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**THE PATH TO THE QUARRY WOOD:
NAN SHEPHERD'S SHORT FICTION
IN *ALMA MATER***

Graham Stephen

One striking aspect of Nan Shepherd's career is her comparatively sparse literary output, and the short time-span within which it first reached print. Although Shepherd lived for almost ninety years, her main published work appeared over just six years in an intense burst of activity comprising three novels, *The Quarry Wood* (1928), *The Weatherhouse* (1930), *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933) and a single poetry volume, *In the Cairngorms* (1934). Shepherd's only other published writings are a handful of rare journal and magazine articles and her posthumously-published book about the Cairngorms, *The Living Mountain* (1977), the work for which she is currently best known.¹ This article sheds new light on Shepherd's formative years and in particular the path towards her ground-breaking novels, which were perhaps not as unforeseeable as has sometimes been suggested.

Shepherd's literary achievement is by now well recognized. Criticism has focused on the innovative writing methods which she used in her three novels to depict North-East language, character and landscape. While she portrayed a largely rural, and ostensibly patriarchal society, she wrote as a feminist. As Roderick Watson observes, Shepherd is "particularly sensitive to that hidden network of female connections and allegiances ... that flourishes beneath the surface of patriarchy," and her strong independent female characters help to lift her novels beyond any taint of "kailyard."² And all her writing, not just *The Living Mountain*, shows a deep connection with the regional landscape, especially her second novel, *The*

¹ See, e.g. Scott Lyall, "The Living Mountain: in an age of ecological crisis, Nan Shepherd's nature writing is more relevant than ever," *The Conversation*, August 29, 2019.

² Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Plagave, 2007), 70; cf. Carole Jones, "Nan Shepherd, *The Quarry Wood* (1928)," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 43:2, 208–209.

Weatherhouse, arguably her best work in its depiction of the inhabitants' intense relationship with the land, as Alison Lumsden has shown.³

Shepherd's literary development and the emergence of these concerns can be traced in her notebooks, correspondence, and early university writings, particularly in the series of overlooked short stories discussed here, all published in special annual charity numbers of *Alma Mater*, the University of Aberdeen's student magazine. Previous studies have noted the existence of only part of this material, and what attention has been given to its content, and to the continuities that it shows with Shepherd's major works, seems to have been very limited.

These early stories may also give us a better understanding of Shepherd's writing ethos and explain what might otherwise seem her limited output. Shepherd, though with a comfortable domestic background, was of a generation of women graduates who in the wake of the First World War pursued professional careers, and Shepherd's career consumed much of her energy.⁴ Shepherd was never financially dependent on her writing, nor did she ever see it as a means of escaping her life-long career as a lecturer at Aberdeen Teacher Training College (TC). After she became a full-time lecturer in 1919 her literary output was often associated with holiday periods, and these constraints are best understood if we appreciate the importance that she placed on her teaching.⁵ This stable and organised existence, however, allowed her the luxury, when the opportunity arose, of being able to publish for charitable purposes. Such circumstances led to the handful of unrecorded prose pieces which form the basis of this article.⁶

Shepherd's three years at Aberdeen University from 1912-1915 were a notable academic success; she consistently achieved high marks and won several prizes (Peacock, 82-92). She thrived as part of a body of strong and eloquent women at King's College, developing a relationship with *Alma*

³ Alison Lumsden, "Journey into Being: Nan Shepherd's *The Weatherhouse*," in *Scottish Women's Fiction: 1920s to 1960s: Journeys into Being*, ed. Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 59-71.

⁴ Charlotte Peacock, *Into the Mountain* (Cambridge: Galileo, 2017), cited below in the text. Shepherd's domestic circumstances, well drawn in Peacock's biography, mirror those of her contemporary Helen Cruickshank: both were single, professional women caring for ageing parents, talented writers with limited output, actively engaged in promoting and encouraging other writers, involved in PEN and literary debate, but forced to be apolitical by their career.

⁵ Cynthia, "Scots Women Writers Interviewed," *The Scotsman*, November 14, 1931: "her college duties do not leave her a great deal of time." On time pressure and workload, see also Agnes Mure Mackenzie's letters, Special Collections, University of Aberdeen.

