'Some Pastoral Improvement' in The Gentle Shepherd: Mediation, Remediation, and Minority

Steve Newman
Temple University

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“SOME PASTORAL IMPROVEMENT” IN
THE GENTLE SHEPHERD:
MEDIATION, REMEDIATION, AND MINORITY

Steve Newman

*The Gentle Shepherd* (1725; 1729) is perhaps the most major of minor texts, not just in eighteenth-century Scottish literature but in the traditions and languages jostled together by that awkward thing known as eighteenth-century British literature.¹ This is suggested by its sheer ubiquity: by 1800, there had been over a hundred separate printings, comparable to such canonical works as *The Seasons, The Beggar’s Opera,* and *Pamela,* and over two hundred performances, not just in Edinburgh and London, but in Hull, York, New York, and other venues.² There were many more editions and stagings after 1800, such as its inclusion in Robert Chambers’ *People’s Standard Edition* (1838) and a report of its being performed by amateurs in the Scottish countryside as late as 1913.³ Its songs circulated widely in the English-singing world by way of Ramsay’s own *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1723-37), other songbooks, ballad operas, and other texts. Add to this its rich visual history, which includes works by Paul Sandy, David Wilkie, and David Allan.⁴ Robert Burns refers to the Foulis volume including

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¹ Citations of *The Gentle Shepherd* are of the 1725 edition, by act, scene, and line number as established for *The Collected Works of Allan Ramsay* (forthcoming, Edinburgh University Press).

² The counts of editions and productions of *The Gentle Shepherd* are the result of research by Steve Newman and Brianna Kirkland-Robertson; the comparison with other texts is based on counts from *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.*

³ Archibald Geikie, *A Long Life’ Work* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 55. Thanks to Helen Smailes, National Galleries of Scotland, for this reference as well as much help with the visual history of *The Gentle Shepherd.* See also Leigh Hunt, reporting on Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, that “there is not a milkmaid, a ploughboy, or a shepherd, of the Lowlands of Scotland, who has not by heart its favourite passages and can rehearse its entire scenes,” qtd. In “A Jar of Honey from Mt. Hybla—Part II,” *Ainsworth’s Magazine,* 5 (January 1844): 163.

Allan’s engravings as “the noble edit\textsuperscript{a} of the noblest pastoral in the world.”\textsuperscript{5}

Yet Burns’s reverence for \textit{The Gentle Shepherd} also underscores its minority. Recent work by Rhona Brown has enriched and complicated our understanding of Ramsay’s reception, showing that from the eighteenth century on he has played an important role in conceptions of Scottish literature and Scottishness itself.\textsuperscript{6} But it is still the case that \textit{The Gentle Shepherd} has often been enshrined as merely the best-known text by an author whose reputation depends on his being a predecessor of Burns (and, to some degree, Ferguson). Then there is Burns’s phrase “noblest pastoral,” itself an echo of the paradox in the title of the play. While pastoral is a central genre in Western poetics, and while Burns’s work and that of others in the Romantic era do much to elevate it, that elevation is predicated in part on inverting its status as the lowest of the Virgilian triad of pastoral, georgic, and epic, its representation of the simple life of shepherds a purification (or an alternative) to the “noble” world of court.\textsuperscript{7}

This view of pastoral is central to Ramsay’s reputation as a poet of the countryside. In the case of \textit{The Gentle Shepherd}, this minority is compounded by its Scottishness in general and its version of Scottishness in particular. A year after its publication as a ballad opera, Theophilus Cibber, in the first of at least four Englishings of the text, prefaces \textit{Patie and Peggy} (1730) by explaining that had he not changed it into “the English dialect ... it had not been intelligible to our Auditors.”\textsuperscript{8} In one of the most influential critical texts in the history of English, Hugh Blair


\textsuperscript{8} Theophilus Cibber, \textit{Patie and Peggy: Or, The Fair Foundling, A Scotch Ballad Opera} (London, 1730), A\textsuperscript{2}.
praises “this beautiful poem” but laments “local disadvantages, which confine its reputation within narrow limits”—namely, that “it is written in the old rustic dialect of Scotland, which, in a short time, will probably be entirely obsolete and not intelligible; and ... that it is so entirely formed on the rural manners of Scotland, that none but a native of that country can thoroughly understand, or relish it.” For Adam Smith, its “homely stile” reveals that Ramsay has abandoned “the duty of a poet to write like a gentleman.” These eighteenth-century acts of reception situate the text as a relic of specific, bygone Scottish place and time, thereby setting up a critique of Ramsay in the twentieth as falsifying that very representation out of a misplaced sense of politeness, a sign of what needs overturning if a true Scottish literature is to emerge.

My aim here is not to argue that The Gentle Shepherd is, in fact, a major text. Most readers of Studies in Scottish Literature will not need convincing, and The Collected Works of Allan Ramsay will make the argument for the wider audience we hope to reach. Rather, this essay intends to draw on archival work done for the edition to reveal how Ramsay’s own decisions anticipate the acts of re-mediation that frame it as a minor text.

The key concept here is pastoral improvement. When Ramsay comes in 1724 to expand two pastoral poems he has previously published into a pastoral drama, he embeds it within a particularized history of Scotland. Set in the Restoration, Ramsay imagines in contrast to the unrest fomented by the Galloway Levellers—a context unrecognized by prior scholars—a laird who has returned to pursue improvement with a gentler hand and will superintend a post-Restoration Scotland without religious persecution and, it would seem, the need for an Act of Union. This element of the play is often stripped out by its various revisions. But, as if Ramsay himself were playing the role of Sir William Worthy, the returning laird who dresses up like a fortune teller, he foresees the alternate directions his text takes as the improvement he conjures is realized in the coming decades. He encodes into the text the importance of literacy and the circulation of print; he writes a prologue that situates the play within a narrative of national and personal maturation, a scene of instruction for those who are literally minors echoed in later representations; he adds songs and images that

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increase the opportunities for the play to find a wider audience, though often at the expense of the play’s original vision. In tracking the play from its composition to an 1780s production in London to its re-inscription in a nineteenth-century American tale ranging from the West Indies to Boston to West Point, it becomes clear how it endures as an often-overlooked resource for pastoral improvement.

