

Studies in Scottish Literature

Volume 46
Issue 2 *Allan Ramsay's Future*

Article 3

12-18-2020

Allan Ramsay: Romanticism and Reception

Murray Pittock
University of Glasgow

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



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pittock, Murray (2020) "Allan Ramsay: Romanticism and Reception," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 46: Iss. 2, 8–21.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol46/iss2/3>

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.

ALLAN RAMSAY: ROMANTICISM AND RECEPTION

Murray Pittock

Allan Ramsay has become—certainly in recent decades—a relatively neglected figure, notwithstanding the foundational nature of his contribution to the language of Scottish literature. What was the nature of Ramsay’s achievement? First, his range as a poet is remarkable. His conception of Scots as “Doric” and his championing—particularly in *The Gentle Shepherd*—of Scotland as a real location for pastoral, a pastoral nation which was substantive and not imaginary, derived from a powerful reinterpretation of the “Doric lay” of *Lycidas* and its “Sicilian Muse,” Theocritus, not as an imaginary zone for classical rhetoric, but as a country in its own right, and one whose pastoral operetta is specifically located within a relatively small area of rural Lothian farmland. In 1713, Basil Kennet had compared Scots song to Theocritus in his *Idylls of Theocritus* and “Ramsay developed this hint into a statement of worth for Scots as a tongue on a par with classical antecedents, and well able to inhabit their genres.”¹ In pursuing this connexion, Ramsay pioneered the use of the term “Doric” to describe Scots, in so doing claiming the relation of Scots to English as that of two variants, rather than presenting Scots as a variation from the standard. “Doric” pastoral and “Attic” urbanity were two linguistic approaches to reality, and both deserved their place. In *The Ever Green* (1724), Ramsay appealed for a return to Scottish tradition which he exemplified in the collecting, editing and composing of work in Middle Scots that followed, and which served to curate if not create a tradition of poetry in Scots reaching back centuries. Like the Attic, the Doric was not merely a mode of expression, but was art and part of a literary tradition. Ramsay’s friend Sir John Clerk of Penicuik had claimed that “Middle Scots was ‘genuine Saxon’ in its purest form,” and *The Ever Green* was

¹ Thomas Crawford, *Society and the Lyric* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), 58; Murray Pittock, “Allan Ramsay and the Decolonisation of Genre,” *Review of English Studies*, 58 (2007), 316-37 (326).

Ramsay's exemplification of that position through the demonstration and creation of a literary tradition. Just as Scots had—as Ramsay had argued in the Preface to his 1721 *Poems*—a greater range in vocabulary than English, it was also possessed of a discrete history and grammatical integrity as a language expressive of a national culture, one he pronounced defiantly to be still “Ever Green.” Ramsay followed Thomas Ruddiman (1674-1757), the protégé of his friend Archibald Pitcairne, in producing a glossary for his Scots, one which on occasion bowdlerized the meaning of the earthier Doric for a polite audience.²

Ramsay thus reached a wider audience in Scots, something that had barely been done before. Building on the controversy between Pope and Ambrose Philips as to the extent that pastoral should represent what Wordsworth was to call “the real language of men,” in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Ramsay found a route to ground this language in the vernacular (using for example some 1500 Scots words) and simultaneously render it polite by the use of conventional high cultural genres, English-Scots rhyme words to guide the reader, and a glossary of Scots, presented on occasion in bowdlerized form. In so doing he blended Addison's aesthetic commitment to “a taste for polite writing” with the English author's “delight in hearing the songs and fables that ... are most in vogue among the common people.”³ In promoting his *Poems*, published in two volumes in quarto in 1721 and 1728, Ramsay acquired a stupendous and (until now) unexamined subscription list including the Duke of Douglas, the Earls of Dalhousie and Eglinton, Lord Deskford, Sir David Dalrymple, Sir Gilbert Elliott, Erskine of Dun, Dundas of Arniston and Alexander Pope for work in Scots to a British audience. The current author and Daniel Szechi are currently working on an article on the prosopography of the subscription list.

The Preface to Ramsay's 1721 *Poems* explicitly states the naturalness of Scots to both Ramsay as an individual and to the wider community (“That I have exprest my Thought in my native Dialect, was not only my Inclination, but the Desire of my best and wisest Friends”) and the supremacy of Scots over English (“our Tongue by far the completest”). The social status of Ramsay's subscription list no doubt helped to bolster the appeal to “Friends” to imply that this was a judgement of no cosy coterie, but of the best judges. Yet while some of the poems are fully

² Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), 170-71; Murray Pittock, *Enlightenment in a Smart City: Edinburgh's Civic Development, 1660-1750* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 167.

³ Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, 7 May 1711, and 21 May 1711, in Donald F. Bond, ed., *Critical Essays from the Spectator by Joseph Addison*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 1, 36, 40-41.

Scots, others are hardly so and yet others are barely Scots at all in their language. The duodecimo *Tea-table Miscellany* which followed from 1723 might hint in its format at the air of the autochthonous and informal, but this was misleading: for the “Scots Sangs” of its tradition were extensively culled from the London prints and stage. Yet at the same time, Ramsay presented Scots song for the first time as having a history, a suitable subject for future *Museums* and *Relics*, and the expression of a genuine tradition. Ever since Ramsay wrote, it has been assumed that Scottish song is possessed of such a tradition.⁴

Originally apprenticed as a wigmaker (and a speedily successful one, judging by the 1711-12 stent roll assessments), Ramsay went on to be a dealer and auctioneer in coins, books, pictures, medals, watches, clocks, rugs, jewels, silver plate and arms.⁵ A member of the Music Club by 1720, Ramsay supplied it with sheet music, thus expanding his commercial base. Through his contacts there and its successor Musical Society, Ramsay found a way to situate his “native” song collection within the increasingly mixed and hybridized repertoire of Scots song. Lorenzo Bocchi, who arrived in Edinburgh with the tenor Alexander Gordon (c1692-1754/5) in 1720, set at least one piece in the *Tea-table Miscellany* (, and possibly wrote the music for the Recitative at the beginning of Ramsay’s Ode on the marriage of the Earl of Wemyss and Mrs Janet Charteris in 1720.⁶ Bocchi may also have had a hand in *The Gentle Shepherd*, whose model seems to have been proposed by Gordon in 1722, and may also “have collaborated with ... Ramsay ... in several dramatic projects.” Ramsay was deeply embedded in such networks: he seems to have met Alexander Stuart and Richard Cooper in the Music Club in the early 1720s, and from these relationships came not only Cooper’s support for publication, engraving, and theatre scenery, but also Stuart’s music for Ramsay’s songs.⁷ The later Musical Society, founded in 1728, included several subscribers to Ramsay’s *Poems*, and the Society ordered music from Ramsay’s shop, while Stuart was employed by the Society up to 1736. The new market for “concerts, music theatre, sheet music and tuition” spreading throughout

⁴ Burns Martin and John Oliver, eds., *The Works of Allan Ramsay*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1945-), I (1945), xviii.

⁵ *The Caledonian Mercury*, 25 November 1736 announcing the 20 January 1737 Auction of valuable Books and other articles as well as Ramsay’s *Scots Proverbs*, “just published” (the publication date usually given for these is 1737, which may suggest that their release was held back until the date of the auction).

⁶ *Tea-table Miscellany* I:22, “A Scots Cantata.”

⁷ See *Musick for Allan Ramsay’s Collection of 71 Scots Songs Set by Alex. Stuart & Engrav’d by R. Cooper*, 6 parts (Edinburgh: Printed & sold by Allan Ramsay, n.d. [1724-1726]; reprinted, with an introduction by Kirsteen McCue, Columbia, SC: Scottish Poetry Reprints, 2017).

Europe in the eighteenth century was one with which Ramsay, ever alert to making money, was fully engaged.⁸ Within this market, Ramsay was collecting and republishing the acceptably cosmopolitan under the guise of its being an access point to the native and autochthonous, and Scottish literature has benefited from his intervention here ever since, even though a chimera called “the folk tradition” has long stood in for the realities of early modern print transmission from multiple sources.⁹

