Dialect in The House with the Green Shutters

J. Derrick McClure

University of Ottawa

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol9/iss2/7

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.
J. Derrick McClure

Dialect in

The House with the Green Shutters

The burgh of Barbie, scene of most of the action of George Douglas Brown's major novel, is well known to be the author's native village of Ochiltree, some eight miles inland from Ayr, with a new name presumably derived from the neighbouring parish of Barbieston. In this area, the local form of Scots was (and, at least among older and less educated people, still is: here and throughout this essay I claim as a native of Ayr the licence to speak from first-hand knowledge) the everyday means of communication; and Brown's use of dialect in his book has been praised as adding to the harsh realism which is one of its most striking features. Yet his characters certainly do not speak consistently in an Ayrshire or any other dialect: indeed, the variable and erratic nature of their speech must be obvious to any reader. In his presentation of the language of Barbie, Brown seems in fact to have attempted something much more difficult than the use of a regular and homogeneous dialect; and both the success and the justifiability of his attempt are open to question.

My use of the word dialect perhaps requires some preliminary justification. The customary distinction between standard language and dialect is made not on linguistic but on political or sociological grounds; but once it is made, the standard language will be found to differ linguistically from the dialects in having a larger vocabulary than any of them (because it has been able to draw on the resources of all of them). By this criterion, literary Scots is not a dialect but a fully-developed language. However, it is a language with no single spoken


2. See David Abercrombie, Problems and Principles (London, 1956), Chapter 4, for an explanation and discussion of these terms.

3. It is also worth noting that according to Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de Linguistique Générale (Paris, 1915), Part IV, Chapter 3, Portuguese and Dutch are classed as languages rather than dialects because they have produced literatures: he gives no other grounds. The applicability of this reasoning to Scots is obvious.

[148]
analogue: no Scotsman living or dead has ever used as his normal speech the Scots of Douglas, Burns or Macdiarmid. A poet wishing to use Scots as his medium and a realistic novelist wishing to represent the speech of a small Ayrshire town are therefore in markedly different positions: the former has at his disposal all the resources of a rich and varied literary language; the latter must restrict the lexical, grammatical and phonological forms in his work to those which his characters, were they real people, could reasonably be expected to use. Literary Scots is a language just as literary English is a language; Mr. Gourlay would speak an Ayrshire dialect of Scots just as John Browdie would speak a Yorkshire dialect of English. A critical study of the use of dialect in the novel must therefore involve three stages: first, a listing of the distinctly Scots forms; second, an examination of the dialect for linguistic consistency; and third, a discussion of any instances where consistency does not seem to have been maintained.

A cursory glance at the novel would suggest that the narrative is predominantly in English and the dialogue predominantly in Scots. More careful examination shows that the number and variety of Scots words in the narrative is in fact very considerable. The following appear: *barley-bree, bass (doormat), "bien", billie, birl, bissock, blether, brae, branks, brau, brosy, "broadened", canny, courbie, "cow-lick", cressbie, "cuddie", dirl, dominie, doo, dree (in the phrase dree a weird), feckless, fliskie, forgather, fosie, fou, gawcey, gee (-ly), golder, goul, gleg, gleming, gowsterous, grosst, gudewife, gurly, hain (in the pro-verb "hained gear helps weel"), heartsome, birple, Hogmanay, botch, bootk, banker, jay, jink, jook, keek, kirk, lass, lear, lippen, mickle (in the proverb "every little makes a mickle"), needcessity, noo, and nan, "orrav" man, poun, pree, quean, reek, "auld residentor", scrum, scanner,

4. Because Brown makes frequent and effective use of the device of writing as it were from the point of view of a particular character, it is not always possible to draw a rigid line between dialogue and narrative in this novel. Even the evidence of inverted commas is not necessarily incontrovertible: the passage so marked in the paragraph beginning: "Gourlay lowered. 'Wha's ma gait wae this to gang on?'—" (Ch. XIII) was certainly not spoken aloud. I use the word dialogue to refer only to passages cited as actual utterances: a definition which seems obvious but which is not always easy to apply.