⁶ Several other unrecorded Shepherd poems and significant notebook entries identified in this research have been reserved for future articles

Mater which lasted well beyond graduation.⁷ *Alma Mater* was an ambitious weekly publication, instigated in 1883, and its continuing throughout the Great War was aided in no small part by the increased involvement of women such as Shepherd.⁸ Shepherd, who joined the *Alma Mater* committee in October 1913, appears to have become the hub of the magazine's operation, "business-like lady of galley slips and make-ups," continuing as a contributor, editor, and administrator till well after her own graduation in 1915 (Smith, 2). When she retired as editor, in 1917, she was praised as the "tall, slim figure with a halo of chestnut plaits, a Blessed Damozel expression, and an awe-inspiring despatch case" who had "taken control in many emergencies."⁹ After her nominal retirement, Shepherd's links with *Alma Mater* persisted for many years, with a "long series of notable contributions," "much verse, some of it of great strength...and some delightful and very personal prose" (Smith, 2). Yet, Apart from a very brief mention in Michael Spiller's essay on *Alma Mater* poetry, this strand in Shepherd's literary output has been ignored.¹⁰

Shepherd regarded herself as part of an exceptional talented contemporary group of female Aberdeen graduates. Many of the group were influenced by Aberdeen's ground-breaking Regius Professor of English Literature, Herbert Grierson, now best-known as a scholar of Donne and Scott, but who was experienced by his students as an educator for whom "knowledge ... need not cease to exhilarate."¹¹ In 1913, *Alma*

⁷ Robert David Anderson, *The Student Community at Aberdeen, 1860-1939* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 61-3; Lindy Moore, *Bajanellas and Semilinas* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991), 95-100; Jennifer J. Carter and Colin A. McLaren, *Crown and Gown: An Illustrated History of the University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1994), 94-96; *Alma Mater*, 26 (1908-9), 223-5; 27 (1909-10), 6.

⁸ Distribution figures for *Alma Mater* are unavailable but the readership extended well beyond the university campus. Though the weekly schedule faltered in the war years, copies were sent to enlisted students at the front.

⁹ Isabella Smith, "Miss Anna Shepherd M.A.," *Alma Mater*, December 12, 1917, 2. Shepherd's organisational and editorial skills were still fully functioning many years later when she took over the *Aberdeen University Review* in the run-up to its celebratory *Fusion* edition of 1959-60.

¹⁰ Michael Spiller, "Spun in the Morning: The Poetry of *Alma Mater*, 1882-1965," in *Northern Visions: The Literary Identity of Northern Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Hewitt (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1995), 39-69. Some of Shepherd's poetry has recently been included in *Wild Geese: A Collection of Nan Shepherd's Writings*, ed. Charlotte Peacock (Great Shelford: Galileo, 2018), but Peacock's prose selections do not include the stories discussed in this article.

¹¹ Anderson, *Student Community*, 61-3; Carter and McLaren, *Crown and Gown*, 94-96; Nan Shepherd, "Appreciation of Sir Herbert Grierson," *Aberdeen University*

Mater had installed its first female editor, Agnes Mure Mackenzie, who became a major influence on Shepherd.¹² The pair were like-minded: academically confident with a conspiratorial irreverence. Mackenzie also kept up a connection with *Alma Mater* long after she left Aberdeen and regularly submitted poems and articles. Their jointly edited *Alma Mater Anthology* (1919) contains substantial contributions by both, suggesting that Shepherd retained confidence in her own early work.¹³ The anthology certainly indicates an orderliness and compulsion to move on after a project was completed; only four of her anthologized poems reappeared in her poetry collection, *In the Cairngorms* (1934). Significantly, even after graduation, till 1921, *Alma Mater* remained the primary recipient of Shepherd's poetry, and its pages give witness to a maturing style that she appears to have been keen to share with the local academic audience. The magazine published over twenty of Shepherd's poems, along with several unsigned prose pieces, many containing Doric, which may well be her work. As her confidence increased, she appears to have been more willing to attach her name to contributions.

In 1922, Shepherd was persuaded by the then editor, Eric Linklater, to contribute to an annual *Alma Mater Special Hospitals Issue*, along with several well-known national and local writers, in order to raise funds for Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and the Sick Children's Hospital.¹⁴ Between 1922 and 1934 Shepherd donated eight short signed prose pieces to the publication.¹⁵ These include several pieces important as showing the emergence of the style perfected in her three novels, particularly in

Review, 38 (1960): 240-243 (242); *Alma Mater*, 26 (1908-9), 223-5; 27 (1909-10), 6.