In 1725, Ramsay created the first effective subscription library in the British Isles, probably based on an innovative reinterpretation of the booksellers’ practice of renting out expensive and slow moving stock: one of the few surviving bookseller’s day books from the era shows Ramsay renting out such stock in 1715. When his library opened, for the price of 10s a year Ramsay also opened reading to whole new markets, not least women, and this drew the wrath of some, such as Robert Wodrow. In 1729 Ramsay co-founded the Academy of St Luke, the first art school in Scotland, with the goal of furthering his son’s career and perhaps also that of arresting the declining number of painters in Scotland since the Union. In 1736-7, he attempted to found a permanent theatre for Edinburgh at Carrubber’s Close, building on his work leading the City’s “Company of Comedians” in 1732. It was a location for Ramsay’s innovation in the development of season tickets and ‘early bird’ booking discounts, attempting to mitigate the risk that audiences would stay away from a play on its first night(s) to see what the reaction of others was, and thus inadvertently collapse the production. The city authorities—in general more the friends of Wodrow’s religious outlook than Ramsay’s—suppressed the theatre through a more zealous application of the 1737 Licensing Act than that practised in some English cities. Finally closed in 1739, Ramsay’s theatre was subsequently converted into a chapel, but the outlines of the theatre space perhaps survive in one mid nineteenth-century photograph.¹⁰

Ramsay was concerned by the cost of his failed theatrical experiment, as well he might be, having spent a considerable amount of money in the 1730s to build the Guse Pye, his house on Castlehill which now forms the

⁸ Gelbart (2012), 91, 94; Peter Holmes, “A Little light on Lorenzo Bocchi: An Italian in Edinburgh and Dublin,” in Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holmes, eds, *Music in the British Provinces, 1690-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 61-86 (61, 62, 64-6, 72); Stephen Rose, “The musical map of Europe, c1700,” in Keefe (2014), 3-26 (7); Kirsteen McCue, email to the editor, 15 November 2012.

⁹ Pittock (2018), 87, 91, 159, 162.

¹⁰ Pittock (2018), 147-48, 179-84, 240-42; *These Fifty Years: The Story of Carrubber’s Close Museum Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: The Tract and Colportage Society, 1909), 19.

core of Ramsay Garden. His house and shop in the Lawnmarket, bought for £570 in 1725, was for a number of years “the rendezvous for the wits of the city,” forming one of the early core locales of the Enlightenment, together with taverns like Don’s and Balfour’s.¹¹

Ramsay’s achievements were commemorated in his own lifetime. In 1741, the Allan Ramsay Library in Leadhills was founded by the local miners and senior staff in the lead mine and from the town including James Stirling FRS, the formidable mathematician who since 1734 had managed the Scots Mining Company, his Jacobitism disqualifying him from more elite pursuits.¹² There were at least two plans to commemorate Ramsay in Edinburgh with a monument in Canongate Kirkyard or via a statue “for the roof of the Ragged School in Ramsay Lane,” but these came to nothing.¹³ The poet was however commemorated on the Scott Monument and the Usher Hall, and most prominently by Sir John Steell’s 1855 statue on Princes Street, Edinburgh, itself based on the 1729 sketch of the poet by his son.¹⁴ In 1949, it was cleaned and floodlit for the Edinburgh Festival, at which *The Gentle Shepherd* was produced by Tyrone Guthrie with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra supplying the music.¹⁵ The statue itself stands directly in front of Ramsay Garden, the development designed by Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) round Ramsay’s “Goose Pie” house at Ramsay Lodge during 1890-93 in tribute to his predecessor as Enlightenment polymath. When it was used as a residence of the University of Edinburgh, in the Ramsay Lodge area, the house rules were to be drawn up by the students themselves. The painter John Duncan (1866-1945) provided murals for the interior and later became the main illustrator for Geddes’s journal *The Evergreen* (1895-97), which was itself a tribute to Allan Ramsay’s volume of the same name, which had helped to create a national tradition for form and vocabulary in Scots writing.

The new edition sets out to foreground the work of the poet as never before, while its accompanying monograph, *Enlightenment in a Smart City*, explores Ramsay’s work as a cultural entrepreneur and its effect on the Scottish Enlightenment. But there has of course also been a considerable scholarly response to Ramsay since his death in 1758, some

¹¹ Nelson S. Bushnell, *William Hamilton of Bangour: Poet and Jacobite*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1957), 16, 40.

¹² Dani Garavelli and Colin Mearns, ‘Focus: the first subscription library in the UK is 275 years old this month’, *Herald Magazine*, 19 November 2016, 13-16.

¹³ Patricia R. Andrew, ‘Four Statues and a Landskip: Allan Ramsay, John Wilson, Thomas Guthrie and Charity’, *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* ns 12 (2016), 65-82 (65).