5. That is, words which appear exclusively or almost exclusively in the Scots literary language. Many, perhaps most, of these occur in some spoken dialects of England as well as Scotland—it is readily observed that though the Anglo-Scottish border coincides very closely with several phonological isoglosses, lexical isoglosses occur with greater frequency further south—but they are not part of the vocabulary of standard literary English.
skellocb, skelp, skilr, smiddy, snirt, sonsy, speir, spirlie, splore, tell, thowless, tspedes, wheeple, whigmalerries. Those enclosed in inverted commas are so printed on their first (or only) appearance in the book; browdened, thowless and bained gear are explained by the author in footnotes and cow-lick in the text. Cuddie, though used in the dialogue in more than one sense, occurs in the narrative only in the phrase "Scotch cuddie" — a nickname, as Brown explains, for a Scot working as a packman in England. A few other words are cited but not actually used in the narrative: examples are: He could hear the muddy noise ("sporroch" is the Scotch of it) made by the big boofs on the squarly head-rig (Ch. XVI); He fell to sorting out the potatoes, throwing the bad ones on a heap aside — "tattie-walin', as they call it in the north (Ch. XXII); "Gunk" and "chaw" are the Scots for a bitter and envious disappointment . . . (Ch. XVI: this is a borderline case, as a few sentences later the following occurs: Barbie boys were always coming back to "do a gunk" and "play a chaw" on young Gourlay . . .: neither word, however, is used elsewhere in the novel except in dialogue). The word bairn makes only one appearance outwith the dialogue: in the footnote (Ch. IV), "Browdened. A Scot devoted to his children is said to be 'browdened on his bairns.'"

In the dialogue, several of the words already cited occur, and also the following: acquiesb, airt (noun and verb), aucht (possession), auld-farrant, aumous, baikie, batts, bawbee, bide, blatter, bock, bonny, braws, breenge, brisquet, brose, canty, chield, chirt, clachan, clarty (in the proverb "the clartier the cosier"), clishmaclaver, clout (cloth), dpye, coup, creepie, daift, dagon, dander, darg, dand (knock), doup, dour, duds (clothes), enoe, estle, feared, feck, flyte, forenens, joy, juff, gang, gar, gat (way), gill-stoup, glaikit, glower, gowan, gowk, greet, gumption, haet, hairst, hantle, herd (shepherd), hereway, boast, burdies, jalouse, jaups, jing-bang, jo, joukery-paukery, kimmer, kist, let on, linn, lag, mavis, mim (in the proverb "a mim cat's never gude at the mice"), the morn (tomorrow), moudie-mon, muckle, nobby, nicker, pack (intimate), poch (pocket), poore (pin), preg (entreat), puddock-stool, redd, rickie, rones, roup, rype, saugh-woond, shank it, shaw (noun and verb), shilp, siller, skreigh, slabber, slais, smeddum, sneck-drawer, snoove, spa, stot (bullock), stot (bound), stour, struavig, streek, stunts (stamp), sumph, tack (tenure), tause, tbole, thrang, thrapple, tousy, towie (noose), trauchle, unco, wean (-ly), wee, welp, wintle, wud (in the proverb "aince wud and aye waur"), yestreen, yett, yoke on, yill. Trauchle, smeddum, the two senses of stot (used in the auctioneer's
witticism "See how the stot stots about the ring," Ch. XXIV) and
since wud and aye waur are explained in footnotes.

A few of the words in these lists are notably rare, or are used in
an unusual sense. One of the only two examples cited in the Scottish
National Dictionary of gowetronus as applied to a voice, and the only
instance of fliskie meaning a flighty girl, are the passages in which they
occur in this novel. Brisket meaning breast is recorded (the usage is
described as "jocular," but no cases are cited to illustrate Brown's use
of on the brisket, apparently meaning at the breast. The phrase let welp
(John's "Yah! Auld Gemmell needn't have let welp at me for being
late this morning," Ch. VII) is not recorded in the English Dialect Dic-
tionary nor in the Scots dictionaries of Jamieson, Chambers or Warrack
(the relevant section of SND has not yet appeared): indeed, this usage
is so uncommon that one is tempted to explain the word as a printer's
error, passes by unobservant or ignorant editors, for wels. Let wels would
certainly not be a standard form, but at least the word would be re-
cognisable (it appears elsewhere in the novel in a similar context);
whereas welp, if correct, seems to be virtually unique.

Characteristically Scots idioms, as well as vocabulary items, occur
throughout the book. The narrative contains a few examples: a noticing
boy, up the stair, ill to find, a snug bit fortune, the length of Edinburgh,
worth the speaking o'. The dialogue contains many, of which the fol-
lowing is only an illustrative selection: the day (to-day), five mile, east
the toon, ben the parlour, a wheen coals, an awful money, the now,
mind ye, away to your bed, come till his breakfast, hide a wee, what for
no?, two-three times, deil a fear of that, wanting something off me, he's
oure often in his gig, I'm thinking, the easiest broken and the worst
to mend, I'm no saying but it's time, what's he for a Goudie, twelve
year come Lammas, I doubt their stuff won't be ready, you have no
mind of me, so here I went out to see him, ye damned sorrow and dis-
grace that ye are.