¹² Spiller, "Spun in the morning"; Moore, *Bajanellas and Semilinas*, 136. Agnes Mure Mackenzie, CBE (1891-1955), novelist and historian, who wrote a pioneering D.Litt. dissertation on *The Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (1924).

¹³ Agnes Mure Mackenzie and Nan Shepherd, eds, *Alma Mater Anthology 1882-1919* (Aberdeen: W. & W. Lindsay, 1919). Contains 16 poems by Mackenzie and 11 by Shepherd, many more than by the other, predominantly male, contributors. Peacock (90-91) infers that Shepherd disowned her early poetry, because pages of Shepherd's poetry notebook have been excised; if these were the poems used in the *Alma Mater Anthology*, which Peacock does not mention, their removal may mark a new beginning, as there is distinct change in her poetic style in early 1918.

¹⁴ Michael Parnell, *Eric Linklater: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1984), 39. An energetic editor, Linklater revolutionised the magazine's charity *Special Hospitals Number* by persuading well-known writers like Walter de la Mare, Neil Munro and John Masefield to contribute and thus established a university Rag Week charitable tradition.

¹⁵ Linklater and Shepherd also contributed to a 1930 *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* Christmas Special, though no copies are known in local or national archives.

characterisation and the mastery of local speech rhythms and dialect. These items, examined fully here for the first time, mark a tentative and controlled expansion of her audience into the wider local community, when, apart from entries in essay competitions, she had previously written only for an intramural readership.¹⁶ Between 1922 and 1934, Shepherd contributed eight stories to these *Alma Mater* special numbers. The first five stories predate the publication of her first novel, *The Quarry Wood*, and offer an insight into the progression of her writing style. The stories were created against a background of heated debate about vernacular writing and the use of Doric, in which Shepherd played a minor part.¹⁷ The theme of female self-determination in a patriarchal rural society which dominates all her novels, also emerges in the short stories, as does Shepherd's interest in the powerful relationship between the landscape of her home region and its inhabitants.

The earliest of the eight, "Naked and Ashamed" (1922), begins as a slightly Wodehousian romp where two young gentlemen on a camping trip cast off their silk pyjamas to walk naked in the country and "lead the life of nature and beautify the complexion of [their] tootsies."¹⁸ They are subsequently apprehended and wrongly accused of poaching. Their release is secured by the innate guile of a local worthy, Sandy Lobban, who outwits the "muckle soor sumph" of a gamekeeper and uses the incident to incriminate a pair of rogue outsiders, "twa idle, good-for-naething craturs, a nuisance to the whole community." In the process, Lobban's own "harmless" criminality and the "laddies oot for a ploy" are both protected, and the finely nuanced rural morality is restored. Shepherd displays a mastery of dialect which lets her narrator switch subtly from upper class foppery to Doric to confirm his local credentials. His accomplice's comic imitation of an outsider's dialect fools only the incompetent game-keeper; a comic subterfuge which local readers would relish. The moral centre is Lobban whose language and phrasing embrace distinctly North-East linguistic quirks. The involuntary repetitions like "they'll nae deny't, they'll nae deny't", and "evidence eneuch, evidence eneuch" and speech full of distinctive local words, "puckle", "peety", "naakit" and "negleekit"

¹⁶ Aside from her poetry and possible anonymous prose pieces in *Alma Mater*, Shepherd's only other output in this period seems to be two prize winning essays in *Cornhill Magazine*.

¹⁷ In an apparently-unpublished letter of support for Charles Murray and Doric, dated November 26, 1926, for an ongoing debate in Aberdeen's *Press and Journal*, Shepherd accused MacDiarmid of being "fair clorted wi' conceit," a phrase she also uses in *The Quarry Wood*: original letter in Special Collections, University of Aberdeen, Ref Ms 3017/8/1/3 Item 9.

¹⁸ Nan Shepherd, "Naked and Ashamed," *Alma Mater Special Hospitals Number*, May 1, 1922, 268-269 (268).

delineate his heritage. Shepherd lets dialect confirm community camaraderie where understanding “the greater good” supersedes authoritarian control. Respect is won by quick wits and a local vocabulary, reminiscent of the treatment of the vernacular in William Alexander’s *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*.¹⁹ The story also has a curious Stevenson echo in the gamekeeper who “ga’ed his ain gate hame. And we ga’ed ours.”²⁰ In Stevenson’s highly-regarded story, “Thrawn Janet,” one of only two he wrote in Scots, the wary community let Janet McClour “gang her ain gait, an’ she let them gang theirs,” stressing profound separation. Shepherd’s separation of the phrase into two short sentences amplifies the sense of distance between the locals and the authoritarian power of the estate.