¹⁴ *The Scotsman*, 24 November 1855

¹⁵ *The Scotsman*, 3 August 1949; programme for the August/September Gentle Shepherd from a private collection.

of which is captured in the Bibliography and Reception sections of the project website; Rhona Brown's "Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson" (Oxford Bibliographies Online, 2012) is currently the best available general bibliography. Ramsay's writing went through numerous editions, not least *Tea-table Miscellany* and *The Gentle Shepherd*, which appeared with illustrations by David Allan in 1796. In 1799, Joseph Ritson proposed an edition of Ramsay's works as "the untutored child of nature & of genius," an interesting persistence of the Miltonic characterization of Shakespeare from *L'Allegro*, which Henry Mackenzie had recently applied to Burns.¹⁶ In the late 1840s the prolific Victorian editor, Alexander Grosart, considered producing an edition of Ramsay, which was never completed.¹⁷ A *Selected Ramsay* was produced by J. Logie Robertson in 1887, and a short and inaccurate biography by Oliphant Smeaton in 1896 in the Famous Scots series.

Ramsay was frequently aligned with Burns as a founding father of Scottish poetry: at the Newcastle Burns Centenary celebrations in 1859 for example, a whole exhibition room was given over to Fergusson, Ramsay and Burns. Ramsay and Burns's songs and shorter poems also frequently appeared in chapbook form. In Germany, Johannes Scherr in *Geschichte der Englischen Literatur* (1854) seems to have put Allan Ramsay in a similar position, exemplifying Scotland's natural love of song and dancing, while Burns represents the apogee of that particular tradition. In France, the situation was similar: Scots poets, with Burns at their head, represented a bridgehead between the *volkisch* and polite, but the evident cultural hybridity of Ramsay and his successors was never or almost never seen-in the Anglosphere as elsewhere-as the product of conscious art. Rather it was the first stirrings of polite literature in the consciousness of these men of the people. In the United Kingdom, many of the early accounts of Ramsay at least attributed a degree of agency in justifying or attacking his use of Scots, but the idea that he was a sophisticated thinker or conceptual and cultural innovator is generally absent.¹⁸

¹⁶ Bertrand Bronson, *Joseph Ritson: Scholar-at-Arms*, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), I:232.

¹⁷ National Archives of Scotland GD 331/5/34; email of Steve Newman to the author, 3 April 2018.

¹⁸ Frauke Reitemeier, "'Nature's Poet' and Socialist Model: The Reception of Robert Burns in Germany," in Murray Pittock, ed., *Robert Burns in Global Culture*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 73-89 (76-77); Dominique Delmaire, "The Aesthetization of Robert Burns in Nineteenth-Century French Literature," *ibid.*, 108-22 (114);

Following the publication of *The Tea-table Miscellany: or, a Complete Collection of Scots Songs* (1723-37), Ramsay for many years dominated Scottish song and song collections. In his 1729 Preface to the fifth edition of the *Miscellany*, Ramsay outlined what he saw as the unique value of Scottish song, which he strongly linked to native antiquity, to dance measures and to accessibility: “an harmonious speaking of merry, witty or soft Thoughts ... these must relish best with People, who have not bestowed much of their Time in acquiring a Taste for that downright perfect Musick, which requires none, or very little of the Poet’s Assistance.” Here as elsewhere it is easy to underestimate just how innovative Ramsay is: fifty years before Herder’s *Volkslieder*, Ramsay argues for simplicity and communal authenticity, slyly noting too that the very “low” status of folksong gives the poet greater and less examined scope. Ramsay claimed 60 of the songs in Volume I and II (1723; 1726) as his own, and 30 as belonging to other poets. The third volume, which appeared in 1729, derives almost entirely from English and Scottish song collections and the London stage. No matter: Ramsay uses his Preface to celebrate the global triumph of Scots song, as he had used his prefatory poem to the first volume to signal the collection’s engagement with a polite female audience. From the collector and creator of emotion and sentiment, he was now become the voice of the people. Quoting a “Dr Bannerman...from America,” Ramsay writes:

Nor only do your Lay’s o’er Britain flow,
Round all the Globe your happy Sonnets go:
Here thy soft Verse, made to a *Scottish Air*,
Are often sung by our *Virginia Fair*.
Camilla’s warbling Notes are heard no more,
But yield to *Last Time I came o’er the Moore*;
Hydaspes and *Rinaldo* both give way
To *Mary Scot*, *Tweed-side* and *Mary Gray*.