**Ramsay and Scotland in 1724: Improvement and Its Discontents**

When he begins composing *The Gentle Shepherd* in the Spring of 1724, Ramsay is well-established as a poet, bookseller, and cultural broker. His first volume of poems has been published three years before with an impressive list of subscribers from the highest reaches of Scottish society (not to mention Alexander Pope), and the first volume of his wildly successful *Tea-Table Miscellany* has appeared in 1723. In 1724, he becomes more interested in understanding and representing the Scottish past. It is not that he had been indifferent to this topic, as we see not only in his various gatherings of “Scots Songs” but also in his additions to *Christ’s Kirk on the Green* (1718), *Tartana* (1719), and *The Tale of Three Bonnets* (1722), a satire on the Act of Union. However, in 1724, he digs more deeply into Scottish history, launching the two most ambitious projects of his career, *The Ever Green* and *The Gentle Shepherd*. For the latter, he revisits two pastoral poems, “Patie and Roger” (1720, revised in 1721 *Poems*), and “Jennie and Meggy” (1723). In a letter of April 8, 1724, he reports, “I am this vacation going through with a dramatic pastoral, which I design to carry the length of 5 Acts, in verse a’ the gate, and if I succeed according to my plan, I hope to cope with the authors of Pastor Fido and Aminta.” The seriousness of Ramsay’s commitment is indicated by the three manuscript drafts, their title page declaring, with a sly wink, that this “Superfyn Poetry nae doubt”; it is rare for any eighteenth-century text, especially one of this length, to go through so many drafts or, at least, to survive in so many. Then, the next year he carefully drafts and illustrates a fair copy he presented to the dedicatee of the play, Susanna, Countess of Eglinton. But if he is aiming to match the celebrated pastoral dramas by Torquato Tasso and Giovanni Guarini, he does so by localizing his story, not only in place but in time. The first addition to the two pastoral dialogues pictures one older shepherd telling another that he has important news that “will afford us joy”: The Cromwellians who have been persecuting them have been overthrown and their laird will be returning.

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12 The unique copy of the 1723 edition of *The Tea-Table Miscellany* is at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
SOME PASTORAL IMPROVEMENT

Allan Ramsay, MSS. Drafts, _The Gentle Shepherd_, Laing MS La.II.212*, 50R
Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University Library
As Symon adds:

Now Cromwells Dead they say & ane Ca’d Monk
Has playd the Rumble a Right slee begunk
the Kings come hame and ilka things in tune
and Halbert says well See our Master Soon.\textsuperscript{14}

Symon and Glaud then plan a feast to celebrate the laird’s return, replete with “a Bow of Maut,” “two Wathers,” “A Furlit of good Cakes,” a “Haggies” and other rustic delicacies (II.i. 451-61).

However, this return to a happier day is also an origin story for a prophetic look forward. When Sir William arrives at the start of Act III, alone and disguised as a spaeman, or fortune-teller, he surveys his ruined estate, and pledges that he will repair “all that Nature, all that Art makes sweet” (III.i.774). That renewal depends on elevating his son Patie, the “gentle shepherd” of the play, whose identity Sir William reveals through a ‘prophecy’ and then confirmed when Sir William discloses who he actually is. This is followed by a plan to provide Patie the necessary polish through travel:

But from his rustic Business and Love,
I must in haste my Patrick soon remove,
To Courts and Camps that may his Soul improve (III.iv.1201-3).

This also, Sir William suggests, will break the bonds of his “rustic Love” with Peggy, but then she is also revealed to be of gentle blood—his first cousin, in fact. This allows Sir William to set aside his plan to send Patie away, as he blesses the gentle pair:

I give you both my Blessing, may your Love
Produce a happy Race, and still improve (V.iii.1887-88).

The repetition of “improve” helps to locate the play as a whole within the discourse of improvement taking root within the elite circles Ramsay frequents. Ramsay attests to his interest in various schemes for modernizing the Scottish economy early in his poetic career, as in “The Prospect of Plenty: A Poem on the North-Sea Fishery” (1720). The effort closest to The Gentle Shepherd is the Society for Improving in the Knowledge of Agriculture, founded in 1723; one of their meetings is advertised in the Caledonian Mercury on 9 June 1724, as Ramsay is composing The Gentle Shepherd, and one of its founding members is his most important patron and friend, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik.\textsuperscript{15} Ramsay’s interest in the Society is reflected in a fragment, “The Pleasures of Improvement in Agriculture (c. 1723).”\textsuperscript{16} In a prefatory note, he tells his

\textsuperscript{14} Laing MS, La.II.212*, CRC, Edinburgh University Library.
\textsuperscript{15} Caledonian Mercury, no. 654 (June 9, 1724).
\textsuperscript{16} Thanks to Craig Lamont for this transcription from BL Egerton 2023, ff. 61-3; see Uncollected Poems [Collected Works of Allan Ramsay], ed. Rhona Brown
“Honourable & Ingenious” audience that he plans to begin with an excerpt from Sir David Lyndsay’s *Dreme* (1528) and its detailed description of the misgovernment of Scotland. Although the excerpt is not extant in the manuscript, the allusion points to Ramsay’s aim of uniting a deeper Scottish past with a call for improvement now. The poem begins instead by situating itself within a pastoral tradition that includes Virgil and Rapin, but where they sang “upon the Banks of Tyber & the Sein,” Ramsay is “beneath a Hathorn father North.” He then admits that while Scotland to date has focused more on “martial toil” than agricultural improvement, this will now change thanks to the efforts of the Society, and he cites the work of its first president, Thomas Hope of Rankeillor, in transforming the marsh south of Edinburgh into what is now known as the Meadows but was long referred to as Hope Park. Ramsay emphasizes the aesthetic gains of this transformation as a respite from economic striving—“in these sweet walks beneath the Blooming Shade/the Citizen shall drop the cares of trade”—but the poem ends with a paean to the economic benefits of improvement:

Rowse evry Lazy Laird of each wide feild  
that unmanurd not half their Product yeild  
shew them the proper season soils and art  
how they may Plenty to their Lands impart  
Treeple their Rents encrease the farmers store  
Without the Purchase of one Acre more (63).  