Whereas Scots lexical items are used in the narrative of the novel
with considerable freedom, examples of Scots turns of phrase are rarer
and generally occur in clear cases of reference to the thoughts of a
particular character. This is even more noticeably true of the relatively
rare appearances in the narrative (they are frequent in the dialogue) of
Scots morphological and phonological forms. The street wasna canny
(Ch. XXIV) contains a verbal negative and a vocabulary item belong-
ing to Scots dialects because Wilson and Templinmuir, from whose
point of view alone the statement is true, might have used Scots forms if either had spoken aloud. *He was aye anything but strong* (Ch. VII), *that was quite unnecessary* (Ch. XIII) and *Maybe they weren't referring to him...* *Maybe he had been foolishly suspicious* (Ch. XXIV) are unmistakably identified by their dialect forms as unuttered thoughts of Mrs. Gourlay, Wilson or Mr. Gourlay. Even forms which are not dialectal but idiosyncratic are occasionally used for the same purpose, e.g. *It was a gaw-a-day way of getting news* (Ch. XXIV), an opinion of Johnny Coe's. Sometimes the viewpoint is not attributed specifically to any character: *He (Gourlay) could be verra jocose with the lairds* (Ch. V) is as it were the general opinion of the bodies, and a more extended example occurs later in the same chapter: *Or if you did venture a bit jibe when you met him, be glorified you off the face of the earth with thae black een of his.* The type of subjectivism which Brown's writing illustrates in such cases is, of course, a notable feature of several Scottish writers, reaching its full development in the novels of Grassic Gibbon.

A statistical head-count of the Scots (or at any rate non-English) morphological and phonological forms used in the dialogue would be neither interesting nor profitable, as this article is, in intention at least, a linguistic and literary examination rather than a pseudo-mathematical analysis of the novel. I will therefore give only a brief selection: which will include, however, all the instances of unusual or irregular forms.

The verbal past tense and past participle in -it: *keepit, stoppit, walkit:* are occasionally found. Negatives in -na are common: *warna, canna, wouldnna.* This usage is restricted to auxiliary verbs, with the exceptions of *kenna* and *daurna:* the latter is, of course, paralleled in Standard English. On one occasion, a verbal negative is written *wudny* (Ch. XXI): the spelling of the suffix presumably represents the pronunciation [ne:], which is in fact as common in Ayrshire as the [na:] represented by Brown's more usual negative form, and is more often spelt *nae.* Some individual verbs appear in forms unfamiliar to English-oriented readers: *muin* (must), *dīv* (do), *ken* (know), *gang* (go); *guen* (going), *gane* (gone), *gied* and *gae* (gave), *gien* (given; the present tense gie happens not to appear in the novel), *flang* (flung), *d rave* (drove), *lap* (leapt: the corresponding present tense, *loop,* again does not appear), *cam* (came), *telled* (an unusual spelling for a form which is customarily written and pronounced as *telt*), *büs* (past tense of *bist*).

Examining the pronouns, the only form which does not correspond to English usage and which occurs with any degree of consistency is *ye,* representing *you* without distinction of number or case. More rarely
(only once, in some instances), the following occur: ‘ee and ‘e, equivalent to you, hit (it), biz (us), ibir and thae (these), us as a singular form, meself (this is specifically cited as an Irish, not a Scots, usage), and yon.

Other details of Scots grammatical forms include a’where (everywhere), ika (every), een (eyes), no (not: Brown spells this word with and without the apostrophe in a seemingly random fashion), and the forms of the prepositions frae (from), wi’ (with) o’ (of). None of these in itself requires any discussion.

Much more interesting are the phonetic and phonological habits of various characters, represented in the dialogue by orthographic devices. The pronunciations so indicated include not only standard Ayrshire forms but usages which are clearly meant to be idiosyncratic, and some are certainly uncommon. Bill (bull), dowg (dog), and bowk (hope), though attested by SND, are rarer in Ayrshire than bull [bal], dug and hope. In the same dictionary fow (how) is illustrated twice, by its appearance in this novel and a passage from Aberdeenshire dated 1739 (though foo is found in Northern and Insular Scots); and ainy (any), mainy (many), noan (none) and nothing (nothing), which Brown uses with a curious consistency, are not recorded at all.6

Regular Scots forms with the traditional spellings abound, and only a few samples need be given: auld, bauid; faut, hauj, had; ca’, a’, sma’; bane, stane, waeful; bane; daer, scar, whaur; boose, aboot, noo, Broon; puir, schule, stone, afternume, swure (this unique form is Brown’s only use of an umlaut in his Scots orthography); deid, beid, freend, weel; drap, lang; abeelity, stpeeded, meenister; ocht, thocht, niacht, lauch; ony, onything; mither, anither, fither; crau, wha; wark; sool; wend (wood). Forms which represent not a dialectal but an idiolectal pronunciation will be discussed more fully in due course: in the meantime, some examples may suffice: noot, unfoartunate, sbstupid, pursbo (pursue), demmed ess, thpeak, thay, phull, and many cases of a vowel letter repeated following a hyphen: la-amb, goo-ood, we-ell, grai-aik.