Handel’s *Rinaldo* (1711) was the first opera in Italian composed specifically for the London stage, building on Francesco Mancini’s *Hydaspes*, produced at the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket in March 1710. Ramsay targets Italian opera (already being attacked in England for its emasculatory effects, the very feminization of culture that Ramsay had seemed to invite in 1723) as the overdeveloped and artificial sibling of traditional song, which is so far removed from its audience that it is even in a foreign language. Although he argued robustly for a fusion of Scottish and Italian traditions (and his work with the cellist Lorenzo Bocchi bears that out), part of Ramsay’s claim for Scots is that it was both comprehensive in expression and natively autochthonous, rather than alien

and artificial.¹⁹ These claims were disingenuous; but they served to make Ramsay's confections both reassuringly familiar and daringly exotic in pursuit of sales.

As a consequence of the success of the *Miscellany* (to which a fourth volume was added in 1737 which helped catalyse even more reprintings) Ramsay became "synonymous with the very idea of 'Scots song,'" and collections such as *The Nightingale* took pains to announce as a selling point that it contained songs "none of which are in Ramsay."²⁰ As late as 1787, almost a quarter of the songs in James Johnson's first volume of the *Scots Musical Museum* were lifted directly from Ramsay.

The very success of the *Miscellany* led to its being embedded into a wider canon of Scottish "traditional song" as the eighteenth century progressed. By 1800, *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725, 1729) was the principal text by which Ramsay was remembered. Its influence had been felt immediately in London ballad opera, for example in Theophilus Cibber's *Patie and Peggy* (1730) and Joseph Mitchell's *The Highland Fair* (1731).²¹ It continued to be produced, for example at Bristol in 1788 and South Carolina in 1796.²² In 1802, Alexander Campbell described Ramsay as "our Scottish Theocritus," drawing attention to what was seen as his groundbreaking contribution to the nativization of pastoral.²³

The Gentle Shepherd was also extensively represented in art, and by the early nineteenth century at the latest was strongly associated with the area around Carlops. Ramsay visited the Clerks of Penicuik frequently, and also the Forbeses at New Hall, where the poet seems to have recited *The Gentle Shepherd* before it was published: the "trotting burnie wimpling through the ground" has been taken as a direct reference to the property.²⁴ A monument had been erected to the poet by the Clerk of Penicuik family within sight of Penicuik House in 1759, while nearby New Hall was the reputed site of outdoor performances of the ballad opera.²⁵ A reading of the opera to the Worthies Club (after which Sir William Worthy was named) is

¹⁹ See Peter Holmes, "A Little light on Lorenzo Bocchi," as in n. 8 above.

²⁰ Joanna Clements, "The Creation of 'Ancient' Scottish Music, 1720-1838," unpublished Ph.D. (Glasgow, 2013), 42.

²¹ See Roger Fiske, *Scotland in Music: A European Enthusiasm*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 17.

²² *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 28 June 1788.

²³ Iain Gordon Brown, "Allan Ramsay's Rise and Reputation," *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, 50 (1984): 209-47 (218).

²⁴ Robert Cochrane, *Pentland Walks with their Literary and Historical Associations*, (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1930), 98-9.

²⁵ R.D.C. Brown of Newhall, *The Gentle Shepherd with Illustrations of the Scenery*. 2 vols., (Edinburgh, 1808); on the dating of the monument, see Craig Lamont's essay below.

the subject of a painting by Alexander Carse (1770-1843) in the library ceiling. In 1792, the Allan Ramsay Hotel was opened in the nearest town, Carllops, while the *Statistical Account of Scotland* noted Ramsay's links to the area in 1794, the year in which Robert Brown of Newhall had an obelisk commemorating *The Gentle Shepherd* erected on the lawn. In 1808, the same Robert Brown's *The Gentle Shepherd, with Illustrations of the Scenery* identified this area (now on the Midlothian/Borders border) as the setting for the drama.²⁶ A map (based on a 1770 original) was produced, identifying Symon's House as lying just to the north of New Hall, with "Glaud's Farm" immediately west of Monk's Burn, due north of the Toll House which stood at the 20 km/12 mile mark on the road out of Edinburgh. "Craigy Bield" lay immediately to the north of the east garden of New Hall, while "Habbie's How" and house lay west en route to Penicuik House, and the monument erected by the Clerk family in 1761. "Mause's Cottage" was marked at the entrance to Carllops, and "Patie's Hill" and farm on the south-eastern side, towards New Hall. This identification stuck, with Robert Cochrane's *Pentland Walks with their Literary and Historical Associations* (1930) only one of the texts that made extensive allusions to this 'Ramsay Country', about seven kilometres by two.