The stories which follow “Naked and Unashamed” become more closely connected with Shepherd’s three novels. In “Certain Wedding Garments,” a more substantial story drawing on Shepherd’s trip to South Africa in 1922, Alan Durno, returning home from Africa makes a stop-over in Madiera, where he encounters a fellow Deeside exile, Betty Sangster, from Boggiewalls.²¹ Betty identifies Durno by his instinctive use of the Doric word “connached” in an otherwise entirely English outburst. Durno’s own recognition is subliminal, emerging as an involuntary glimpse of Deeside’s distinctive hill, Clochnaben, which is conjured by the cut of Betty’s withered bridal clothing and the hint of “bog myrtle or rosemary in the dark garden” in her aromatic sprigs. Durno’s thoughtless racism is tempered by his disaffection for his own country-men who could ostracise an innocent family member so vehemently that she would fear ever to return. However, Betty is cursed by Boggiewall’s gossip as “gone wrong” and damned despite her innocence:

“Unless it’s to disgrace them to stand for your own thought against theirs. They despised my man, for nought but that he was rich, and we crofter folk. My father thought he was sporting with me. Thought, thought! I thought my own thought and went with him. And he married me—I wrote them that he married me. But still they had their thought” (*ibid.*).

Her self-determination is condemned by her family and by fate; she is stranded in Madeira after her husband perishes on the journey to Africa in a manner which echoes the death of Shepherd’s brother, Frank. Betty’s debilitating pride prevents her return home, and both she and her family are

¹⁹ Shepherd delivered several lectures on William Alexander’s novel *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* (1871).

²⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson, “Thrawn Janet,” quoted from *Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 112.

²¹ Nan Shepherd, “Certain Wedding Garments,” *Alma Mater Special Hospitals Number*, April 23, 1923, 275-279.

immobilised in a prison of misplaced morality. In Shepherd's story, self-righteousness haunts lower Deeside just as Durno is now haunted by involuntary visions of Clochnaben and the faded bridal wear. Both characters have a powerful innate bond with the landscape of home.

Some of the names in "Certain Wedding Garments," such as Durno and the farm of Boggiewalls, and some of its themes, notably exile and the pull of home, will resurface in Shepherd's final novel, *A Pass in the Grampians*. There, the flighty Bella Cassie flees Deeside's stagnating rural life, to return as a famous singer, the incandescent Dorabel Cassidy—reborn, renamed, but still unsatisfied, and drawn home to seek completion. The novel is weakened by Dorabel's inconsistency, which may be rooted in the author's inability to engage fully with a character whose life choices are so opposed to her own. However, the book is a powerful depiction of the inextricable links between rural inhabitants and their land, which becomes a character in its own right. Clochnaben taunts its inhabitants with conflicting facets which juxtapose the sanctuary and captivity of rurality and tempt Jenny to follow Bella's lead and escape:

She remembered the great crag on Clochnaben, that looked so friendly and familiar from the farms, like the hunched back of an old labourer; but from one angle on the moor grew sinister, like a hooked claw. That unsheathed claw was in Jenny's eyes.²²

Dorabel/Bella is also an evolved, liberated creation; Betty is marooned by pride on Madeira, caught in a patriarchal and familial trap but Bella Cassie is allowed to escape the constraints of Boggiewalls, to rise above the horrors of her conception, and of local gossip. Like Martha Ironside in *The Quarry Wood*, she becomes her "own creator":

"You think you've got me hipped. You think I'll stick my tail between my legs and slink away with my house in my teeth and save you any more trouble. I tell you I'll be damned if I do...I'm what I've made myself, amn t I? I'm Dorabel Cassidy" (*ibid.*, 101).

Or again:

"You're all tied to your daddy's coat-tails up here right enough. Who was her father? Who was her mother? What was her great grandma's table-linen like? I'm Dorabel Cassidy, I tell you" (*ibid.*).

Bella Cassie's affirmation, "I'm Dorabel Cassidy," is repeated throughout the book. It marks her re-creation and rebirth as a success in a modern world on the other side of the pass where talent makes social mobility possible. Both Dorabel's escape and Martha Ironside's apparent happy inertia mark acts of self-creation and of Shepherd's progression beyond the

²² Nan Shepherd, *A Pass In The Grampians: The Grampian Quartet Edition* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1933), 81.

short story where Betty Sangster is constrained by dubious morality and pride.