But if the multiplicative magic of improvement is also part of the pastoral imagination of *The Gentle Shepherd*, Ramsay knows it does not come without a cost. In general, Ramsay is not an uncritical cheerleader for the transformations of the economy. His poems on the South Sea Bubble, as I have argued elsewhere, may be less strident than many others, but are hardly uncritical. The *Gentle Shepherd* itself comments tartly on elite ideas of improvement, as when Patie and Peggy question the pretensions and duplicities of polite society and thus the value of Sir William’s plan for him (IV.ii.1541-64). There is, however, a more specific concern around agricultural improvement that irrupts in a series of events not discussed by prior commentators on the play—the agitation by the Galloway Levellers. The first published report comes from the *Caledonian Mercury* on April 17, 1724:

We are credibly informed from Galloway and other Places in the West, That a certain Mountain Preacher, in a Discourse he had in that District to many Days ago, among other things, so bitterly inveighed against the Heritours and others of that Country, for their

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laudable Frugality in Inclosures, &c. and (as he term’d it) making Commonty Property, that next morning several hundred arm’d Devotees, big with that Levelling Tenet, in a few Hours rid themselves of that Grievance, to the great Detriment of the Gentlemen in the Neighbourhood.

Had our Religioso been as solicitous in enforcing the Doctrines of Love and Peace, and of suffering (even Injuries) rather than Sin, ‘tis a Question if his Rhetoric had so readily obtain’d. 18

In the midst of his sneering, the author does lay out the key claims of those who organized in groups as large as 2000, many of them armed, to overthrow dikes to protest the displacement of tenants by the enclosure of large swathes of common land for parks to graze cattle. Over the next months, the Levellers are cited in no fewer than 11 issues of the Mercury: they “continue in their Insolence”; “dragoons are sent to the West, the better to level the Levellers”; but they continue their depredations at night to “bring all to a beloved Parity.” 19 It is likely that Ramsay would have read at least some of these issues; he frequently advertised his work in the paper, and, on May 28, the publisher, William Rolland, scornfully rejects a satirical poem, “A Letter to Allan Ramsay, occasioned by a former one.” 20

The Caledonian Mercury would not have been his only potential source of news about this unrest. Clerk of Penicuik, who reports on the depopulation in the region due to enclosure as far back as 1721, receives a letter on May 3rd from his brother-in-law, the Earl of Galloway, that fears “the whole gentlemen of Galloway will be overthrown” if the government does not authorize troops; Clerks’s brother, James, sends him on May 13th an extensive eye-witness account of the Levellers overthrowing seven miles of Basil Hamilton’s dikes; his brother reports more depredations on June 3rd. 21 Then there are the many texts by the Levellers and their allies in

18 Caledonian Mercury No. 635 (April 27, 1724).
19 Quotations from Caledonian Mercury No. 643 (May 14, 1724); No. 651 (June 4, 1724); No. 657 (June 16, 1724). Other references on May 11, May 26, June 1, June 8, June 9, June 18, July 9, and July 20.
20 Caledonian Mercury No. 649 (May 28, 1724).
which they articulate their case against enclosures as contrary to Scriptural injunctions to pursue “the greater Good of Humane society,” not only causing great suffering among the peasantry but also providing a convenient place for possible Jacobite invaders. 22 Protesting their absolute loyalty to the King, one author explicitly presents their current sufferings as a repetition of “the great Persecution” they suffered under Charles II and James II as a result of “a great Part of the Commonality being very zealous in adhering to Presbyterian Principles.” 23

These sources provide a picture, however distorted by elite fear and indignation, of a well-organized, articulate, and disruptive representation of past and present counter to Ramsay’s—vociferously anti-Jacobite and skeptical of the morality and the economic consequences of improvement. This is not, of course, to claim that Ramsay sets the play during the Restoration because of the Galloway Levellers. The attractions of the Restoration are broad and deep. They allow him to tell a Jacobitical story of return, not as a source of political upheaval but as a counter to The Good Old Cause and one that under the direction of the laird will bring the improvements that the Union has thus far failed to deliver. But the sense that the Levellers haunt the text is revealed in a revision Ramsay makes in Draft 3, the most substantial addition to what he has already written. In response to Symon’s proclamation that “[t]hey that Hag-raid us till our guts did grane” will now be replaced by “good Sir Colin [who] sall enjoy is ain,” Ramsay adds:

Glaud:
and may he Lang for never did he stent
us in our Thriving rising with a Racket rent
or Grum’led to see us thrive or shor’d to raise
our Mailen when we Pat on Sundays Claise

Symon:
Nor wad he Lang with Proud and Sausy air
allow our Lyart Nodles to be bare
“Put on your Bonnet Symon tak a Seat
“how’s a’ at hame? —hows Elspa? —how does Kate?

22“News from Galloway; or, the Poor Man’s Plea against his Landlord” (n. p., 1724), 1.
“how sells Black Catle? — what gies Woo the year
and sic like Kindly Questions wad he speer.

Glaud:
Then wad he gar his Butler bring beeden
The Nappy Botle Ben & Glasses Clean
Whilk in our Breast raisd sick a Blythsome flame
as gart me mony a time dancing Hame
My hearts een Raisd dear Nibour will ye stay (La.II.212*, 2V-3R)

So, unlike the landlords targeted by the Levellers, Sir Colin is just, kind, and properly paternal, refusing to rack his tenants’ rents, even when they thrive, or put on airs by insisting that they remain bare-headed. Of particular interest is his question, “how sells Black Catle,” since what agitates the Levellers is precisely the displacements that result from “parking” land for cattle, especially cattle illegally imported from Ireland. Here, though, the tenantry appears to own the cattle, a practice integrated without comment or apparent difficulty into their economic and social lives, simply one topic among many that their solicitous laird asks about.

This is of a piece with Ramsay’s generally pacifying and ameliorative pastoral vision. In contrast to the full-throated religious commitments of the Levellers (and some of Ramsay’s own antagonists throughout his career), he tells a tale in which the Kirk hardly figures at all. The only religious ‘fanaticism’ appears in a false accusation of witchcraft by Bauldy, the play’s bumptious comic relief; it allows Sir William to demonstrate his genial and humane skepticism and to list the superstitious beliefs for the amusement of Ramsay’s more enlightened audience as part of the play’s commitment to a pastoral set in the particularities of its time and place.