The ballad opera was also commemorated through other locations and objects, some as large as the *Gentle Shepherd* ship that docked in Massachusetts in 1767.²⁷ It was also the subject of extensive illustration and reinterpretation, for example in Sir George Chalmers's (1718-91) painting of *A Shepherdess Spied Upon in a Landscape* (1760), which drew attention to the Jacobite references of Ramsay's operetta: Chalmers's father was a co-founder of the Academy of St Luke, and George trained with Ramsay's son and was the father's first biographer. In more recent years, Ramsay's drama has been the subject of revivals in locations as diverse as Glasgow (1962) and Chicago (2016) and was staged at the Edinburgh Festival in 1949 and 2001.²⁸

In 1787, John Aikin, who followed Ramsay by drawing on Theocritus as an example, suggested that "no attempt to naturalize pastoral poetry appears to have succeeded better than Ramsay's 'Gentle Shepherd.'"²⁹ More recent criticism of *The Gentle Shepherd* has been limited in scope.

²⁶ Brown (1808), II: 440

²⁷ Steve Newman, email to the author, 15 March 2016.

²⁸ There are several short extracts on YouTube, including, for example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN2_MxUfA9s and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sstRFPYSbbs>

²⁹ John Aikin, *Essays on song-writing: with a collection of such English songs as are most eminent for poetical merit*, 3rd ed. (Dublin: Thomas Armitage, 1787), 33.

W.H. Grattan Flood claimed *The Gentle Shepherd* as the first ballad opera in 1928 before discovering that *The Beggar's Opera* preceded it (though Gay's and Ramsay's was a two-way interchange).³⁰

More recent work on *The Gentle Shepherd* has been relatively sparse, with essays from Iain Gordon Brown in 1986 and Franco Buffoni, who examined 'La pastorale scozzese di Allan Ramsay', in 1993.³¹ In 2008 Murray Pittock offered a comprehensively Jacobite reading of the text, following on from his earlier work on Ramsay in *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (1994, 2006), *The Invention of Scotland* (1991, 2016) and elsewhere.³² Ramsay's Jacobitism has long stood in the way of a full appreciation of his cultural programme and techniques, and it was for a long time denied, resisted or accounted "sentimental." Since his son was re-identified as the painter of a portrait of Charles Edward Stuart likely to have begun at Holyrood in autumn 1745, the case for political reassessment has become clearer.³³ The politics of both Ramsays requires assessment with clarity and honesty, not within the framing historiography of British unity and Hanoverian victory as the guarantors for Enlightenment, which itself is evidently of seventeenth rather than eighteenth-century origin.

At the turn of the twentieth century, and perhaps helped indirectly by Patrick Geddes's (1854-1932) appreciation of the poet in his titular homage in *The Evergreen*, Ramsay began to be recognized as a founding figure in Romanticism owing to his passion for song-collecting, faux mediaeval reconstruction of tradition and other elements of his work. W.J. Courthope's *History of English Poetry* (1895-1910) characterized Ramsay's oeuvre, in particular his song-collecting, as giving "a powerful impulse to the Romantic revival"; in 1924, following an argument he first

³⁰ W.H. Grattan Flood, "The First Ballad Opera: Allan Ramsay's 'The Gentle Shepherd,'" *Musical Times*, 69.1026 (1928)

³¹ Iain Gordon Brown "'Superfyn Poetry Nae Doubt?'" Advice to Allan Ramsay, and a Criticism of *The Gentle Shepherd*," *Bibliothek*, 13.2 (1986): 33-41; Franco Buffoni, "La pastorale scozzese di Allan Ramsay," *Compar(a)ison: An International Journal of Comparative Literature*, 2 (1993): 261-277; and cf. Buffoni, *Ramsay e Ferguson precursori di Burns* (Milan: Guerini, 1992).

³² Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³³ Lucinda Lax, "The Lost Portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stuart," in David Forsyth, ed., *Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites*, (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2017), 127-39. At Lax's lecture about this painting at Penicuik House during the 2017 Ramsay Festival, it transpired that the portrait was most likely framed in Edinburgh in the 1750s. See also:

<https://www.arthistorynews.com/articles/3878-Allan-Ramsays-Bonnie-Prince-acquired-by-SNPG>.

made in 1908, J.W. Mackail identified Ramsay as giving “the first clearly assignable impulse to the romantic movement.”³⁴ This view survived the war, with J.E. Congleton enlarging on it in 1952, and Thomas Rosenmeyer continued to advance it as late as 1969, despite the (by then) longstanding intrusion of the hazy and manufactured category of “Pre-Romanticism” into critical discourse.³⁵ The present author renewed the claim for Ramsay as a founding figure of Romanticism, with his emphasis on Herderian *volkisch* writing and subject-matter, and his penchant for collecting songs and mediaeval survivals, which anticipated Percy by decades. Ramsay’s preservation of the simple and autochthonous (or apparently such) in the face of the complex threats of history is a more or less direct expression of a core motivation in Romantic writing from Macpherson to Moore, Wordsworth to Scott.

A collected edition of Ramsay was at length produced on the back of the revival of interest in Scots in the 1920s and 30s, associated with the writing of Hugh MacDiarmid, but with many other prominent supporters, not least John Buchan, whose article on “The Scots Tongue” had appeared in *The Scottish Review* on 5 December 1907, and who thereafter remained a strong supporter and prime mover in the organizational and establishment structures which supported the revival, centred on The Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club (1920). Ramsay was likely to be an indirect beneficiary of this process, and so it proved, with the first (and so far only) textual edition of much of his work carried out over a prolonged period of time by Burns Martin, John Oliver and then Alexander Kinghorn and Alexander Law for the Scottish Text Society between 1945 and 1974. The edition was assembled without any single unifying textual policy by disparate editorial teams. It does not utilize extant MS readings, and the *Tea-table Miscellany* and *Ever Green* were not edited at all. In 1992, John Goodridge in the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* described the serious limitations and inadequacy of the STS edition as a scholarly text in uncompromising terms, judging that it was:

deeply flawed as a scholarly edition...It is badly organised; its transcription of MSS...is unacceptably inaccurate; its contents pages, titling, indexes and apparatus are variously inadequate, inconsistent and error-ridden.³⁶

³⁴ J.W. Mackail, “Allan Ramsay and the Romantic Revival,” *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 10 (1924): 137–144 (138–139).

³⁵ See the discussion in Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [2008]), 32; J.W. Mackail, as cited above, Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 10.

³⁶ John Goodridge, “Allan Ramsay,” in *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, III:3 (London: Mansell, 1992), 172.

This is as categorical an assessment of a scholarly edition as one is likely to come across. It is not unfair, but Kinghorn and Law faced considerable difficulties in completing the edition, and their desire to see the edition completed and Ramsay in print is laudable. The scholars engaged in the STS edition also produced some fine work individually: Burns Martin published an accompanying *Bibliography of Allan Ramsay* in 1931, which is still useful, and Kinghorn and Law produced a selected Ramsay and Fergusson in 1974. Law also individually produced some very good textual work on Ramsay, not least his short essay on the *Tea-table Miscellany* in *The Bibliothek* in 1969.³⁷

Ramsay had first received biographical treatment from his son, whose brief life of his father is preserved in the Laing MS. Alexander Chalmers drew on this in his *General Biographical Dictionary* of 1812, and William Tennant attached a life of the poet to the 1819 edition of *Poems*, the year after a number of Memoirs of the author had prefaced the 1818 *Poetical Works*. In general, these biographies are not reliable in assessing Ramsay's antecedents, and Oliphant Smeaton's work is the most unreliable of all.³⁸ Ramsay's most recent critical biography is the 1985 Twayne volume from Allan MacLaine, simply titled *Allan Ramsay*. Full-length biocritical studies such as Andrew Gibson's *New Light on Allan Ramsay* (1924) are even more of a rarity. The focus on Ramsay as a pioneer of Romanticism began to fade, and the increasing dominance of the term "vernacular revival" (commonplace in the university curriculum by the early 1960s) saw Ramsay once again as a founder or originator of something better at best and at worst, a mediator of popular culture to a wider public, as he had been in the nineteenth century.³⁹ Nonetheless, new and original work on Ramsay continued to be produced. In 1977, Peter Zenzinger produced an evaluation of Ramsay's writing language in *My Muse Is British*, and in the 1980s, Iain Gordon Brown carried out extensive and primarily biographical work on both Ramsays.⁴⁰ Specialist work on Ramsay as translations and

³⁷ Alexander Law, "The First Edition of 'The tea-table miscellany,'" *The Bibliothek* (1969): 198-203.

