Cunninghame Graham's Scottish Writings

Prologue

I'm going to start with a caveat. I'm not an expert in literature, let alone Scottish literature and, thus, have had to rely heavily on the work of those far more able than I, which I hope I have interpreted correctly, especially if any of them are in the audience. I apologise, in advance, for any errors, which are mine alone.

The first time I gave a talk on Don Roberto was 30 years ago at the University of Hull. I had just finished an exam when the invigilator approached me and asked, "Are you one of the famous Cunninghame Grahams?" The invigilator was one Owen Knowles, a Conrad expert well known to Laurence Davies, who invited me to give a talk on my famous forebear to the English Literature Society. Sad to say, apart from Anne Taylor's 2005 biography and Lachlan Munro's 2019 doctoral thesis, the scholarship on Cunninghame Graham has remained much the same as I used for my talk back in 1991.

Introduction

Tonight's talk is an adaptation of a lecture I gave to students at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid for their Scottish Studies Seminar in April of this year.

I'm going to start by asking whether Cunninghame Graham can actually be considered a Scottish writer; then I will briefly examine his style, preferred literary devices and recurring themes; next, I will examine his opposition to the Kailyard School of writers before discussing his other Scottish sketches; finally, I will explore his first book, *Notes on the District of Menteith*, and hopefully, come to some conclusion.

Was Cunninghame Graham actually a Scottish Writer?

When one considers that Cunninghame Graham was born in London, educated by Anglican clergymen and in an English public school, lived most of his life outwith Scotland, with the majority of his literary output being set elsewhere, it is not unreasonable to ask, as did Davies, "Is there any sense in calling him a Scottish writer at all? Is not Graham's writing essentially a cosmopolitan product of late Victorian or Edwardian London*?*" (1973:156); and, consequently, "Why discuss the sketches set in Scotland as a separate entity?" (*ibid* p177)[1]. Walker seems to harbour similar doubts, stating that Graham's first volume, "*Notes on the District of Menteith*", was his "only book devoted exclusively to Scotland" (Walker, 1982:9), a work which Graham himself dismissed as "a mere travel guide for tourists" (*ibid.* p.9).

Yet, in this rather erratic, somewhat eccentric and deeply personal book, Graham displays his love of his ancestral homeland or *tierra ancestral*, as he might have put it, and the people that inhabited it, which he recorded with nostalgia; a nostalgia which, after the loss of Gartmore, was to deepen over the years (Munro, 2019:202).

Walker believes that despite his international reputation, Graham always considered himself a Scotsman and his Scottishness was evident in his writings (1985:25) and suggests that in order for a writer to better appreciate the characteristics of his own people, it is necessary for him to leave his

[1] This question is partly answered by the fact that many of his Scottish sketches were collected in a separate anthology, *Scottish Stories*, which was published by Duckworth in 1914.

own country (ibid. p27). Davies agrees that Graham *"*had a sense of Scottishness" and "of there being a particular fate to being a Scotsman." (1973:177). Moreover, he praises Graham for his attempts at "a synthesis of Scottish and foreign experience" (*ibid.* p176) and compares him favourably with Robert Louis Stephenson, who he points out "was at least as much an expatriate" (*ibid*). MacGillivray, concurs, pointing out many Scottish writers through the centuries have been cosmopolitan, as were Graham's contemporaries, Stephenson, Barrie and Buchan, "who all wrote mainly an English discourse but on many Scottish subjects".[2] Furthermore, despite living long stretches away from Scotland, these writers would all have identified themselves as Scots.[3] In similar vein, Jauncey observes that Graham "wrote more of his oeuvre in Scotland than anywhere else" and that "Scotland was a constant point of reference for him, regardless of where his writings were set."[4], while Walker avers, "it is when [Graham] writes of Scotland that he shows his emotion—and, one might suggest, his art" (1985:30). Jauncey concludes that Scotland and his Scottish heritage hugely influenced everything Graham wrote and to that "extent, he is certainly a Scottish writer." [5].

Certainly, other Scottish authors contemporary with Graham saw him as one of their own. Neil Munro, for instance, writes of Graham's Scottishness and seeming inability, in his later years, to stay away from Clydeside, absence seeming "to have made his heart grow fonder." (1933:307). William Power, "considered Graham to be the doyen of Scottish literature" (Walker 1982:8), while Hugh MacDiarmid, who was not renown for flattery, wrote, "Cunninghame Graham possesses to a higher degree than any Scot of his generation those vital qualities of the Scottish genius." (Walker, 1985:26).

Though, MacDiarmid saw Graham as part of the Scottish Celtic Renaissance, despite the bulk of Graham's work preceding it, both Fraser and Munro disagree, the former claiming that Graham "was never the member of any particular artistic or literary clique." (Fraser, 2002:5), while the latter states that Graham did not write "as part of any particular cultural movement in Scotland" and would sit uncomfortably within that movement (Munro, 2019:203).