The linguistic credibility of the various Scots vocabulary items which occur in the dialogue could not be determined without an investigation far beyond the scope of the present work. (The narrative, as already indicated, is a different matter: as it does not purport to be

6. According to the English Dialect Dictionary, pronunciations suggested by the spellings ainy, mainy and noan can be found in parts of Mid and East or South-East England. Nothing is not attested for any part of the island of Britain.
in any Scots dialect, the author is justified in claiming the freedom to use any form at all which occurs in the Scots literary language.) That many of them are used in the local speech of central Ayrshire, the present writer can confirm from personal knowledge. Most appear in the poetry of Burns, who was born in the same dialect area, and in the works of other local writers such as Galt and Service. A word which is not thus supported obviously cannot, however, for that reason be dismissed as unauthentic; and we are obliged in doubtful cases to accept Brown's word for it that his characters might have had those words in their vocabulary.

The same reasoning applied to grammatical and phonological forms immediately raises problems: we seem to find ourselves obliged to accept Brown's word for it that his characters talked in a most erratic way. For example, in Mr. Gourlay's speech the following verbal negatives occur: winna, couldna, dinna, wasna, werenena, didna, maunna; wouldn't, needn't, don't, aren't, cannot. The first seven of these may be described as "dialect" forms (in the sense already indicated), the remainder as Standard English. In the same way, his pronunciation of his own name alternates between Gourlay and Gourla (the latter form is perfectly convincing: compare the common pronunciation of such place-names as Islay and Inveraray as if they were spelled without the final -y); and in Chapter XXV, he uses both members of each of the following pairs: nicht and night; tua and two; speerit and spirit; hame and home; are ye na and are ye no; tall (an unusual form) and tell; verra and very; thrapple and throat; aye and always. Nor are inconsistencies of this kind unique to Mr. Gourlay's speech: the first words ascribed to John (not an actual utterance, but the author's verbalisation of his feelings: this, however, does not affect the point) are MY father is YOUR master, and ye dawna stand up till him (Ch. IV). Ye dawna and till him are obviously Scots; yet father, master and stand are English forms which have been selected in preference to their Scots equivalents father, master and stand. A few paragraphs later, John exclaims to Gilmour Don't you try that again, in a speech which contains the Scots forms anyway and father, besides some turns of phrase (What are ye after? and I'm telling ye) which might be regarded as Scots. It is observable that Brown very rarely uses dinna as an imperative: Mr. Gourlay's Dinna be fie-ey-ered (Ch. IV) and Mrs. Gourlay's Dinna hoast sae loud (Ch. XXVI) are the only examples in the book: this, however, merely

7. With which the baker, who we have no reason to suppose is a more educated man than his fellow bodies, is exceedingly well acquainted. What effect Burns may have had in enlarging the vocabulary of his and other Scots dialects is an interesting question.
alters the problem of the reason for John's use of don't here from a particular to an instance of a general question. It is also observable that John says anyway — the regular Ayrshire form — although both his parents usually say anyway, ainything, etc., a form which, as already mentioned, occurs (if anywhere) in the southern half of England.

John's boastful monologue to his schoolfellows (Ch. VII), which opens with the sentence containing the uncommon let welp form, illustrates the following authentic Ayrshire usages: couldn'a, ye see, she gaed ben (the house), (after)nune, winna, aye (always), sbale, I'll no bide, wi', abin'. John's use of these forms is convincing, of course; but if he were speaking the Ochiltree dialect he could also have said the kyle o' instead of the whole of, oot instead of out, tae mak instead of to make, bile instead of boil, boose instead of house, ane (pronounced 'yin') instead of one, fae instead of from, efternune instead of afternune, faither instead of father, oor instead of our, we maun bae a' thing instead of we must have everything, mitthe instead of mother, a' instead of all, be lang noo instead of be long now, tae geng (or gae) intae instead of to go into, hae instead of have, aboot instead of about, twa instead of two, and perhaps dogs (or dougs) instead of dogs. All of these forms were, and most of them still are, in actual use; many of them appear elsewhere in this book. John's response to his father's decisions to send him to Skeighan High School and Edinburgh University is in both cases I don't want to gang (Chs. XIV and XV), a line which begins in English and ends in Scots (should a reader presume, therefore, that he pronounced want as [want] or [want]?).

Even Mrs. Gourlay, whose lines certainly contain the most consistent representation of Scots dialect among the major characters, produces sporadic Anglicisms: her form of any and its compounds alternates between the Ayrshire ony, the Standard English any, and the English dialectal ainy; puir and poor, weel and well, faither and father, sair and sore, mair and more, boose and house, doon and down, no and not, dimna and don't, bae and have, noathing and nothing (but not the authentic form naething) are all found in her dialogue.