By April 1924, when her story, "Speirin' Jean," appeared in that year's Special Hospitals Number, Shepherd was constructing her first novel, *The Quarry Wood*. This connection was recognized by her friend Mure Mackenzie, who read the work in progress and mentions being "pleased to meet Maggie Hunter, even in bits."²³ "Speirin' Jean" offers the world a glimmer of Maggie, who would later become Martha Ironside. Her family, the Hunters, are present, and Maggie herself debuts in the almost unnoticed aside: "it is from her mother that Maggie takes her fine flinging style."²⁴ The fictional locale of Shepherd's novels now appears to be fully formed, and throughout this and her next three contributions to the *Hospitals Number* Shepherd experiments with her characters against its backdrop.

In "Speirin' Jean," the rural warmth of the Hunters' croft forms the neighbourhood fulcrum, just as the Ironside hearth would in *The Quarry Wood*. The Hunters' fireside welcomes a sample of Shepherd's wider imagined community, the wise, the dim, the intellectual and the cynical. All are tolerated, though few escape the harsh wit of the company; waggishness and repartee help to bond the community. Shepherd's language displays a mature linguistic expertise in her characters' banter, which is augmented by the insightful and sarcastic intellect of a narrator who is placed in the centre of the action. Shepherd's adroit mixture of limited dialect, Scots phrasing, and wise rural philosophy in many ways anticipate Gibbon's *Scots Quair* and would not be out of place in the mouths of Chae Strachan or Long Rob:

Truth's a gey slippery chiel, and when you find a book that lets you get a right grip on't, you're bound to be the better of the reading. I don't know—unmitigated truth has always seemed to me dangerous stuff to play with when you are seeking advice (*ibid.*, 286).

The plot of "Speirin' Jean" centres on the blatantly chauvinistic and self-serving courtships of the sturdy but dim-witted Robbie Murchie who is "that big, there couldna' be muckle in him" because "when a man's the size o' yon, he's bound to be toom." Rural lore insists that physical strength is irresistible to servant lasses but the local hive mind senses injustice and diverts Robbie's covetous attentions to protect Jean, and her "fair bit tocher" (*ibid.*, 286). The intervention involves Jonathan Bannochie, who would later be developed as the opinionated sage of *The Weatherhouse*. In this story, the character shares the shiftiness and

²³ Agnes Mure Mackenzie to Shepherd, Nan Shepherd Archive.

²⁴ Nan Shepherd, "Speirin' Jean," *Alma Mater Special Hospitals Number*, April 23, 1924, 286-280 (288).

festering education of *The Quarry Wood's* Stoddart Semple; Bannochie and Semple are two characters sprouting from one seed. The company tolerate Bannochie's curmudgeonly traits because they understand why he gave up "both the dram and the kindness," although his history is merely dangled untold by Shepherd to imply the extended bounds of her fictional community which, like Alexander's *Gushetneuk*, live in awe of intellect. Bannochie's sharp wit and knowledge of the ways of the "Apostles and the Emperors" enhance his status. However, his disdain of Providence suggests a shifting attitude to religion in the more educated which is not shared by the dim-witted Robbie or the host Jake who refuses to employ his Bible "in a matter o' licht weemen."

The characters' interaction is conducted in dense Doric and the complexities of the community's relationships are fleshed out by the narrator's sharp asides, revealing a social framework built on interdependence, tolerance, and "vain expectation" like Barbara's "terrible belief in her man's learning." "Spierin' Jean" marks a watershed in Shepherd's development. She has mastered dialogue, found a distinctive narrative voice and created a set of players who bring life to her imaginative setting. She has discovered that character interaction creates a community and that Doric strengthens this communication. Her Doric is challenging, though not as impenetrable as Alexander's, and laced with humour which encourages the reader to persevere.

These qualities continue in "Drochety's Clem," Shepherd's story for the *Special Hospitals Number* the following year.²⁵ The title character is the same Clem, a "caution" and a "cure", who will provide much needed humour to the dying Josephine in *The Quarry Wood*, with her "eyes that werena neebors an' feet at a quarter to three."²⁶ The narrator of the story is accompanying her genteel companion on a house hunting trip to remote Crannochie, a fictional hamlet which Shepherd will later transplant to lower Deeside.²⁷ Shepherd's stories seldom stray beyond the territory that she knows intimately.