Given Graham's diffidence towards his only truly Scottish book, Walker asserts that Graham's "reputation as a Scottish writer rests squarely on his Scottish sketches" (Walker, 1985:27), which T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) described as "the rain-in-the-air-and on-the-roof mournfulness of Scotch music in his time-past style…snapshots – the best verbal snapshots ever taken, I believe," (Munro 2019:137), capturing an essential aspect of Graham's Scottish writings, which remains constant right from *Notes on the District to Menteith* (1895) to *Mirages* (published posthumously in 1936), all of which are imbued with an "acute sense of melancholy" and a "preoccupation with parting and grief" (Walker, 1982:11).

Some 50 of Graham's 200 sketches are Scottish (Walker, 1984:26). These Walker divides into three periods: an early period up to 1896, the bulk of which is a diatribe against the dominant Kailyard school; a middle period, covering the next two decades, which was his most prolific; and a late period, covering the last decade of his life (1982:10-11).

But before we turn to the Scottish Sketches, I'd like to briefly look at Graham's style, some of his favourite literary devices and most common recurring themes.

[2] Personal communication 01/05/2021
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Personal communication 03/06/2021
[5] *Ibid.*

Style

Graham, though a prolific letter writer, didn't start writing until he was in his 40s. In 1880 he wrote to his mother, "I have tried two or three times to make a magazine article out of the Mexican journey, but find I have no talent whatever in that line…I think I have no literary ability whatever." In fact, he never did write the article; that fell to Gabrielle, whose account "*Waggon Train*" was published posthumously.

Graham claimed, "…he wrote not to please his audience, but to please himself" (Fraser, 2002:5). Accordingly, his writing can be "pretty indigestible"[6] at times, as I can attest, but persistence rewards the reader with little gems; gems which Frederick Watson called the "phrase that bites the mind and haunts the memory" (Walker 1982:9).

In terms of influences, most commentators note the influence of Maupassant (and to a lesser extent Turgenev) on Graham's literary style (MaGillivray:2012), and that of Flaubert through his friends W H Hudson and Joseph Conrad, but he made the form his own through a heterogeneity of style, in which the shorter writings defy definition (Watts & Davies 1979:172). Walker states that it is "easier to identify what this special genre of Graham is *not* rather than what it is." (1985:28).

These shorter writings can contain elements of sketches, short stories and even essays, through which they move seamlessly, all in the same work (Watts & Davies, 1979:154) or in the words of Davies, "The essayist squeezes the impressionist, who in turn squeezes the storyteller; the bed is very crowded." (1973:164). According to Walker, it is "His use of casual reminiscences, authorial interpolations and indirections" which creates "a subtle melange of fiction and autobiography that gives Graham's sketches a special flavour." (1985:28) For Davies, it the power to unsettle through his use of planned indirection and surprising changes of emphasis that characterise Graham's best writing (1973:174).

James Steel Smith described the disconcerting uniqueness of the shorter writings thus:

"Without themselves seeming accidental or incomplete, Graham's tales leave one with an aftersense of fragmentation, a feeling that the scene or episode or persons described were fragments of something not given and to be guessed at. They are bright, vivid pieces, but their very vividness somehow suggests chipping, a breaking-off in such a way that the ragged edges, clear and hard, promise, without defining, a larger reality - which, too, might be just a large, jagged fragment." (Steel Smith, 1969:61-2).

Graham was extremely well read and, in terms of Scotland, well acquainted with the works of Dunbar, Smollett, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stephenson; Graham perhaps surpassing the last with his "…surprisingly economical approach to descriptions of landscape and atmosphere and people which is very effective".[7]

Graham, despite being hailed as a "Scottish Maupassant" (W M Parker, 1917), was not really an impressionist as, according to Walker, his sketches generally lack plot development but evoke scenes from "his mine of experience and his wealth of memories" (1985:28). Munro concurs. "He simply wrote impressions, which he usually wrapped around some central, often vague narrative or meditation." (2019:202), which Jauncey discerns as "trying to find the universal in the particular" but with such skill that it "is so understated you hardly notice it".[8] Dolan believes that Graham would

[6] James Jauncey, personal communication 21/01/2020
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid*.

have been unable to write the things he did "unless he really had experienced most of what he says he'd experienced, albeit he gives it a dash of spice" (Caledonia TV, 2008).

Graham, like Robert Louis Stephenson, claimed that his works were autobiographical, because the themes, characters and situations were derived from his memories - an anonymous critic, writing in *The Saturday Review* in 1899, described him as having "observed everything with the eye of a lynx and the memory of an elephant" (Munro, 2019:148) - which Graham described as "…being a sort of record of a dream...photographed in youth upon the writer's brain..." ("The Lazo", in *The Ipané* (1898). Elsewhere, he writes, "all writing is a sort of icehouse of the mind" (Preface to *Faith*, 1909). As Watts & Davies note, "His career as a writer, indeed, is the story of an irrepressible rememberer trying to discipline his reminiscences without sacrificing their subversive power." (1979:155). Munro astutely comments that "Graham was not only writing a memoir, these were documentaries, recording the disappearance of a way of life, to make a point about change and loss…" (Munro 2019:135).