Brown had at least the first sixteen years of his life in which to observe Ayrshire village speech, and The House with the Green Shutters was not written by a man whose powers of observation were inadequate: it is therefore a priori unlikely that his use of a heterogeneous Scots-English mixture for the dialogue of his novel can be attributed to ignorance or carelessness. And in fact, several of the alternations be-

8. And Gourlay's response on the first occasion, Go you shall, is about as un-Scots as it could be.
tween native and English forms in his characters' speech can be explained by factors which might cause real Scots speakers to mix their dialects, as many do. Mr. Gourlay, for example, nearly always uses the verbal negative in -nu when speaking to his family, to whom he might be expected to talk in a fairly informal manner. The exceptional Don't tell lies now and I'm afraid ye aren't in very good health are both addressed to John during the climactic scene in Chapter XXV, and it is by no means incredible that the don't and aren't could represent a deliberate adoption of an unusually formal style of speech, intended as an ironic expression of the depth of his contempt for his son. It is not only possible, but obvious, that Brown wished to convey a similar intention on Gourlay's part by making him respond to the ingratiating and (as he sees it) impertinent friendliness of Wilson with the retort No. . . . I cannot say, sir, that I have the pleasure of remembering YOU (Ch. IX). His twice-uttered I don't need you any more to Peter Riney (Ch. XXII) could perfectly well be a formality imparted to his speech by the awkwardness which he feels at dismissing the faithful old servant. And when he answers to the baker's attempt to quieten the malicious gibes of the travellers in the Skeighan brake with Thank you, baker . . . but don't interfere on my behalf! (Ch. XV), there is no difficulty in supposing that the use of don't rather than dinna reflects both courtesy to the baker and the "ringing pride" with which, according to the author, he makes this speech. Don't "really" me, sir! to John's teacher (Ch. XIV) could be another ironically elevated usage, though in the immediately previous exchange "The Headmaster!" said the janitor. "Headmaster, ay," said Gourlay in scorn . . . the pointed contrast between the two men's respective pronunciations of the word shows that this is not Gourlay's only method of dealing with school personnel. The general tone of If you don't send him home wi' the welts on him as thick as that forefinger, I'll have a word to say to you-ou, Misterr MacCandlish! is certainly neither ironical nor elevated, but here another explanation for the English negative suggests itself: If you don't send him home, spoken by a powerful man in a fury, would sound more impressive than If you dinna send him home, in that the loss of an unstressed syllable necessarily slows down the apparent rate of utterance and that [ə] is a more sonorous vowel than [ɪ]. Gourlay is not a clever man, but a capacity for selecting the more effective of two possible utterances need not be dependent on brain-power.

A broad view of John's dialogue reveals an interesting and quite clearly marked development: in the early part of the story dialect forms predominate; during his University career his speech becomes affected and Anglicised; and after his expulsion the Scots forms return. The
changes are decisive enough to leave no reasonable doubt that the
author intended them, though inconsistencies in details certainly appear.
Of course, this progression is in principle completely realistic. John
would naturally grow up speaking Scots, as it is the language of his
parents; it is obviously reasonable to presume that his compeers at
the local school would speak the local dialect; and the few recorded
utterances of Mr. Gemmell the dominie suggest that even he, though
a man of some learning, is not averse to using the vernacular (*Ay . . .
there's a wheen gey caddies in Barbie* - Ch. XV) — as many educated
Scots, on occasions, still do. At Edinburgh University (which was
probably less of an English outpost in the mid-nineteenth century than
it now is) Scots Standard English rather than any local dialect would
be the medium of instruction — *o't* (of it) is the only Scots form to
appear in the speech of either lecturer whose words are quoted in the
novel — so that John would be exposed to its influence; and, being
John, nothing could be more in character than that he should flaunt
his education by a deliberate attempt to abandon his native speech and
knap Sadron. Expulsion from the University is enough to lessen even
John's inclination to put on airs; and it is in no way surprising that this,
his return home in disgrace, and his subsequent mental collapse should
be accompanied by a return to the speech habits of his childhood.

Before John's departure for Edinburgh, his speech contains a
considerable number of Scots forms (and the fact that it does not contain
more could be at least partly explained by suggesting that even at the
age of eleven John was inclined to swank before his schoolfellows and
his father's servants by avoiding distinctively Scots usages). In Chapter
XVII, he dines with several other students from his native area at the
home of Jock Allan. He has only one utterance of any length: the speech
beginning *Metaphor comes from the power of seeing things in the
inside of your head*; and it is immediately observable that this speech
contains no Scots forms except *lang syne*, which in its context looks as
if it had been brought in (either by Brown or supposedly by John) as
a mere decoration. The speeches of the other characters in this scene
contain a few Scots forms, and indeed John, a few sentences later, says
*Pass the watter*, but the fact that his native dialect seems to have given
place almost completely to Standard English is obvious and surely
intended to be so by the author.