³⁸ See *The Works of Allan Ramsay* Volume IV, eds Alexander Kinghorn and Alexander Law (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Text Society, 1970), 1-3, 71.

³⁹ R.D.S. Jack, "Which Vernacular Revival? Burns and the Makars," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 30:1 (1998): 9-17.

⁴⁰ Iain Gordon Brown, "Allan Ramsay's Rise and Reputation," as in n. 23 above, and his *Poet and Painter: Allan Ramsay, Father and Son, 1684-1784* (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1984).

imitations and on his role in the theatre appeared in the 1990s from scholars such as Roger Greaves and Michael Murphy.⁴¹

The beginning of the 21st century saw a major move forward in the work of Steve Newman (*Ballad Collection, Lyric and the Canon*, 2007) and others. Some of the most comprehensive research engaged with Ramsay is to be found in Matthew Gelbart's *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music"* (2007), which sweeps away the sentimentalist fantasies that underpin these categories in placing Ramsay as a central figure in their development. Gelbart followed this up with an essay on Ramsay's contribution to the foundation of the concept of national music in 2012.⁴² Gelbart's core argument is that Ramsay "helped transform Scotland's musical culture from a manuscript- based milieu organized around specific musical functions and occasions to one in which national origins helped validate music, and printed collections enshrined such groupings." This is unquestionably ambitious in its claims.⁴³ However, the origins of "national" musical traditions—so central to the Romantic period and the assumptions of Romantic public memory—have themselves received relatively little attention (as Gelbart also observes), so it is a claim at least worth entertaining. Its implications would make of Ramsay an entirely more central figure on literary and musical history than he has hitherto been.

The sense of Ramsay as an originator is also found in Fiona Stafford's fine essay on "Scottish poetry and regional literary expression," in John Richetti's volume in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780* (2005), while Leith Davis argued in her co-edited volume on *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (2004) that Ramsay sought an "independent international reach of Scottish song 'round all the globe.'" ⁴⁴ Steve Newman identified Ramsay's conscious artistry in a 2002 article in

⁴¹ Roger Greaves, "'Thigging a Fable far a Frenchman': Allan Ramsay's Imitations of La Fontaine and La Motte," *Translation and Literature*, 8:2 (1999): 176-96; Michael Murphy, "Allan Ramsay's Contribution to Theatre in Edinburgh, 1719-39," *Scottish Studies Review*, 2:2 (2001): 9-28.

⁴² Matthew Gelbart, "Allan Ramsay, the Idea of 'Scottish Music' and the Beginnings of 'National Music' in Europe," *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 9.1 (2012): 81-108.

⁴³ Gelbart (2012), 91.

⁴⁴ Leith Davis, "At 'sang about': Scottish song and the challenge of British culture," in Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen, eds, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188-203 (191); Murray Pittock, "Allan Ramsay and the Decolonisation of Genre," *Review of English Studies*, 58 (2007): 316-37 (317).

Modern Language Quarterly.⁴⁵ The poet also received extensive coverage in works such as the present author's *Invention of Scotland, Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland, Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008, 2011) and *Enlightenment in a Smart City: Edinburgh's Civic Development, 1660-1750* (2018). In 2018, the Ramsay project team and others contributed to a special number of the *Scottish Literary Review* including a number of important pieces, such as that by Rhona Brown on "The Afterlives of Allan Ramsay in the British Periodical Press, 1820-1870."

The new edition will provide both a comprehensive and a new Ramsay: innovative, experimental, dynamic and central to the intellectual life of Edinburgh and Scotland. It will also offer a comprehensive archaeology of the origins of his music and verse which will render his Scottishness a visibly relational artifact. No longer the British hero of the Scottish vernacular, Ramsay will be displayed as the man who brought a new dimension of cosmopolitan engagement to Scottish writing and song under the guise of defending its native traditions. The Collected Edition of the Works of Allan Ramsay will present the artfulness of the collector, editor, author and cultural entrepreneur as never before.

University of Glasgow

⁴⁵ Steve Newman, "The Scots Songs of Allan Ramsay: 'Lyrick' Transformation, Popular Culture, and the Boundaries of the Scottish Enlightenment," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 63:3 (2002): 277-314.