Graham himself believed that, *"…*all that a writer does is to dress up what he has seen, or felt, and nothing real is evolved from his own brain, except the words he uses, and the way in which he uses them. Therefore it follows that in writing he sets down (perhaps unwittingly) his life" (Apologia to *His People* 1906). However, as in all autobiographical works, Graham admits, "It is the natural instinct in the majority of men to keep a secret garden in their souls, a something that they do not care to talk about, still less to set down for other members of the herd to trample on." (Preface to *Writ in Sand*, 1932).

Graham saw himself as an essayist first and an impressionist next, believing, as he told Garnett, he had "the storytelling faculty very weakly". Yet there are stories such as *Beattock for Moffat*, *At the Ward Toll,* and *Brought Forward* (Walker 1982:9) or, though not Scottish, *Snaekoll's Saga*, which "show Graham did have a 'storytelling faculty'." (Davies 1973:164).

Davies remarks on the irony that Graham wrote "with acid when sentiment was in vogue" and with nostalgia "when muted realism became popular" and observes that "In writing, as in everything else, Graham always went his own way." (Davies, 1973:175), concluding that "his situation was too individual to form the basis of a school." (*ibid*. p176).

Yet, according to Walker, "…his biting and perceptive remarks on, and his humane treatment of, the victims of time, fate, failure and success give to his sketches an eternal quality…" (1982:28); while, for Jauncey, Graham's "trying to find the universal in the particular feels very modern"[9]. Dolan, pointing out that Don Roberto was born in the mid-19th century, agrees: "His writing is astonishing…there's nothing when you read Cunninghame Graham that doesn't sound relevant to the 21st century…that's extraordinary" (Caledonia TV, 2008).

Literary Devices

Graham relies on a few well-tried devices, the most popular being his impressionistic descriptions which evoke a scene or a character, but then lapse into another favourite, the embedding of a story within the tale as in *Miss Christian Jean*, *Christie Christison* or *Fidelity*. In the first sketch, Don Roberto is host to a local bonnet-laird, who recounts how he had to encoffin his aunt; in the second, a group of expats are drinking in a hotel in Buenos Aires, when one, a Scot, tells the story of the ups and downs of his marriage; and in the last, Don Roberto is a guest whose host gives him an account of his coming across an injured curlew. All three start with a detailed setting of the scene and the

[9] Personal communication 21/01/2020

people before moving on to the story within the tale and, in the case of the first two, ending with the storyteller departing, while in the last, there is a typical authorially silent finish (Watts & Davies, 1979:157), or one of his "conclusions in the minor key" as Neil Munro called them (1933:306), of which Jauncey comments, "the vignette ends without resolution…[which] though some may find it unsatisfying is actually true to life."[10].

Another favourite device is "mist", a word which permeates many of his Scottish sketches (Munro,2019:147). Mist is a common phenomenon in the District of Menteith, the location of Gartmore, and Sir Walter Scott frequently alludes to it in his novel, *A Legend of Montrose*, which is set in Menteith.

Graham first uses this device in his 1906 sketch *The Grey Kirk*, in which a village is described as "shut out from all the world by mist and moors". Graham often uses mist to "cast out the uncomfortable world of modern reality" (Munro, 2019:147) as it utterly transforms the landscape making it unfamiliar and, in his later works, otherworldly, as in this example: "Inside the wreaths of mist another world seems to have come into existence" (*Mist in Menteith*). Munro believes that mist provided Graham "with a key to his subconscious, and is a realistic (non-invented) vehicle to express his imaginings to his readers, because its presence blurred the difference between the present and the past, reality, and unreality." (2019:147). One such imagining is contained in Graham's Scottish story, *At the Ward Toll*, in which he encounters in the mist a Spanish sailor from Vigo, Ildefonso López by name, who "had lose the ship in Liz and walka Glasco".

Another favoured technique is "the 'conjecture' approach" (Walker, 1985:28). Graham, when confronted by some unknown, will ponder on how the person came to be in such a situation, what they might have felt or what his family may have thought (*ibid*.). An example of this may be found in *A Princess*, in which he wonders how the Polynesian princess met and fell in love with a Scottish mariner: "His steel-blue eyes may have appeared to her as hardly mortal; his rough and hairy hands, symbols of strength embodified; his halting speech, a homage to her charms."

Graham also peppers his sketches with proverbs, popular sayings and foreign words, which he often seems to assume readers will understand. For example, he uses Latin phrases such as *adscripti glebae* (tied to the land) in *Miss Christian Jean* or *perfervidum ingenium* (ardent disposition) in *Brought Forward*; the French *faux bossu* (false hump) in *Heather Jock*; the Italian *non ragioniam* (let's not think) in *The Grey Kirk* or *dove il dolce Dorico risuona* (where sweet Doric rings out) in *A Pakeha*; and, of course, with far too many examples to cite, words and phrases in Gaelic, in which he often makes errors (Walker, 1982) *e.g.* the spelling of *Cha Till Mi Tuilleadh*. However, Spanish, which abounds elsewhere in his writings, is here notable in the paucity with which he uses it[11]. There are only three examples. All three (*ajarafe* (an extensive piece of high, flat ground) in "The Grey Kirk", *parameras* (the plains outside Ávila) in "Salvagia" and *lazaretto* (a quarantine hospital[12]) in "At the Ward Toll") refer to Spanish landscapes; the first two through their similarity or contrast with the part of Scotland he is describing, while the last figures in his memories of Vigo which were provoked by his meeting with the Spanish sailor.