During his summer holiday, the Anglicisation of John's speech
remains generally consistent, except that he still addresses Mr. Gourlay
as *faither*. (A much more daring boy than John, of course, would
hesitate to swank before Mr. Gourlay.) In his speeches to the Deacon
(Ch. XX), some curious forms appear: Oh, I'm all rai-ight, Deacon ... how are ye-ow?; ya-as; the we-end; a demmed good holiday. It is impossible to be certain of the exact pronunciation which Brown meant to suggest here, but the impression of fatuous affectation is very effectually conveyed.

He continues to talk English after his return to Edinburgh for his second year, except, in the important scene of his confrontation with the lecturer (Ch. XXIII), for a brief internal monologue which unexpectedly is as near as any of his speeches to being pure Scots. (It is not entirely pure: Why couldn't he is much less probable than Why could he no, and oot and mooth could have replaced out and mouth; but the reversion to the use of any Scots forms after his English of the last few chapters is striking.) After this point, his native speech begins to return. He retorts to the lecturer To Hell wi' ye! and describes himself later as a gey ill ame. From then until the murder of his father, he has little to say, and that little, except for Ay, I dinna ken, a line from Burns, and the catch-phrase a drop o' the Auld Kirk, is in English; but from the end of Chapter XXIII onwards, when he reacts to his father's death with I didna strike him so hard ... get up, jaither! O man, you micht get up!, his dialogue is at least as consistently Scots as it was in the first few chapters. A few English forms are still visible where he might have used Scots: mother for mither, don't for dinna, go to bed for gang tae my bed, you know for ye ken, the whole house for the hale boose, and others: but the author's intention to convey a resumption on John's part of his early speech habits is unquestionable.

Not all instances of competition between Scots and English in the speech of the various characters can be explained in this way as simple realism: other explanations, however, are possible for some at least of the remainder. A sound dramatic reason suggests itself for the relative consistency of Mrs. Gourlay's dialect in comparison with those of Mr. Gourlay and John. In the story, the Gourlay menfolk are active figures, whereas Mrs. Gourlay's part is, until the very end, entirely passive. Her personality, though strikingly presented, is much less interesting than that of either her husband or her son, and is in no way developed from the first chapter in which she appears until the last. Therefore, while Brown is able to maintain the reader's interest in Gourlay and John by plot and characterisation, he is obliged to find other means to prevent Mrs. Gourlay from becoming, after her first appearance, a mere pathetic nonentity. This he does by giving her a distinctive style of speech, and it is observable by any reader that her dialect is more Scots than that of
THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS

her "twa John Gourla's." Her speech in the final chapter beginning
Janet! ... Janet! D'ye mind you nicht langsyne ... and the two which
follow (not the most suitable speeches in literature for unemotional
scientific commentary) are probably the author's most sustained and
successful attempt in the novel to give a true representation (within
the limits of more or less standard orthography) of unadulterated
Ochiltree dialect: lonely is the only certain example of an English form
that is used where an alternative Scots form, lonesome, exists. (Cam
could have been written instead of came: however, as the word would be
unstressed, the pronunciation would in effect be little different.) Ony-
body and name are used, instead of the non-Scots anybody and nowm
which Brown, for some reason, uses much more frequently; and my
heir was b'akin, despite the ridiculous orthography, is a representation
rare in the novel of the Ayrshire Scots pronunciation of these words.

The speech habits of some of the minor characters admit of a
similar explanation. In the early chapters, Brown copes most skilfully
with the necessity of presenting a "chorus" of seven men, none of
whom is individually of major importance in the story but each of
whom must be sufficiently distinguished to avoid leaving the reader
with the impression merely of a confusing jumble of names. Each man
has his identity established by a particular method: Tam Wylie and
Tam Brodie by brief physical descriptions, Johnny Coe by an insistence
on the speculative and sentimental cast of his mind, the Baker by his
curious anonymity (as the story progresses he certainly comes to stand
out among his fellow bodies as being "the only kind heart in Barbie."10
but though he is called Tom by his wife on her only appearance in the
book — Chapter XXI — none of the other characters, including himself,
ever addresses him as anything but "baker," and his surname is never
mentioned), and the Deacon, the Provost and Sandy Toddle by distinc-
tive idiocies. Deacon Allardyce speaks with a lisp, which Brown
represents in the familiar manner by such spellings as bith, thpeak, thay,
etc., and Dyohn (John). Sandy Toddle's affected English accent is
represented by a marked dearth of Scots forms and by such spellings as
demned ess — except when he "forget[s] his English in surprise"
(Ch. X) and produces a sentence in Scots. (Sandy seems to forget his
English altogether as the book progresses, but this is in no way strange:
though he has worked in England before the novel opens, he never
(as far as we know) leaves Barbie in the course of it, and as the story
spans several years it is perfectly natural that in this time he should