One of the defining individualities of *The Quarry Wood* is Shepherd's interweaving of the land, the weather and the community, and this is also a notable element of "Drochety's Clem." The protagonists are "jammed

²⁵ Nan Shepherd, "Drochety's Clem," *Alma Mater Special Hospitals Number*, April 20, 1925, 298-302.

²⁶ Nan Shepherd, *The Quarry Wood: The Grampian Quartet Edition* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), 132.

²⁷ The narrator and companion recall a similar pair in "The Caravanserai," *Alma Mater*, December 6, 1916, 21-22, which, though unsigned like most *Alma Mater* contributions in regular issues, may be one of Shepherd's many contributions that remain unattributed..

between earth and the onrush of melted sky,” but their chosen refuge is equally daunting, governed by the devilish “dull red rage” of the fiendishly religious Jeannie Mortimer. Jeannie’s malevolence is a disturbance in the community which Clemmie visualises being subsumed by the landscape as “thingies have been meltin’ ooten her hoosie” to leave “naething bit the standin’ stanes left.” The inhabitants of Crannochie’s battle with the elements and the land forges an endurance and durability that Shepherd admires and depicts so often in many of her female characters. In this story, for the first time in Shepherd’s writing, the narrator’s familiar mix of very proper English, occasional vernacular locutions and interspersed dialect words, the dialect words are highlighted in *italic*, anticipating a technique used in *The Quarry Wood*.²⁸ This quirk becomes more marked with Clem’s arrival at Drochety:

A raw country lass, high cheeked, with crude red features and sucked and swollen hands, Drochety had fee’d her just after the wife took to her bed. She lay and *worritted*, the wife, poor feeble body: but she need not have troubled, for in a month or so Clemmie had the whole establishment, master and mistress, kitchen and byre and *chaumer* securely under her *chappit* thumb.²⁹

Shepherd’s idiosyncratic italicization poses a critical conundrum. Only certain words are highlighted, as if emphasising specific word choices or sounds, but also exoticizing them. In her own speech, Shepherd reportedly relished the occasional Doric insertion. The one known recording of Shepherd reveals a very dramatic, declamatory performance where telling local phrases are delivered with gleeful aplomb for the sake of the audience. In an interview in 1933, Shepherd maintained that sometimes only a precise dialect word can carry the necessary weight of meaning in its sound and shape, so that “whenever a suitable dialect word offers itself...[she would] use it without hesitation.”³⁰ Shepherd’s dialect words give power and depth of meaning: a word like “*worritted*” carries more authority than “worried” with its “tt” adding a harsh physicality to the process; a bucolic harvest expressed as “*Hairst*” defines a point in the

²⁸ Shepherd continued the technique in *The Weatherhouse* but discarded it for *A Pass in the Grampians*, with progressively fewer dialect words used in each book.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 301. This entire passage with only minor amendments was used in *The Quarry Wood*, although the subsequent section which relates Clemmie’s relationship with Drochety’s son, a pre-pubescent “muckle halarackit loon of ten, that had fair got over his mother,” is omitted there, perhaps to avoid any question of Clemmie’s morals.

³⁰ Robert F. Dunnett, “Nan Shepherd: One of the Scottish ‘Moderns,’” [*The Scotsman?*], 1933, 341. Shepherd’s clipping of this interview in the NLS is marked as from *The Scotsman*, but I could not confirm that source, and the page numbering seems unlikely in a newspaper.

North-East farming calendar when survival or failure is decided; *scunner* is where ennui and disgust collide. The men who are “*ill-shakken thegither*,” women who stand “like *bourrachs*,” and corncrakes who “*skraigh*,” are localised individualities, to be relished and savoured.

Margaret Elphinstone has, however, suggested that Shepherd's italicization creates a self-consciousness of expression, distancing the narrator, who becomes an outside observer of the community rather than part of it.³¹ There is a discernible detachment in these short pieces; although Shepherd can empathise, understand and analyse her characters' existence, she cannot allow herself to fully inhabit her created world, and she sometimes seems driven to insert a piece of extraneous knowledge as if to emphasise this separateness. In *The Quarry Wood*, the development of her *alter ego*, Martha, allows Shepherd to close the divide and place herself, and her intellect, directly into the narrative, which is the key to that novel's artistic success.