Furthermore, he spices his sketches with "interjections and comments on life and death, religion and politics, and very often the triple-headed monster of civilisation-commerce-progress" (Walker 1985:28), which frequently impedes, if not disrupts, the narrative flow. However, as Munro

[10] Personal communication 21/01/2020

[11] The exception, of course, is *Christie Christison*, which is set in Argentina, where it provides verisimilitude.

[12] Walker is mistaken in his assertion that this was an area outside the harbour where ships were quarantined. The Lazareto de Vigo was a Quarantine Hospital on the Isla de San Simón: http://lazaretodemahon.es/lazareto-de-vigo-isla-de-san-simon/.

observes, “it was not simply a hatred of civilisation, but civilisation’s demands for conformity, not only across cultures, but on the individual…” (2019:186).

Recurring Themes

A major theme is success versus failure: “Success, how few can carry it off even with decency?…For those who fail, for those who have sunk still battling beneath the muddy waves of life, we keep our love…” (Preface to *Success*); or, in Scottish settings, “The fight had gone against them, but they still had the recollection of the struggle, for all except the baser sort of men fight not to win, but simply for the fight” (*A Braw Day*); or this from *The Beggar Earl*, “No mere success, the most vulgar thing that a man can endure would have been so lasting, for men resent success and strive to stifle it under applause, lauding the result, the better to belittle the means.”. Thus, for Graham, honourable failure was far more interesting than success which “should be its own reward.” (Preface to *Success*).

For Graham, progress was closely aligned to success as it led to the obliteration of historic landscapes such as the Scottish Highlands or the Argentinian Pampas and, along with them, the customs, cultures and primitive virtues of vanishing types such as the pre-Culloden Scot, the Argentinian Gaucho or the American Indian. In his “*Apologia*” to his anthology *Progress*, he writes: “But as the Goddess Progress, who from the horse-dung of the streets ascended up on high, and sits enthroned within the hearts of all her votaries, beckons us onward, we must arise and follow…and all unite to glorify success.” That is not to say that Graham romanticised or sentimentalised the past as his sketches often depict the harshness of life with a detached realism as in *A Survival*: “Before the fire two ragged children sat, searching each other’s heads as diligently as if they’d been scriptures…Close to the house a tall, athletic man, half drunk (but not so drunk as to have lost his wits)…stood looking at a woman and a girl planting potatoes” and Graham concludes that, unlike the cant of the landlord, Inverquharity, “Sloth was not altogether lovely, but prating progress worse.”

Transience is another theme which permeates his writing: “Nothing is stable…men come and go, the Saxon speech replaces Gaelic; even traditions insensibly are lost…Life, faiths, ideals, all have changed.” (*Mist in Menteith*), change which, for Graham, was always for the worse. Elsewhere he writes, “life is but a long farewell” (*A Braw Day*). This theme became more melancholic and reflective as he became older “…all men born of woman are but brief shadows, strutting their little hour on an unstable stage…” (Preface to Mirages).

Graham and the Kailyard School of Literature

Graham was one of the earliest to “seriously challenge the predominance of the Kailyard School of writing” (Davies, 1973:156), which included authors such as J M Barrie, S R Crockett and Ian Maclaren. Though J H Millar was the first to make a major critical attack on the genre in his article *The Literature of the Kailyard* in 1895, Graham preceded George Douglas Brown’s 1901 novel, *The House with the Green Shutters*, with his three early sketches *A Survival*, *Salvagia* (Gart-na-cloich being a thinly disguised Gartmore), and *Heather Jock*, which were all published in the Saturday Review in 1896, and republished in his second anthology, *The Ipané* in 1899. Yet, these “attacks seem to have made little impression at the time.” (Davies, 1973:157), perhaps because their style and content were secondary to the polemicist message. (Munro, 2019:112).

Graham had a number of objections to the Kailyard literature, which can be summarised as a “narrowness of mind and vision, as well as to self-congratulatory and misleading smugness” along

with “false and unimaginative dreams of grandeur” (Davies, 1973:163), all of which, sadly, we saw anew in those who advocated Brexit.

Graham’s first objection was to their sentimentality. In a letter to Edward Garnett in May 1898, he wrote, “In dealing with Scotland and things Scotch one should avoid sentiment, it destroyed those awful McCrocketts, and Larens, and is a snare to the pious chanting, hypocritical hard, but at the same time sentimental, and whisky loving Scotchman. I am a Scotchman” (Davies 1973:157-158). In contrast, particularly in his middle period, Graham’s writing displays a detached realism in place of diatribe, while still countering the sentimentalism with comments such as “No one in his wildest fits of patriotism ever talked of Merrie Scotland.” (“De Heretico Comburendo”, in *Father Archangel of Scotland*).