9. Gourlay's words, in Chapter XXV.

10. So described by Johnny Coe in Chapter XXI.
resume the local dialect.) The Baker on one occasion produces an 
entertaining mockery of Toddle’s speech habits (Ch. XXI): ‘Din it!’ 
said he. I like a man that says ‘Dahm’s.’ The idiolect of Provost Connal, 
a man of brosey speech, large-mouthed and fat of utterance,” deserves 
closer examination: here Brown’s attempt to fit the language to the 
man has resulted in something remarkably suggestive of working-class 
Glasgow speech. This is most clearly and consistently visible in the 
oration he makes, in his official capacity, at the meeting convened to 
discuss the coming of the railway to Barbie (Ch. XII). Nearly always, 
in words where Scots Standard English has the sound [ɔ], the Provost 
appears to use [ɔ], represented by the digraph oae (loang, thoat, wroang, 
 oat (ought), noat, stroang). The use of the same digraph in oald and 
moar (the latter form appears in other speeches of the Provost, though 
not in this one; which at first seems unnecessary or merely "graphae-
thetic" in function, could well be taken as an attempt to represent the 
diphthongisation of Scots Standard English [ɔ] in some words, giving 
pronunciations of which an approximate transcription would be [ɔəld] 
and [moə]. (Wounce is less convincing: the Provost would be more 
likely to use wamce.) The palatalisation of [s] to a sound closer, though 
not identical, to Scots Standard English [], is represented by such 
forms as shuipid, disapprovel, prosheed. The form rileway is also a fair 
representation of a possible pronunciation of the word in this accent — 
though the effect is somewhat spoiled by the fact that a few lines 
further on the Provost says railway. Brown’s departure from both Stan-
dard English and Standard Scots orthography for Connal’s accent is 
noticeable: the form of Scots which he is apparently trying to repre-
sent has no established spelling, being phonetically and phonologically 
distinct from both Scots Standard English and the dialects on which the 
literary language is based. Towards the end of the novel Connal’s speech 
loses its distinctive peculiarities, as does Sandy Toddle’s (and without 
the same possibility of a naturalistic explanation): however, by then 
his identity has been clearly established and no longer requires to be 
indicated in this way.

Even characters of minimal importance in the book are in some 
cases rendered more memorable by an unusual style of speech: Miss 
Coe’s “old-maidish scream” of No-ad! . . . No-ad! He’s no-a in-ad and the 
drunken Irish ragman’s Yis, Prawst . . . He’s nearly as phull as meself, 
And begorra, that’s mighty phull! are examples.

What was earlier assumed to be probable is thus seen to be at 
least in some instances demonstrably true: when Brown chooses 
to make a character speak in something which is neither pure English 
nor pure Ochiltree Scots he does so with a definite purpose in mind. A
further argument to support this is the fact that he can and does, on occasions, use an almost clinically pure Scots: this can be seen in Johnny Coe's account of the events at John's birth in Chapter VI, the description of John's accident with the gig by a now de-Anglicised Sandy Toddle in Chapter XXI, and John's own last long speech in the final chapter, as well as several shorter passages.

However, many cases remain where his purpose in choosing a particular form remains obscure. Mr. Gourlay frequently has good reasons for his use of a Scots or an English negative, but when he uses both in a single speech (e.g., *Dinna be fæe-æred. . . I wouldn't dirty my hands on 'ee!* (Ch. IV); *I wouldn't lëp drënk if the wëater wësna ice-cold* (Ch. XII)) it is hard to find a particular explanation. The same mixture of dialects is visible in *about* (English) *my boose* (Scots) (Ch. IV), *I don't* (English) *mean to hire dowgs* (a rare but apparently authentic Ayrshire form) and *bark for mysell* (a very frequent Scots form), and several other utterances. His choice between *Gourla* and *Gourlay* is rarely, if ever, clearly motivated; nor are the alternations already cited which he uses in Chapter XXV. Most of Mrs. Gourlay's Anglicisms are equally difficult to explain. There is scarcely a character in the book whose dialogue does not contain switches from Scots to English and back: switches which sometimes can, but often cannot, be attributed to specific factors in the situation.