The inquiry Sir William orders turns out to be the occasion for the play’s happy ending, as the supposed witch reveals that she is the nurse of Peggy, the gentle shepherdess. Ramsay thus provides an influential example of pastoral improvement that obscures the social unrest in 1720s Scotland, including the work of the Levellers, that Christopher Whatley, Valerie Wallace, T. M. Devine, and others have recently helped to recover.

Media of Improvement, 1725-29: Book, Stage, Song, Image

If Ramsay articulates at the level of the plot a macro-narrative that returns to the Restoration to imagine a pacific and improving Scotland, he also
weaves in to the text modes and media of improvement that anticipate its further transformation as it circulates over the course of the century. As I have argued elsewhere, literacy is a key element distinguishing this pastoral, but Ramsay’s commitment to it is revealed more clearly by looking at his manuscripts. In completing the first full draft of the play, he adds many references to the key role that books play in improving the mind. 26 In Draft 3, Sir William, after revealing himself, asks Symon what Learning did you give can he has he can he write & read, and Symon replies:

Baith wonder well- for faith I didna spare
to gie hym at the School eneugh of Lair
and he deylts in Books and reads & Speaks
with them that ken them latins words & Greeks
ay when he ganges out drives out sheep to Ed Port
he Buys from Books of Historys Sangs or Sport
he has a sort of them at Rowth & will
nor gangs without a pouchtfu to the Hill
I sometimes think he maks oer great a frais
abut fine Poems Tatlers News & Plays
when I reprovd him anes—a Book he Brings
with this Quoth he on Braes I crack with Kings (La.II.212*, 18R).

The passage goes into remarkable detail about Patie’s literacy—not surprising, perhaps, from a man who came to Edinburgh in 1701 to apprentice as a periwig-maker and transformed himself into a prosperous and even famous author and bookseller. We learn that Patie can write and read; that he is classically literate, though it is unclear whom he actually converses with in the countryside; and that he supplements his schooling by way of the pastoral economy, trading whatever he earns from selling his sheep for the books that can be found only there. Symon’s attempt to reprove him for over-valuing these books is met with a pithy retort on the power of them to bring to the countryside the possibility of socially elevating “crack,” even if one does it alone. These sentiments are echoed in an essay reprinted in the Caledonian Mercury in 1724:

When I am importun’d to go to the Tavern in the common Phrase—To Kill Time,—I frequently excuse myself, by saying, I am to meet Company at home:—The Company I mean, are Titus Livy, or Cornelius Tacitus, with whom I pass many an Evening, and while my Companions (in the Poet’s Phrase) are pouring a Thief down their Throats to steal away their Health and Senses, I’m improving both, by the Conversation of these two Sages.27

26 Newman, “The Scots Songs of Allan Ramsay,” as in n. 7 above, 289-91
27 Caledonian Mercury, No. 651 (June 4, 1724)
Whether Ramsay read this essay cannot be known, but in a later passage Patie directly proselytizes for the value of books. When Roger marvels at his philosophical attitude toward Sir William’s insistence that he abandon Peggy as an unsuitable match, Patie says he owes it to “Books the Best wale of Books” and encourages him to “ware some Stanes of Cheas / to gain these silent friends” (24R). Although Symon earlier jokes to Sir William that he and his fellow tenants do no more than “a Leaf or twa half read half spell” (18V) till the reader and his auditors both fall asleep, Roger, who has aspirations of his own, enthusiastically embraces Patie’s advice even if it should require him to “sell my Ky” (24V). So the cattle that are at the heart of Leveller unrest will be converted into money to purchase improving books.

Ramsay continues to refine and emphasize the role of literacy in his revisions for the Fair Copy. Symon’s report of his reading list is altered and enlarged in response to Sir William, who now worries that while some books “gives Light, Some blindly Lead the Blind”:

- about ane Shakespear and a famous Ben
- he afften speaks and Ca’s them best of Men
- How sweetly Hawthrenden & Sterling sing
- and ane caw’d Cowley Loyal to his King— (NLS MS 15972, 66, 67).

Though firmly grounded in Scotland, Patie’s syllabus now explicitly includes authors on both sides of the Tweed as it continues to adhere to a Royalist code; Ramsay also now substitutes “Historys” for “Tatlers News,” which suggests a more elevated curriculum (67). Peggy attests to his literacy in pointing out what separates him from “the lave” in a passage added to “Jenny and Meggy” (1723)—“he Reads fell Books that teach him meikle skill” (21)—and even suggests that his reading is a safer way to improvement than the dangerous travels Sir William is requiring:

- since with nae hazard & sae small expence
- my Lad frae Books can gather siccan sence
- Then why, ah! why, should the Tempestous sea
- endanger thy dear life & frighten me (ibid., 84)

Ramsay thus encodes within the play the chief medium of its circulation in the centuries to come—the editions issued from presses in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Dublin, Philadelphia, Newry, and many other places.

In the end, Peggy has no cause for worry, since there is no more mention of Sir William’s plan and Peggy concludes the play by responding to his request for a song with one set to “Corn Riggs are Bonny,” politely celebrating her gentle shepherd and leaving the audience with an image of a pastoral Scottish landscape where “all’s at rights” and on the path to improvement. This conclusion points to a couple of other modes key to the play’s reach. First, Peggy’s song reminds us that this, after all, is not just a written but a performative text; and Ramsay considers the implications of
You bravely face - [text obscured] ... and must be gone, - and all be gods think it so. Our Pastoral Author thinks so - but fears the Doctor may offend some wise ears. In this we regard, not because will proceed to act the Pilgrim's Life, but'shep's lead thus we read mankind at all different States of various ages, & of various Nations. Happy the youth, the son of Lord & Kings, too much his Lady's, Lord's, and delight who's nour'd in proper time from this emblem that often shap'd the many graces. Were he rid from himself and have the fate of God for Williams on our gentle Past. More nervous & more prudent, he would spring for service of his Country & his King. Thus give us leave to pass our longest time or year all be Dale's and Stig by oth sym.
this from very early on. A key document in situating Ramsay’s understanding of its function is the play’s prologue, one draft of which is preserved among the Laing MSS. Written by Ramsay for a performance at Haddington School in 1724 or 1729, it separates The Gentle Shepherd from the “fierce” political and plot-ridden world of Julius Caesar, the first play of the double-bill.\textsuperscript{28} Pastoral is at once a turn toward “softer strains” and a new national landscape, “Scotia’s plains.” Set next to Ramsay’s poem to the Society for Improvement, we can see a complex movement here; in that poem, Scotland must now turn from its martial past—which it resembles in this way the “fierce” world of Caesar’s Rome—to cultivate its land along more rational lines. But in a literary sense, pastoral is also a turn to a simpler time. With that comes a worry about decorum and status that Adam Smith might have confirmed decades later: “Our Pastoral Author ... fears / the Diction may offend Some Nicer Ears.” But this does not trouble the speaker of the prologue, instead pointing to the value

\begin{quote}
act[ing] the blythsome life that shepherds lead 
thus we read mankind of all different Stations
of various ages & of Various Nations.
\end{quote}