A second objection, was to the jargon with which the Kailyard characters were forced to speak. Though not a speaker of Scots himself, he was “quite at home in it” (MacGillivray, 2021) and, thus, his use of Scots in his writings is authentic (see for example the near monologues in *A Pakeha* or *M’Kechnie v. Scaramanga*), unlike that of the Kailyard against which he wrote, “that all sufficient cloak of Kailyard Scotch spoken by no one under heaven, which of late has plagued us.” His view is further illustrated in passages from his sketch, *A Survival*, “…and today a Scotchman stands confessed a sentimental fool…oppressed with the tremendous difficulties of the jargon he is bound to speak, and above all weighed down with the responsibility of being Scotch.”; lamenting, “…the fact remains that the modern Scottish writer to be popular in England, must write in a dialect his readers cannot understand.” (Munro, 2019:123-124). This highlighted a key fact: the Kailyard School did not write for “home consumption, but [to] sell in England and America, where I understand, they touch the cords of the great national Heart, and loose the strings of the great National Pocket.” (*ibid*. p126).

Which leads to his third objection. Graham accused the Kailyarders of “selling shoddy goods” as in order to write they must “treat entirely of weavers, idiots, [and] elders of churches” (*A Survival*), or as George Blake alleged, it was almost impossible to tell from their fiction “that anyone lived anywhere but in farms and villages” (Davies, 1973: 159). Graham complained, “…not a henwife, shepherd, ploughman or anyone who thinks in ‘guid braid Scots’, would recognise himself dressed in the motley which it has been the pride of kailyard writers to bestow. Neither would I have Englishmen believe that the entire Scotch nation is composed of ministers, elders, and maudlin whiskified physicians…” (*A Survival*).

As a self-conscious Scot, who wanted his country to be well-regarded, he feared that such sentimental stereotyping would lead to contempt for Scotland (Davies 1973:159). And he was presciently right as this narrow definition of Scottishness, the “Shortbread Tin” image, persists abroad to this day and is used politically to ridicule Scottish Independence.

The Kailyarders were all closely linked to the Free Kirk and, thus, their attitude to the churches was one of affection, whereas for Graham “the kirk [was] a divisive and destructive force” (Davies, 1973:161). The Calvinist’s dour, flinty faith – a faith, which Graham described as “*black narrow* [and] *anti-human*” (*At Dalmary*), churchgoing having ousted charity (Davies, 1973:165), and regarding the poverty and misery of the east end of Glasgow *“as a thing ordained by God.*” (*Heather Jock*) – was utterly repugnant to him.

We can catch a glimpse of this affection and Graham’s antagonism by contrasting a passage from Crockett’s The Stickit Minister with a passage from Graham’s *Salvagia* written just three years later.

First, from Crockett:

“The Sabbath morning broke over the farm like a benediction.

The old Cameronian kirk sits on a hill, and is surrounded by trees, a place both bieldy and heartsome. The only thing that the Cameronians seriously felt the want of was a burying ground round about it."

Now from Graham:

"Two churches and two public houses, and a feud between the congregations of each church as bitter as that between the clients of the rival inns…Much faith and little charity, the tongue of every man wagging against his neighbour like a bell-buoy on a shoal…The deity worshipped there is Dagon, or some superfetated Moloch born in Geneva."

As Davies remarks, "One may indeed wonder if these two authors are talking about the same institution in the same country." (1973:161). Of course, neither depiction was wholly accurate: Graham sardonically caricatures the ugliness and poverty of rural life to counter the Kailyard School's burying it under a mawkish, faux picturesqueness.

Graham also objected to the narrowness and the hypocrisy of the Calvinistic religion. In *Salvagia*, he writes, "a Bible ever ready on a table for advertisement, as when a minister or charitable lady calls, and the cry is heard of "Jeanie, rax the Bible doon, and pit the whiskey in the aumrie."

But such hypocrisy is perhaps best exemplified in a passage from Graham's sketch, *Christie Christison*, which is set in Buenos Aires. Christison, a former Greenland whaler, first tells how having suffered shipwreck, he refused to sell his wife, Jean, to an Indian despite the good price offered. He then goes on to relate how he had rescued her from a Peterhead brothel after she had run away because he had "gied her a bit daud or two". He recounts how, on the Sabbath, he arrived at a brothel after seven months at sea. While he is waiting for "a girl" to be sent to him, he starts whistling a tune. When the Madam, Maggie, hears it, she flings open the door "looking awfu' mad. 'Christie' she skirls, 'I'll hae na whistling in ma hoose, upon the Sabbath Day I canna hae ma lassies learned sich ways, so stop it or get out." And after Christison reasonably points out that whistling can hardly hurt the girls, given their profession, Maggie counters with "…whilst I live na one shall harm their souls, puir lambies, wi' whistlin' on His day.", Graham revelled in the absurdity. In typical fashion, the sketch ends with tale told and the raconteur leaving his companions, in this case, to go home to his wife.

According to Davies, "In *Salvagia* Graham looks in fury at the cruel world [but] the world of *A Survival* is filled with mutually incomprehensible people whose absurdity is comic." (1973:166). Walker, alternatively, regards these sketches as treating the defects of the Scottish character and the abuses and vices of national life with "vitriolic realism" (1984:113). However, Munro points out that these were not, as Walker imagined, "bitter portrayals" that expressed negative feelings towards Scotland but sardonic parodies. (2019:202).