Many of the characters in “Drochety's Clem” reappear in *The Quarry Wood*, and the story is most likely an extract from an early draft of the book, marking a significant developmental stage. Typically, Shepherd's characters develop through interaction with others, naturally evolving as details are reported or revealed. Clemmie exudes irreverent exuberance as she dances when hearing of the crazed religious fervour of her neighbour, the reluctant house-seller Jeannie Mortimer; Peter Mennie the post-man (“as honest a six foot of ugliness that ever tramped a country road”) is seduced by Clemmie's cocoa. Clemmie herself is “steamed with benevolence,” but limited by prospects which will never satisfy her needs. There seems to have been significant refining and editing, because in *The Quarry Wood* Shepherd's characters become more fully developed as they interact with Martha and Aunt Josephine. Peter's unsightliness is countered by the fact that he “could never be ugly to Martha,” and his essential importance as the messenger is accentuated by the earthly wisdom that he shares with her.

“Bury it, lassie, bury it in the earth,” answered Peter, “the earth's grand at cleanin'.”... There's mair buried in the earth nor fowk kens o'.”³²

Peter's messages connect the community with the outside world and modernity and these secrets, and his ancient wisdom, make him attractive to Clem, and to Martha who sees beyond his unsightly exterior and is granted insight.

³¹ Margaret Elphinstone, “Four Pioneering Novels,” Chapman, 74-75 (Autumn/Winter, 1993): 23-39 (31).

³² Shepherd, *The Quarry Wood*, 128.

Shepherd's novels present community as deep-rooted, intertwined and interdependent. What differentiates them are developing viewpoints. *The Quarry Wood* is viewed through the eyes of a maturing girl/woman, while *The Weatherhouse* offers a multi-viewed mosaic and *A Pass in the Grampians* offers a more objective view of the destructive effects of an outside agency, as Dorabel thrusts the outside world and modernity into Boggiewalls. The short stories represent Shepherd experimenting with viewpoints. The narrators become more immersed in the rural communities that they depict, adopting the language, sharing the humour, knowing the history and understanding the social etiquette. The adoption of the local dialect is a key to this transition; it denotes belonging, understanding and hereditary links with the locale.

Dialect is central to Shepherd's next story, "Bawbie and the Pot of Ginger," in which the Hunter family appear once again.³³ A young doctor, Kennedy, is clinically and academically brilliant despite his "broad Buchan accent." The story is a battlefield of accents and differing degrees of Doric; Kennedy's success despite his Doric is opposed by Bawbie's unsuccessful attempts to anglicise her own.

Her accent was as rough as a new harled dyke; a roughness without innate character; unlike Jake's slow, considering, idiomatic utterances or Mrs Hunter's racy talk; and when she subjected it to the further indignity that she called "putting on the English," the result was pitiful (*ibid.*, 310).

The parameters of proper Doric are defined. It requires "innate character" such as Jake's slow dryness or Mrs Hunter's "nyatterin," and it is sacrosanct, never to be tainted by "putting on the English." Shepherd's Doric speakers never stray far from those definitions. Despite her lofty aspirations, Bawbie is beguiled by "a Buchan accent and a freckly country face" in a farcical episode involving her aunt's "very special preserve," the "pot o' ginger" that exemplifies rural heritage and skill. It is a flimsy but entertaining piece, notable for another of Shepherd's indestructible old women, Barbara Hunter, who proudly proclaims, "I'm seventy-twa year auld an' I've had fower bairns an' never a dose o' medicine hae I had ower ma throat." Her equally stoic husband dismisses his appendix removal as "awkward kin a whilie." As Roderick Watson has commented, what counts for Shepherd in her characters is "gumption," "the deep resources of life and energy to see them through their trials."³⁴ As will be seen in her

³³ Nan Shepherd, "Bawbie and the Pot of Ginger," *Alma Mater Special Hospitals Number*, April 19, 1926, 309-312.

³⁴ Roderick Watson, "'To Know Being': Substance and Spirit in the Work of Nan Shepherd," in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. Douglas Gifford and

novels, vernacular witticisms and philosophical aphorisms are presented as victorious full-stops in conversations which assert the power of local dialect, traditional common sense and in a wider sense, national identity. Shepherd's use of dialect in these stories and in *Alma Mater* pieces which precede them shows a progression from ornamentation in the early sketches to the affirmation of regional and national identity which expands in her novels and parallels its use in other novels of the period.