This representation lacks the clear sense of a discrete pastoral stage in the stadial theory that is the hallmark of the Scottish Enlightenment Ramsay helped to lay the groundwork for, but it does place pastoral in a specific timeline, as it were—a time of “Inocence” that may strike the “gentle Audience” as “rude.” It might seem, then, that “pastoral improvement” would be an oxymoron, since it would perforce remove one from the pastoral state. However, this conflict is resolved in the preface on the level of individual maturation. Circling back to what may seem like the feminized “softer strains” of pastoral, we are introduced to a “youth, the Son of Lord or Knight” whose doting mother’s “fond delight” risks “Stupif[y]ing] the manly graces.” The plot of the play, however, provides a

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\textsuperscript{28}As John Goodridge, “Allan Ramsay 1684-1758,” \textit{Index to English Literary Manuscripts, 1700-1800, Alexander Pope-Richard Steele}, vol. 3, pt. 3. ed. Margaret M. Smith and Alexander Lindsay (London: Mansell, 1998), 177-80 (175-176), points out (175-76), it is difficult to date the prologue because there is another draft in the British Library, MS Egerton 2023, which the S.T.S. editors date in 1729, because it follows a prologue to \textit{Julius Caesar} that can be dated August 19, 1729 and which then appears first in a double-bill with \textit{The Gentle Shepherd} eight days later. However, the Laing MS draft is more complete and polished, suggesting it comes after Egerton. Brianna Robertson-Kirkland has exciting archival research forthcoming on productions at Haddington Grammar School and related performances. It seems that the text may be misplaced among the Laing MSS: since the name Sir William is used rather than Sir Colin, it was probably composed after the 2\textsuperscript{nd} draft, and the absence of writing on the verso of the leaf also suggests it was not composed along with the rest of these texts.
solution to this gendered problem: the “Youth” would be saved if he were “hid from himself” and the dangers of a feminized upbringing, emerging instead as a “more nervous & more prudent” one in the “Service of his countrey & his King.” And this, in turn, justifies the play, as the youthful players “pass our Nonage time on” and assume the role of “Patie’s and Lesley’s be our Symon.” Under his pastoral tutelage, they can emerge into proper manhood.

We will see shortly how the narrative Ramsay sketches here is realized in the decades to come. First, though, we need to consider two more media central to the circulation of The Gentle Shepherd—song and image. Peggy’s concluding song is one of four that appear in 1725. But, as John Goodridge has demonstrated in detail, Ramsay adds eighteen songs to the edition published in 1729.29 His impetus seems to be the remarkable popularity of The Beggar’s Opera (1728); by turning his pastoral drama into a ballad opera, Ramsay appears to aim at the wider circulation on both sides of the Tweed that he has pursued from early in his career. On example of how he altered the play occurs in a manuscript that is now split between the Huntington and the John Rylands Memorial libraries, another example of the contingencies of textual circulation.

Song 15th Tweed Side
When hopes was wer all sunk and dark in despair
my heart a was lik going to Break
my Life was seemd not worthy my Care
but now I shall save, & for thy sake
Where eer my Love travells by Day
wherever he Logedes at night
with me his dear Image shall stay
and my soul keep him ever in sight
with patiens I’ll hope wat the Long year
and study the Gentlest charms
Hope time away till thou appear
  to lock thee for ay in these arms
While thou was a Shepherd I wisht prizd
  for no higher station of Life
but now I shall study endeavours to rise
to a hight that Becoming thy wife.30

This is one of the thirteen songs that Ramsay builds from existing text. Here, he sets to “Tweedside” Peggy’s vision of her own improvement; her simple pastoral love narrative disrupted by the revelation of Patie’s gentleness, she now imagines rising herself. Interestingly, this draft lacks

29 Based on the Rylands MS, Goodridge (178-179) argues that Ramsay at one point intended Sir William’s “prophecy” as a song, to be set to “Auld Lang Syne.”
30 MS 748, unpaginated, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.
the last stanza of the song as printed in the 1729 *Tea-Table Miscellany*, which fixes the transformations of improvement, changed to “virtue” that outlives fleeting physical beauty. This historical lability is recapitulated in the tune. “Tweedside” dates back to the Leyden Manuscript (c. 1680) and the lost Blaikie Manuscript (c. 1692), but once Ramsay uses it for *The Gentle Shepherd*, it appears in Gay’s *Polly* (1729) and five other ballad operas as well as in a variety of instrumental collections. In this way, the song continues a circuit between Ramsay and others who integrate popular song into their work; if Ramsay takes his cues from *The Beggar’s Opera* in turning his play into a ballad opera, Gay has already borrowed from Ramsay, drawing on “The Lass of Patie’s Mill,” “Bessy Bell and Mary Gray,” and “The last time I went o’er the moor,” all from *The Tea-Table Miscellany*.

The 1729 edition gives us one more medium that shapes the fate of Ramsay’s work. The frontispiece includes an engraving of a shepherd with his crook upside-down—Ramsay, we assume—encountering Apollo on Parnassus, holding a lyre, and haloed by divine rays. In the background is
Pegasus. Apparently, a dramatic illustration of Ramsay’s “The Poet’s Wish: An Ode,” it pictures Ramsay in pastoral garb, at once ambitious but humble, similar to his position in the poem. Lying behind the engraving is part of the cultural infrastructure that will help Ramsay to realize that wish and that brings Cooper and Ramsay together—the Academy of St. Luke, the first, though short-lived, attempt by Ramsay and others to establish an academy for drawing in Scotland, at which Ramsay’s own son studied. Taken altogether, then, we can see that Ramsay unites in his work on The Gentle Shepherd the various media that further his project of Scottish pastoral improvement and locate the sort of atavistic social unrest of the Galloway Levellers safely in the past.