It should be remembered that up until this time Graham' writings had been political polemics, sarcastic parodies of Victorian Society, in which "the style and even the content remained secondary to the message" (Munro, 2019:112). Throughout his life, Graham was "a fierce critic of imperialism, racism and cruelty to any human or animal" (MacGillivray, 2012:1) and equally strong in his denunciations of "hypocrisy and poverty and inequality" (*ibid.* p3).

We see this in his maiden speech to the House of Commons, in which he attacked the Government declaiming, "Not one word was said in the Speech about lightening the taxation under which Her Majesty's lieges at present suffer…not one word to bridge over the awful chasm existing between the poor and the rich; not one word of kindly sympathy for the sufferers from the present commercial and agricultural depression" and denounced Britain as a society "…in which capital and luxury made a heaven for 30,000 and a hell for 30,000,000"; we see it in his pamphlet *A Plea for the Chainmakers* and in his article *The Bloody City* (Munro, 2017). Therefore, as Munro notes, it is unsurprising that his

first two Scottish sketches used the same scathing satire to subvert the Kailyard representation of Scottish Rural Life (2019:202).

In *A Survival* and *Heather Jock*, Graham attacks the protestant work ethic and bourgeois respectability inherent in the Kailyard literature by portraying "a semi-drunken Highland crofter [who] cared but little for hard work" (Munro, 2019:125) in the first, and "a wandering singer and buffoon" (Davies1973:168) "who lived life on his own terms" (Munro, 2019:186) in the second.

Heather Jock seems to be someone who Don Roberto had actually seen, indeed been entertained by. His portrayal of him, which is undergirded by his respect for "a simple way of life now gone and the disappearance of old values" (Walker, 1982:99), gives a startling alternative to the Kailyard School's depiction of Scottish people, but without resorting to the diatribe of *A Survival* or the cynicism of *Salvagia*.

The sketch starts with a detailed description of this eccentric, his attire and gait which finishes, "he seemed a sort of cross between a low-class Indian, such as one sees about a town in South Dakota, and an orang-utang *(*sic*)* which somehow had got itself baptised." Davies asserts that it is the very grotesqueness of the description and a sense of curiosity rather than pity which saves the sketch from being patronising (1973: 168) and that, through the insertion of South Dakota, it is clear we are not being shown Heather Jock but "Graham looking at Heather Jock" (*ibid*.). This is affirmed when Graham, using one of his favourite devices, stacks his memories in transparent layers (Davies, 1973:169) and, mimicking the way in which one memory leads to another, smoothly switches from essayist to narrator. Graham darts from his Scottish childhood recollections to an entirely different memory in Argentina, in which he muses, without sentiment, on the dark irony that the bringing of the news of Heather Jock's death had cost the life of a postman. Davies notes that "although there is no reason to believe that [the sketch] is not autobiographical*, Heather Jock* has the uncertainty of fiction, rather than the certainty of fact" (1973:170).

Even had Graham written nothing else, his initiating new techniques and fresh attitudes in an attempt to demonstrate new ways of writing about Scotland (Davies, 1973:156) should have assured him an honoured place in Scottish Literature.

His Middle and Late Periods

Walker believes that, by his middle period, Graham had "purged himself of his early virulence and settled down to a more realistic portrayal" (Walker, 1985:29) of both places and people. Watts claims that, despite these changes in style and subject matter, which he conjectures were related to the sale of Gartmore (Watts, 1983:23), Graham "showed little development as an essayist and short-story writer." (Watts, 1969:30). However, Munro postulates that the distinctive post 1900 sketches also "in their own more subtle way, were an antidote to Kailyard writing" (Munro, 2019:131).

Graham now tended to focus on places he knew well, mainly from the District of Menteith. This is reflected in such sketches *Mist in Menteith*, *The Grey Kirk*, *The Craw Road* or *The Beggar Earl* (to whom we will return presently), in which he gives detailed descriptions like this one from *Snow in Menteith*:

"Woods had turned into masses of raw cotton, and trees to pyramids of wool, with diamonds here and there stuck in the fleece. The trunks of beeches stood out black upon the lee, and on the weather side were coated thick with snow as hard as sugar on a cake."

The Beggar Earl had made an earlier appearance in *Notes on the District of Menteith* and clearly fascinated Graham. Like Doughty Deeds, The Beggar Earl, who was Graham's first cousin 5xremoved,

is one of the legendary characters of Cunninghame Graham family history, and like Graham himself, was an eccentric. This sketch allowed Graham to give more detail to his pen-portrait and relive, through the Beggar Earl's wanderings, the ride from Gartmore to Ardoch that he, Don Roberto, knew so intimately:

"So through the valley of Menteith, along the Endrick, and by Loch Lomond side, past the old church at Kilmaronock, through Gartocharn, and up and down the Leven, he took his pilgrimage.";

a ride which Graham, not only no longer made, but which was even avoided after his death by his funeral entourage.