Two possible explanations suggest themselves, one being much less complimentary to Brown than the other. It is undeniable that the use of Scots, albeit an important feature of *The House with the Green Shutters*, is not a vital feature: whereas *A Window in Thrums*, for example, would clearly be worthless if translated into English, Brown's novel if rendered in Standard English throughout would still be a work of considerable merit. He may, therefore, have felt himself at liberty to use Scots almost as a decoration. When he wished, for a particular dramatic purpose, to make his characters talk either Scots or English, he did so with a fair degree of consistency: when he had no specific reason to emphasize a character's style of speech, he made that character use a language which is basically Standard English sprinkled more or less thickly with a seemingly random selection of Scots forms in vocabulary, grammar and orthography. In other words, it was no part of Brown's intention to provide an accurate representation of the Ochiltree or any other Scots dialect, or to employ the literary Scots language, but only to remind his readers continuously, by the mere presence of Scots forms, that this is a novel of Scots village life. A couple of points might be cited in support of this view. The -ing
ending of present participles and certain other words is usually spelt in the novel as -ing: occasionally, however, such spellings as slinkin', mornin', (with the apostrophe), brakin', lichinin', (without it) appear. Now this ending is regularly pronounced in Scotland, even by many Standard English speakers, with a final [n]: if Brown's characters used any Scots form at all, they surely used this one. Yet it is indicated in the orthography only sporadically. That is, in one field where the actual speech of the characters would almost certainly have been consistent, Brown's representation of it is certainly not. As an even more unassailable example: a man who lisps, lisps consistently. Dialect forms may come and go in a particular idiolect, but a lisp does not. Yet the Deacon's first utterance is the one word "Ess?" (a sarcastic imitation of Sandy Toddle's rendition of ass), and his second, in part, is Gourlay'th stupid enough . . . But there'th one thing to be said on his behalf. Throughout his dialogue, his lisp is indicated in some of the words in which it would really be noticeable, but by no means all. Of course, the obvious answer is that everybody knows what a man with a lisp sounds like, and can therefore easily imagine how the Deacon would actually be talking even when his lisp is not overtly represented. However, the fact remains that in both these cases Brown's writing displays inconsistencies which cannot possibly be interpreted as realistic, and which he could, and from the point of view of strict accuracy should, have avoided. As he is capable of this procedure on occasions, it is at least conceivable that he applied it regularly throughout the novel.

A different explanation for the variability lies in the fact that Scots speech at times simply does vary. Not only for definite reasons, but sometimes for no discoverable reason at all, a Scots dialect speaker will, as it seems unconsciously, use a Scots form and its English equivalent in the same conversation: inconsistency appears to be an inherent feature of Scots speech. This is not a very recent development: in the Second Statistical Account of Scotland, references to apparent inconsistencies are made. Among the many historical and social factors that account for this, two can be seen as operating in Barbie: the absence of a tradition of prose literature in Scots (all the Gourlay household except its master make a hobby of reading novels — written, of course, in English) and the customary use of English rather than Scots in the Reformed Kirk (for Reverend Struthers of Barbie, even the use of the phrase auld Tam is "stooping to Scotch"). The inconsistencies may therefore have been, in intention, plain realism. And Brown may have had a further reason for refusing to make the language of his

11. I owe this point, the general argument of this paragraph, and much else in the article, to Mr. A. J. Aitken.
dialogue purer than it might have been in real life: the Kailyaird writers frequently did precisely that, thus associating pure Scots with sentimentality, "quaintness," "pawkiness," etc. — associations which Brown, obviously, was anxious to avoid.

The first of these hypotheses clearly amounts to a suggestion that Brown has at times chosen to disregard carelessness and accuracy for the sake of a number of specific and certainly effective dramatic touches: a reflection, surely, on his artistic integrity. The second (of course, the two need not be separated: Brown may have considered that the fact that Scots speech is variable entitled him to exploit the variability for dramatic effect) seems to raise a question concerning his artistic judgment. A reader unacquainted with the facts of Scots speech would probably be puzzled and distracted by the erratic language of the characters. By avoiding at least the inconsistencies for which no definite motivation is visible, Brown might arguably have made the dialogue more immediately acceptable. A more fundamental objection: literary dialogue, even in a "realistic" novel, is always stylised: to give a lifelike, as distinct from an artistically convincing, representation of dialogue is an impossibility. That is, it is of necessity more regular, in several obvious senses, than real conversation. In view of this, an attempt to give a convincing literary representation of a style of speech containing a large number of random variations would seem to be an attempt at a regular representation of irregularities: which raises several theoretical questions.

The use of Scots is a promising literary device, which Brown, in the dialogue and the narrative of his novel, exploits most successfully. The conclusion from a study of the book must, however, be that despite the striking effectiveness of many specific passages, both the apparent basis and the observable results of his dialect writing are to be praised with reservations.

University of Ottawa