The Gentle Shepherd in the 1780s: The Tickell/Linley Production and William Henry Ireland

However Ramsay may seem to anticipate his reception and circulation, he cannot, of course, control it. There were pirated editions during his lifetime, and, in the two decades after his death in 1758, the number of editions and performances continue at a steady clip. But in the 1780s, there is a significant uptick in his works both for the page and the stage. There are around 60 printings between 1729 and 1780; there are more than 30 in the 1780s. The increase in performances is greater still. There are approximately 100 performances from 1729 to 1780; there are 105 in the 1780s alone. Except for the two Englishings by Cornelius Vanderstrop (1777) and Ward (1785), the editions almost all follow the 1729 version of the play. But the evidence from the stage, not surprisingly, shows the texts being revised to a greater degree. In 1730, Cibber’s English adaptation profoundly alters the play: He shrinks it to one act, and among other alterations, he largely strips out references to the political changes; Sir William is accorded no songs, while Cibber adds two others. From the evidence we have, other performances appear to adhere more closely to the 1729 text; for instance, in the 1750s and 1760s, James Lauder is celebrated for his role as Sir William. But there is another major rewriting in the production, close in many ways to Cibber’s, that is largely responsible for the sharp increase in performances in the 1780s--the two-act afterpiece

32 Exceptions include the 1740 Belfast edition.
33 See The London Stage, 1660-1800, Part 4, Volume 2 and The Gentle Shepherd: A Scots Pastoral Comedy: As it was acted with great Applause at the Theatre at Edinburgh (Dublin, 1773).
written by Richard Tickell, with music by Thomas Linley, first performed on October 29, 1781 at Drury Lane. In this, it is really Linley’s name that should come first. Tickell is criticized by reviewers for his clumsy Anglicizations, among other things, and, though others are more positive toward his revisions, their focus is on praising Linley’s music. The importance of the songs is emphasized by the fact that the only text of the play that survives is the songs; there is no evidence that the full text of the play was ever published—surprisingly, given how frequently it was performed.

The songs differ in many respects from those in Ramsay’s 1729 edition. While the two that emphasize the displacement of the Commonwealth and the return of the King remain (“Cauld be the rebel’s cast” and “Peggy, now the King’s Come”), gone is Sang VII, in which Symon praises Sir William for not being a rack-renter, as well as all of Sir William’s songs. This mutes the play’s politics of improvement, an effect strengthened by the two new songs, one of which is on Roger’s wooing of Jennie and the other setting to music Bauldy’s list of Mause’s supposedly witchy acts, thus underscoring the play as a vehicle for preserving quaint rustic superstitions. This theme is repeated in the alterations to the concluding song; transformed into a full-on finale, with Patie, Roger, Jenny, and Bauldy getting their own verses, and a chorus at the end with each one, it ends with Bauldy reminding the audience of how his belief in witches and ghosts was taken advantage of by Mause and Madge. Yet the last word comes from the communal chorus, and its emphasis on a community palatable to the ears of a later eighteenth-century audience is heightened by the music itself. As Brianna Robertson-Kirkland observes, while Peggy’s opening verse closely resembles the setting in *Orpheus Caledonius*, the chorus is a “very classically-styled four-part harmony, ... reminiscent of the choruses from oratorios, which were really popular at this time.”

David McGuiness adds that the chorus is a piece of “very self-

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35 The lyrics of some of the songs can be found *The Select Songs of the Gentle Shepherd. As it was performed at the Theatre-Royal, Drury Lane* (London, 1781). The complete scored music is provided in a scarcer volume, *The Gentle Shepherd, A Pastoral Opera. As performed at the Theatre-Royal, Drury Lane. The overture and accompaniments, by, Thomas Linley* (London, [1781]).

36 Also excised is “By the Delicious Warmness.” The alterations of Sang X were successful enough to warrant separate publication of “The Yello-Hair’d Laddie” in a Salisbury broadside.

37 Brianna Robertson-Kirkland, personal communication. This setting of “Corn Rigg’s” is not discussed in Andrew A. Greenwood, “Song and Improvement in the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Journal of Musicological Research*, 39 (2020):42-68,
consciously simplistic and naïve writing.”

Or, we might say, the chorus is pastoral understood in a more limited way than Ramsay does. Taken altogether, Tickell and Linley’s revision provides a version of *The Gentle Shepherd* that significantly shrinks its scope—we can only guess what is said rather than sung, but given that it has only two acts, it can’t be nearly as much—providing a less-complex vision of pastoral improvement.

That we are in a mistier region of “Scotland” familiar to anyone who has studied post-Ossian representations is indicated by the review in *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, which remarks that “the characters were dressed with a rustic simplicity, which though not exactly characteristic of the Highland manner, were perfectly pastoral.” So even a play set in the Pentland Hills errs by not dressing its characters in Highland garb; but at least they were “perfectly pastoral.” This is in keeping with the unapologetically presentist tenor of the rest of the review; “pastoral” is its keynote, though its meaning, beyond “countrified,” is hard to pin down and lacks the more substantive and nuanced significance of Ramsay’s text.

After remarking that the original was “always deemed prolix and heavy” with its rhymes “all of the pastoral kind,” and difficult for those who did not know “the Scottish dialect,” the reviewer praises the authors for preserving and polishing its “so many scattered beauties,” singling out Linley’s music and especially the overture, “the first movement, though, of the pastoral kind, very lively; and the popular air of the *Highland Laddie* is made the subject of the last, which is diversified with great professional skill among the different pastoral instruments.”