The Beggar Earl, William Graham by name, was the younger son of William Graham of Gallingad, a Writer to the Signet. He was born around 1704 and studied medicine at Edinburgh. In 1744, he took it into his head that he was rightful Earl of Menteith and accordingly presented himself at the election of Scottish peers claiming "the right to vote". He voted five times at the Election of Peers of Scotland between 1744 and 1761, after which, in 1762, his assumption of the dignities was prohibited by order of the House of Lords. He, however, continued to use the title for the remainder of his life. Rather than admitting that The Beggar Earl had been forced to abandon his claim, Graham romanticises his leaving Edinburgh by attributing it to weariness and disenchantment, writing, "Then disillusion fell upon him, and he withdrew to beg his bread and wander up and down his earldom and the neighbouring lands" (*The Beggar Earl*). It was his sad fate to die in a ditch at Bonhill on 30th June, 1783.

Typically, Graham, records the Beggar Earl's death without sentimentality, though he uses artistic licence to change the season from summer to winter to heighten the dramatic effect. "All night it snowed, and in the morning, when the heritors were coming to the old kirk of Bonhill parish, they found him with his back against a dry-stone dyke, and his beloved parchments in hand." Equally characteristically, Graham does not finish there as most authors would, but adds a couple of sentences about the Beggar Earl's old white pony.

Munro surmises that Graham's change of focus was due to "ancestral guilt" and his "own loss of 'mutuality' with the neighbourhood and his past." (2019:131). Such guilt and loss are probably best reflected in one of Graham's most obviously autobiographical sketches, *A Braw Day*, which describes his last, interminable day at Gartmore House.

Graham opens the sketch with the memory of how on signing the deed of sale, he suddenly realised how much a part of his identity the house was, and despite the inevitability of the sale, laments "Still he felt like a murderer."

The removal of their possessions develops the theme of loss, "By degrees, the familiar objects, that time and sentiment make almost sacred and as if portions of ourselves, had been packed up…The owner and his wife, after their years of struggle, had felt at first as if their ship had got into port; and then as the days went by, and by degrees, the house which they had cared for more than their own lives, grew empty and more empty, till it was left a shell, now found that their port had vanished, and they were left without an anchorage." (*A Braw Day*).

His sense of betrayal goes beyond his ancestors, beyond even the house, to include even the trees: "To bid good-bye to buildings and familiar scenes seemed natural, as life is but a long farewell; but to look for the last time on the trees – trees that his ancestors had planted, and by which he himself recognised the seasons…that seemed a treason to them, for they had always been so faithful, putting out their leaves in Spring, standing out stark and rigid in the winter and murmuring in the breeze."

I think one can still feel the pain he felt writing this sketch a dozen years after the event, despite his distancing it through use of the third person. The sale of Ardoch in 1987, where I spent a great deal of my childhood, though it was never my home, provoked similar feelings of loss for me and, despite Tommy Mackay's kind invitation, I have never felt able to go back, preferring to preserve my memories of it as it was. Yet, Graham saves the sketch from becoming mawkish by not ending with his sense of guilt, loss or deep sorrow, but with subtle irony, through his recollection of the farewell words of a tenant, the only Scots in the whole piece, "Laird, it looks like a braw day."

However, not all of Graham's Scottish sketches were set in Scotland. His sketches of the wandering Scot are set in "the areas he knew best, Latin America and North Africa, in particular" (Walker, 1982:135), with, for example, *Christie Christison* being set in Argentina, but not confined to those areas, *e.g*. *A Convert* which is set in Angola. These tales express the essential Scottishness of the central characters that has survived their being transplanted into a very different milieu, albeit with a concept of Scotsmen, which according to Neil Munro, is outdated (1933:305). Munro cites the example of the missionary Rev. Archibald Macrae in A *Convert*, complaining that Graham had made him "think and speak as if he were a contemporary of John Knox", declaring that Scotsmen like that "have not existed in Scotland for some generations back." (*ibid*. p306).

Graham also drew on his memories of people he had known in his youth; people who, as he writes in his Preface to *Thirteen Stories* (1900), "…for the most part have disappeared …". They included friends, as with Laird Wallace in *Miss Christian Jean*; characters like Campbell in *A Pakeha*; and vanishing pre-Culloden types such as the tenant in *A Retainer*, whom he describes thus:

"Huge and athletic as he seemed to me in later life, in childhood he loomed gigantic, and illness, death or age appeared in his case as impossible as they would have been to a mountain…".

He also wrote of customs and events which were dying out as in *The Falkirk Tryst*, which describes the annual meeting of Highland horse drovers with their Lowland and English buyers, of which Graham laments, "Well, well, the Tryst, that is as I knew it in my boyhood, has slipped away into the realms of old, forgotten far-away memories."