Shepherd's determination to employ Doric in her writing was conducted against a background of national debate on the topic. Shepherd was at the very heart of a significant cultural shift, and her use of dialect can be seen to move from entertaining sketches to a more complex motivation, one which as Lumsden contends "helped her re-imagine her own locale."³⁵ Her dialect use evolves from being a stamp of regional identity to a self-examination of her heritage and an understanding and acceptance of her own boundaries. But Shepherd's position is complex, and it may be best understood by considering one of the few reminiscences of Shepherd from a rural source, Jessie Kesson's memory of her as an "ootlin," a moral or social outsider, who "knew country workers well, their way of life, their Doric tongue," but could never be fully embraced and included because she would always be a "lady" rather than a "wife."³⁶ This is a position that Shepherd understood well, advising the trainee teachers under her tutelage to maintain social distance: control came with distance and respect.

Between 1930 and 1934, Shepherd made three further, though less significant, contributions to the magazine's charity issues, which by then had been renamed as *The Gala Rag*. One of them, "Two or Three," offers an intriguing character study of hospital patients, mainly conducted in Doric, while the others are entertaining humorous sketches giving perhaps

Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997): 416-427 (420-421).

³⁵ Alison Lumsden, "'To Get Leave to Live': Negotiating Regional Identity in the Literature of North-East Scotland," in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature Volume Three: Modern Transformations: New Identities (from 1918)*, ed. Ian Brown et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 95-105 (96). On the wider debate, see e.g. Lumsden, "To Get Leave," 102-3; John Corbett, "Ecstasy Controlled: The Prose Style of James Leslie Mitchell and Lewis Grassie Gibbon," in *A Flame in the Mearns*, ed. Margery Palmer McCulloch and Sarah Dunnigan (Glasgow: ASLS, 2003), 89-103; Hanne Tange, "Language, Class and Social Power in *A Scots Quair*," in *The International Companion to Lewis Grassie Gibbon*, ed. Scott Lyall (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2015), 22-32 (26-30).

³⁶ Jessie Kesson, "Nan Shepherd: In Recollection," *Aberdeen University Review*, 53.183 (1990): 187-191 (188-90).

a few small insights into the writer's character.³⁷ By then she was established as a novelist, and while she continued to contribute, the annual stories for the charity magazine must have engaged less of her creative attention.³⁸

During the Great War, Shepherd and her contemporaries suffered profound losses; sustaining *Alma Mater* provided a point of stability in the disruption. Doric articles published in that period provided comfort and the reassertion of identity during the anxiety of war. The novels are the fruition of a long-planned germination in which the innovative use of Doric has an integral role, particularly its use in the narrative voice to embed the narrator in the community. Shepherd's use of Doric is distinctive in North-East literature, synthesizing William Alexander's lack of compromise and Charles Murray's precision. These innovations can be traced in her *Alma Mater* work, where she begins to recognise that dialect is born from the land which in turn becomes embodied in the characters who work it.

After the War, Shepherd developed this idea in the *Hospital Number* short stories, which are the birth-place of ideas and characters that would appear in her novels. Piece by piece she builds up the components of dialect, character and location and begins to create the co-dependency of a rural community which underpins her work. The earliest short stories lean heavily towards a patriarchal society where women have little control, but incrementally Shepherd's characters become unshackled, and we see the emergence of forces of nature like Clem and Bawbie. The elements of her own experience that she later brings to her novels, particularly *The Quarry Wood*, embody her progress as an educated woman within the deeper society and expectations of her ancestry. Shepherd's reimagining of her own intense academic and sexual development within this fictional rural setting attempts to combat the de-personalization which modernity and the chaos of war has wrought. The *Hospital Number* short stories show Shepherd cultivating the style and subject matter for which she is now recognized, recreating herself by reconnecting her experience with a pre-war culture.

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³⁷ Nan Shepherd, "Two or Three," *The Gala Rag*, April 25, 1930, 7-9; "Vehicles," *The Gala Rag*, May 1932, 27-28; "Things I Shall Never Know," *The Gala Rag*, May 1934, 30-31.

³⁸ She also had new local demands on her writing time, from her old school magazine. In 1927, due to a crisis, Shepherd took over as the *Aberdeen High School Magazine's* stand-in editor, and from 1926 to 1937 she was regularly contributing both poems and articles.