*The Gentle Shepherd* that emerges here may lend support to the opinion of Ramsay’s son, that his father, “carried away by the torrent” of praise for *The Beggar’s Opera*, was mistaken in adding these songs. Adding the songs, his son argues, opened the door to the “vitiated taste” of a song-loving public that preferred the ballad opera version of the play to the one


38 David McGuinness, personal communication. For an illuminating analysis of the difficulties in constructing what Ramsay’s songs actually sounded like, see McGuiness and Aaron McGregor, “Ramsay's Musical Sources: Reconstructing a Poet's Musical Memory,” *Scottish Literary Review*, 10:1 (2018), 49-71. In the forthcoming edition of *The Gentle Shepherd*, with music edited by McGuiness, with the assistance of Roberston-Kirkland, examples will be given of every surviving setting for songs in the 1729 *Gentle Shepherd* up to 1758, and of other significant later settings.

39 *Lloyd’s Evening Post* (October 29-31, 1781), 420.
in its “original purity,” though his father solaced himself with the fact that it remained in that happier state in his collected works.\textsuperscript{40}

Yet Ramsay’s supposed desire to quarantine his work from the “contagion” of popular song is belied by his own practice as he continues to market his work through songs, and another performance of Tickell-Linley shows that at least some signal elements of his vision of pastoral in \textit{The Gentle Shepherd} survived the depredations of reception and remediation. Remarkably, it involves the infamous Shakespearean forger, William Henry Ireland. In \textit{A full and explanatory account of the Shaksperian forgery}, a manuscript draft of his \textit{Confessions} in the Houghton Library at Harvard, Ireland describes his family’s relationship with the painter Samuel Westall. Westall, Ireland says, was given free room and board by his father, who also introduced him to potential patrons:

\begin{quote}
It was during this term that our great intimacy with the Sheridan’s [sic], Linleys, and Tickells began and on the idea of performing a Play being started Mr. Westall was of course to undertake a part with the rest of us which he did and at my father’s request after made the drawing here inserted containing portraits of the several persons performing the Piece. Mr. Sheridan being much amused determined on the Opera’s being repeated at his Town House in Bruton Street where it was splendidly got up under the direction of the Hon Mrs. Sheridan and her Sister Mrs. Tickell who tutor’d us on the occasion. It was performed before all the Persons of Quality of the Day.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

\textit{The Confessions} themselves reveal that the “Opera,” was, of course, \textit{The Gentle Shepherd}:

\begin{quote}
The piece selected on the occasion was the opera of \textit{The Gentle Shepherd}, with Bon Ton; the parts being filled by young persons. My character, though of a trivial nature, did not diminish the zest I felt on that occasion; but, on the contrary, rendered my predilection for theatrical pursuits even more determined.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Westall paints a striking image of the Ireland and Linley families acting out the concluding scene of \textit{The Gentle Shepherd} in full “pastoral” dress, presumably in the town house of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.\textsuperscript{43} There, in the middle of this overlooked instance in the rich visual history of the play, Ireland himself looks on:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} The two biographical fragments by Ramsay’s son were reprinted in Kinghorn and Law, as in n. 13; this quote is from 72-73.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{A full and explanatory account of the Shaksperian forgery}, MS. Hyde 60 (3), Houghton Library, Harvard University, 23.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland} (London, 1805), 2.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{A full and explanatory account} (n. pag.).

So *The Gentle Shepherd* initiates another boy into another stage of life, but the lesson here differs greatly from what is imagined in the Prologue for the performance at the Haddington Grammar School—rather than masculine public-mindedness grounded in the sensible world of the Scottish countryside, we have the dreamy theatricality of the would-be litterateur out to make a place in his father’s affections and the world of letters by forging everything from a Shakespearean play to his religious confession to a love letter to Anne Hathaway.

This, however, is not the only career being launched. This is apprentice work for Westall himself, his first depiction of a literary work in a career in which many of his most celebrated paintings are of scenes from Shakespeare, Milton, Scott, Gray—and his famous portrait of Byron. Here, *The Gentle Shepherd* gets more firmly situated in a narrative of personal and national maturation, an emblem of a particularly Scottish place and time that can be valued in
polite British culture. The aspirations of Westall are legible within Ramsay’s own arc, and though we might say that the narrative of improvement goes horribly wrong in Ireland’s case, there are elements in his creative approach to antiquities that, even acknowledging significant differences, are not so far from Ramsay’s in *The Ever Green*. Whatever Ireland’s fate, it is likely that Ramsay would have approved his play being performed in such rarefied domestic precincts as the Sheridans’ townhouse in Bruton Street, “before all the Persons of Quality of the Day,” the sort of domestic setting imagined by Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany* and aspired to in his various dedications to his aristocratic patrons. Having fought hard throughout his career for a theatrical space in Edinburgh with little success, *The Gentle Shepherd* is now at the heart of the first family of London’s theatrical and musical world, the Sheridan-Linleys.

**Looking Ahead and Abroad: 
*The Gentle Shepherd* in “The Young West Indian”**

The nineteenth-century afterlives of *The Gentle Shepherd* in Scotland have been expertly surveyed by Rhona Brown, demonstrating how it plays a central role in Ramsay’s increasingly secure role as a canonical writer who encapsulates a rural Scottish past that is by turns “golden” and “too coarse” (104-13). But what of his reception in the New World? A fuller account would consider the many productions of *The Gentle Shepherd*, including the dueling productions of 1798, one in New York, of Tickell-Linley, and another “with the original airs, the accompaniments by Mr. [Alexander] Reinagle”; or editions of the text from the first U. S. edition in 1788 to an 1812 edition in Pittsburgh that was the only secular publication that year from that publisher. But I want to conclude by instead focusing on one example that transports Ramsay’s narrative of pastoral improvement to the New World, Lydia Maria Child’s story “The Young West Indian.” Child was a central figure in nineteenth-century American literature, in contact with Emerson, Whittier, Fuller, and other luminaries. She began her career as an author with *Hobomok* (1824), set during King Philip’s War (1675-1678), and features an inter-racial romance between a white woman and a Pequod Indian. Child further showed her daring in 1833, when she published *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*,

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which generated a backlash that punished her financially and emotionally. In between *Hobomok* and her abolitionist *Appeal*, “The Young West Indian” appeared, first in the gift-book, *The Atlantic Souvenir* in 1828 and then in 1832 in a collection of her work, *The Coronal.*

