical achievements and conferred an LL.D. on Ross.

¹³See Hugh Blair, a reflector of accepted theory. In his 1783 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* he perceived history as an integrated whole, a *totum simul*, a story of steady development.

¹⁴Ross, [1884], p. 16.

Ross credits Columba, whose work he describes as the first foundation of Scottish nationality, with some poetry but, not wishing to be accused of "literary barbarism," admits "the almost total dearth of literature in Scotland till the latter half of the fourteenth century."¹⁵ His exercise in comparative literature, greatly indebted to Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, which made up for Warton's cursory treatment of pre-Conquest literature, contrasts his country's literary poverty with England's affluence.

Inevitably, Ross's opening chapters suffer from tensions emanating from the competing claims of his twin disciplines, but he gains confidence as he reaches the War of Independence. Barbour, adjudged both historian and poet, supplies the weight of historical information in chapters 3 and 4, which also deal with Fordun, Bower, Wyntoun and Blind Harry. Ross concedes that *Wallace* is not true historical biography but praises it for throwing "a powerful light on the age of the minstrel himself" and draws a patriotic conclusion, to the effect that although English rule might have given the Scots immediate material benefits, the moral effect would have been disastrous, robbing the race of "its bold and hardy traits, that rugged force and firmness of nature which in later ages has enabled it to overcome the most formidable obstacles to its advancement and prosperity."¹⁶

Ross calls Barbour, Fordun, Bower and Wyntoun "apologists [i.e. defenders] for Scotland" and while noting the differences between their methods, justifies their literary standing in detached terms. "It was apparently felt that the time had come when Scotland should give a historical reason for her policy of resistance" he observes, adopting Taine's group of "race, milieu et moment" as an explanation of the emergence of great art.¹⁷

Very little that is documented by the chroniclers escapes Ross—he takes his own where he finds it and calls up a battery of sources, primary and secondary, anecdotes and hearsay, to illustrate and embellish his narrative. Chapter 5 describes James I, Henryson and Dunbar. Occasionally he draws parallels with English works and compares *The Kingis Quair* and *Confessio Amantis* to the disadvantage of the latter "in point of vigour and beauty." Of the *makars*, he calls Henryson "the most exquisite." With hardly any biographical information to help him present even a sketchy account of the poet's life, Ross had to rely on internal evidence to provide a plausible portrait. He places Henryson on a level with Chaucer, especially in *The Testament of Cresseid* which he says "is inspired by a keener moral sense." Hen-

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 105, 106.

ryson's writings furnish "something that the political annals of his time do not teach"—"Poetry is, indeed, not the only nor always the chief factor in human progress; but in the dismal reigns of James II and III we mark with peculiar interest its radiant and beneficent presence."¹⁸

Ross's unhurried, occasionally sceptical exposition conveys the measured tones of the lecture-room. Like Robertson he took pains with his prose style and, following James Beattie's precept for mastery of the language, tried to write as he spoke. It does not, as Beattie said of the style of the Edinburgh *literati*, "smell of the lamp." Ross is much easier to read than Irving and his economy of phrase and respect for authorities may be seen at its best in his detailed exposition (in Chapter 6) of the literary culture of the Scottish Reformation, including accounts of the academic historians Boece, Major, Belenden and the anonymous author of *The Complaynt of Scotland*, inspired by "violent and morbid patriotism."¹⁹ He offers a full critical description of *The Complaynt*, with copious quotations and a detached conclusion condemning its pugnacious extremism.

"Every Scot who has since lived has derived an unspeakable advantage from Lyndsay's noble sacrifice of literary ambition to religious duty" is Ross's orotund final sentence.²⁰ Predictably, his position is that of a comfortable mid-Victorian Scots Presbyterian, confidently contemptuous of what he calls "the sentiments and superstitions of the Middle Ages," quick to blaze away at the iniquities of the Roman Catholic Church and "the stupidities, superstitions and impurities from which the Reformation delivered us."²¹ His admiration of Lyndsay, on non-literary grounds, appears boundless.

The weaknesses shared by Irving and Ross are traceable to their insistence that all was grist to their exceedingly-small-grinding mill and to their inability to fashion convincing factual links demonstrating the continuity which they sought to maintain. Persuasive narrative and rhetorical flourishes were not enough to fill the gaps separating division by conveniently titled periods. Past motives and conditions were distorted by romantic nostalgia and the weight of unselective bric-a-brac polished up and conveyed in a Robertsonian full-dress manner is unsatisfactory. Inasmuch as they adopted the pragmatic methodology of the Enlightenment, Irving and Ross have themselves become items of antiquarian interest.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 292.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 414.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 403.

However, such strictures, levelled with hindsight, have to do with later concepts of history, historical methodology and the literary canon. Irving and Ross were pioneers, each a child of his time, circumscribed by bookish authorities and overloaded by antiquarian predecessors. The panoramic studies which Irving and Ross produced are not often attempted today and the single-author surveys published since the Second World War have been but faintly praised, charged with academic offenses ranging from fine writing and footnoteless superficiality to name-dropping charlatanism. Of adherents to the fast-vanishing company of *homines multarum literarum* only the full-dress biographers seem to have survived without blemish to go on writing lives of the poets and novelists, reconstructing their elusive personalities from primary and secondary sources, public and private letters and merchants' invoices.

So what of the successors of Irving and Ross? There have been a great many, from George Eyre-Todd to Maurice Lindsay together with a century-long queue of biographers, published in STS editions or independently.²² These have been supplemented by compilations of essays, like James Kinsley's *Critical Survey of Scottish Poetry*, or of papers read at conferences, like McLure and Spiller's *Bryght Lanternis* and by hundreds of articles in *SSL* and *SLJ*. The editors of our latest *History of Scottish Literature*, issued in four volumes by the Aberdeen University Press, recruited over eighty specialist contributors dealing in the *minutiae* of modern critical and textual scholarship. Irving and Ross would surely be amazed at the scope of this ambitious project but at the same time proud of their own solo efforts, now, like so much pioneering work on Scots, almost forgotten. Though he has become part of a history of Scottish literature himself, the assiduous Irving

²²One of the most original and exhaustive of these is William Walker's *The Bards of Bon-Accord 1375-1860* (1887), which in 600 pages ferreted out poets and versifiers related to Aberdeenshire by birth or residence. Walker started with Barbour and omitted no one qualified and on record, including the 17th-century Aberdeen Latinists (John Johnson, Thomas Reid, David Wedderburn and William Barclay) included in a 1637 Dutch anthology, together with scores of obscure "bards" of greater or lesser reputation, whose shortcomings Walker did not hesitate to point out. He brought the account up to date with a long Appendix capturing fugitive verses by still active poets and added an annotated bibliography of 285 printed sources with a full index. To support his chronological and biographical treatment he provided running dates on each page. Walker hoped that his book might encourage the writing of local literary history in other parts of Scotland. His anonymous reviewer in the local newspaper, *The Aberdeen Press and Journal*, remarked that the title was something of a misnomer since "Bon-Accord" is the City of Aberdeen only. Walker deserves to stand beside Irving and Ross for his scholarly and often acidly critical volume but, like them, remains largely unread. A substantial essay on Walker's *Bards* by the present author will appear in a forthcoming *Festschrift* dedicated to Professor Allan H. MacLaine.

gets only two mentions in volumes 1 and 3 and although two notable scholars owning the surname Ross are cited in the reading lists and notes to volume 1, the diligent John Merry is not one of them.

Barham, Kent