In “The Young West Indian,” Child continues her inquiries into national and racial identity; and, as we will see, *The Gentle Shepherd* figures centrally into it as a pastoral again ferrying its characters into an improved adulthood and imagining the past and future of the nation. The narrator is an unnamed Man of Feeling, who, we find out later, lost his fiancée; he declares that his method will now be to travel and experience whatever he can, since this will “overcome” “our local prejudices,” though, as we will see, locality matters a great deal in this story (201). The tale begins in 1808, with the narrator onboard a ship from Cuba to Boston—connecting the Puritan heartland, which the narrator ties to “home and country” (215), with the Caribbean and its slave economy. There, he meets Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds and the lovely Angelina. He initially thinks Angelina is their daughter, but she turns out to be the daughter of Mrs. Reynolds’ first love, a rich planter in Cuba, whose wife has died; he has asked the Reynolds to take her back to Boston to be educated. Angelina’s identity is interesting—she is olive-skinned, which “betray[s] a Spanish origin” (204) but which also gestures at other possibilities. The narrator is enraptured by Angelina and is touched by a gift of a miniature she gives him. But tragedy ensues. After he comes back from a visit to some Missouri lead mines he has some stake in he is told that Mrs. Reynolds and Angelina have died of a fever.

Our narrator is devastated, and the story picks back up in 1817, with him absenting himself from a literal hunt— instructed by William Cowper not to kill any animal—to engage in a hunt of another type, for a monument of what for Child is America’s primal national scene, King Philip’s War. It is here we see two versions of pastoral we also find in Ramsay. One is of the humble but noble men, “of obscure rank, yet born to a lofty destiny” (234), who fought to establish European settlement and set progress into motion. The other is the bumpkinish figure of fun who cannot tell him where to find this “monerment” (225) but can tell him

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*46 The Atlantic Souvenir; A Christmas and New Year’s Offering (Philadelphia, 1828), 230-69; The Coronal. A collection of miscellaneous pieces, written at various times (Boston, 1832), 201-62 (Hathi Trust); text here from The Coronal.

where he can find a schoolmaster who could show him. There is where he finds a third version of pastoral that combines the best of the other two. The beginning is unpromising, as he is shown to a hut with a dirty interior. But things improve when he meets Frank Dudley the schoolmaster and especially when he meets a young woman who happens to be named Peggy who has “nothing of rustic angularity” (230) about her, and, like Ramsay’s Peggy, seeks to be educated. The narrator, taken by both of them, decides to exert his benevolence, backing Frank’s bid to go to West Point and taking Peggy, who reminds him mysteriously of Angelina, for school in Boston, a mending of the broken plot at the start. If the similarities to The Gentle Shepherd were not enough, it then appears explicitly, as the farewell gift from Frank: “A few kind words to the tearful Margaret, accompanied by a present of Allan Ramsay’s Gentle Shepherd, closed the farewell-scene” (241).

Ramsay’s text clearly moves her: “For a few days, Margaret was melancholy, and more than once I found in her tears over the Gentle Shepherd” (241)—an index of her refined heart, but also, it would seem, her ability to see a parallel to her own situation, as social mobility threatens her romance with Frank, though in this case, the Peggy character leaves the countryside. There are no concerns expressed here about the archaism or lowness of the play’s dialect or the outmodedness of the world represented. It is perfectly legible.

However, the narrator’s adventures do not end there, and The Gentle Shepherd appears again as Childs’s scope expands further. In 1820, the narrator is on a boat toward West Point; there, he is to meet with Peggy, who has for the last year been in the company of a Miss Fitzroy, a celebrated beauty from South Carolina, and who extends the national reach of the story still further—though we may wonder where slavery is in all this since it so often features in Child’s work. While on the boat, he encounters another refined and “dark-complexioned” personage, in this case a young man “absorbed in the enchanting pages of Ivanhoe” (244)—though it’s typically Burns who is paired with Ramsay, Scott plays that role here. The young man waxes poetic about West Point, though his analogy to Scott’s “wild picturesque and sublime” Highlands is qualified by the narrator’s nationalist observation that, like the monument to those who fought and died in King Philip’s War but on a grander scale, West Point lacks “any of that pageantry of association which throws such enchantment around Europe and Asia” (246-47). West Point thus stands as a perfect embodiment of a virtuous American masculinity, polished but not effeminate or showy; humble, but not mean.

The narrator learns that this young man is none other than Angelina’s brother, Orlando, who remarks that he has never really had a home; and he
reveals that he knows that Angelina is still alive and can be distinguished by the tattoo of a carrier-dove with a letter in its mouth (251)—a device not unlike the “mouse mark” that identifies Patie in The Gentle Shepherd. As we might expect, a family reunion shortly thereafter takes place in the hallowed space of West Point. Frank is concerned that his Peggy’s new elevated identity will turn her head, as “[c]rowds of suitors contended with each other for the bright West-Indian prize” (261). But his jealous fears are soothed when he sees the markings by hand and by tears that Angelina makes on The Gentle Shepherd (261).

In the end, Orlando marries Miss Fitzroy and Frank marries Peggy, and Orlando and the rest find a home in adjoining Virginia plantations, a picture of domestic bliss that pulls the narrator from the New England that had before been the center of his national affections. Again, one wonders at the absence of any mention of slavery in this move to Virginia; but it seems as if Child’s aim here is to bracket race—saving the darker figures of the brother and sister—in order to create a vision of national unity that brings together South Carolina and West Point, Boston and Virginia, even Cuba. And at the heart of this Atlantic/Caribbean Souvenir, this national pastoral, is not only a variation on the covert pastoral plot of The Gentle Shepherd, but also the text as an index of the feeling hearts of the hero and heroine.

We have now traveled a great distance in space and time from the Galloway Levellers and Ramsay’s concerns in the 1720s. Yet as this final example confirms, The Gentle Shepherd continues to circulate within the literary systems of the English-speaking world well into the nineteenth century. Although it may be altered from its original in many ways, translated into English English or having its songs cut entirely or changed or with new songs added, it does not become a mere period piece preserving the quaintnesses of a long-past Scottish countryside though it is that in many of its manifestations. It also remains a resource for the complex ideological work of pastoral improvement. Much work remains to be done in tracking the history of The Gentle Shepherd textually, musically, and visually, but the evidence we do have indicates that this most major of minor eighteenth century texts continues to realize Ramsay’s prophetic view of it well into the nineteenth century.