Fraser comments that Graham *"meditated much upon death, not in any morbid way, but with the realism of a man prepared to face facts*" (2002:117) and that his nephew (and heir, Adm Sir Angus Cunninghame Graham) recollected that Don Roberto had a "liking for attending every available funeral" (*ibid*.). It is not surprising then that many sketches deal with death as in *Ha Til Mi Tuliadh* - "I will return no more" - the death of a hereditary boatman's daughter); *Beattock for Moffat*, in which an ailing Scot, accompanied by his Cockney wife and his brother, returns to Scotland to die); or funerals as in *At Dalmary* (a ploughman's funeral), parts of which Munro claims are worthy of Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Munro, 2019:148); *With the North East Wind* (the funeral of Keir Hardie); or, though not a Scottish sketch, *With the North West Wind*, his account of the funeral of William Morris, of which Bernard Shaw supposedly remarked, "He'd wipe the floor with all of us if he often wrote like that" (Harris, 1931:129).

In light of this, it is not strange then that Graham had "a natural penchant for graveyards, monuments and tombs" (Walker, 1985:30), which is reflected in his middle period by sketches like *A Princess* (a story woven around the Buckhaven tomb of "Sinakalula, Princess of Raratonga…wife of Andrew Brodie, Mariner")[13], and in his late period by *Inch Cailleach* (/kaLʲəx/a description of a nun's cemetery) and *Euphrasia* (a description of a war memorial) both of which were written in the last decade of his life.

[13] The tomb no longer exists as the church was demolished in the 1960s, along with the old town, and the rubble used to fill in the harbour. https://www.allaboutthescones.com/stuarts-buckhaven-cafe/10/2015/

Graham's late sketches are marked by "*a softness of touch here, a yearning for happiness long buried in the mists of Celtic Scotland…a land of islands and fairies, a source of myths and dreams*…" (Walker, 1985:30) which, according to Munro, possibly following GoGwilt, is "*nostalgic rather than sentimental*" (2019:137). Munro concludes that even if Graham had written nothing else, these nostalgic 'sketches' should have been conspicuous "as a major contribution to Scotland's literary heritage." (*ibid*. p202).

Despite Walker's assertion that Graham's reputation as a Scottish writer rests on his Scottish Sketches, and Graham's own belittling the work, it would be remiss of me not to discuss his first, and only wholly Scottish work, *Notes on the District of Menteith*, to which I turn now.

Notes on the District of Menteith, for Tourists and Others

This curious little book (just 6 chapters) has, as a prefix to Chapter 1, the title *Shadows of Menteith*, leading me to wonder whether this was in fact Graham's original title for the book, but which had been rejected by the publishers in favour of one they believed more marketable. And this slim volume, as *Notes on the District of Menteith*, did sell well, being reprinted just 2 months after its publication in 1895 and "going through a number of editions in the years that followed" (MacGillivray & MacIntyre, 2011:3).

Certainly, the volume is seriously defective as a guidebook (MacGillivray & MacIntyre, 2011:4); its scope too narrow, its focus too much on the distant past, and the digressions too idiosyncratic. MacGillivray is surely right when he calls this a "prentice work" (*ibid*. p5).

But before we dismiss it, as did Graham himself, in its pages we find in embryo many of his later writings. His "tendency to overlap the genres" (Walker 1982:10), which is such a feature of his Scottish Sketches (and other writings), is evident in its pages. The key themes are all there too: the detailed descriptions of landscapes and people; the theme of failure being more interesting than dull success, as reflected by the misfortunes of the Menteith Earls and the Beggar Earl; his riling against the effects of progress; detailed descriptions of vanishing types like Hugh Graham or "going about bodies" like the poacher, "Trootie", to whom he dedicates the book and devotes a significant section of Chapter 5; his interest in burial places; and the odd gibe at the Kailyard School; all delivered with his characteristic, witty irony.

Only mist is missing, though Graham introduces it in his Preface to the 3rd edition (1907) writing, "I said the District of Menteith seemed to me 'shadowy'; now after long reflection, all I can say is that I find it full of mist*."*

Graham was alluding to the opening sentence of Chapter 1, "Menteith has always seemed to me a shadowy district", which he bookends with shadows in his wistful final paragraphs:

"The motley elements which went to make the history of Menteith are gone and buried, but their shadows still remain…, Could we but see a shadow of the future, and compare it with the shadows of the past, why then, indeed, we might know something of Menteith and other districts where the shadows play, coming from life, from nowhere, and returning into nothing."

The alternative title "Shadows of Menteith", consequently, is clearly a far more appropriate one for Graham's writing, which is "a kind of meditation on the shadowy, transitory nature of human life within a particular landscape" and, therefore, firmly anchors it within the context of his later anthologies of essays, stories and sketches (MacGillivray & MacIntyre, 2011:5).

Conclusion

I hope that this brief excursion through Cunninghame Graham's Scottish writings has demonstrated his love for his native land, which both drew him and repelled him. On the one hand, there is the melancholy and increasing nostalgia for a mythical Celtic past that pervades his Scottish works; on the other hand, he dreamt of "a non-historical, non-political Scotland" (Walker 1984:112) that one day would become an independent country of which he could be justifiably proud; a paradox encapsulated by William Power, "Scotland for him was not an old song ended, but a new song for the Lord" (NLS).

For Power, "Cunninghame Graham was a cosmopolitan and also a Scottish Patriot" (NLS), an epithet which was repeated on his Memorial (originally erected in Dumbarton, but now at Gartmore) with the words: "Patriotic Scot and Citizen of the World". And this duality is clearly depicted throughout all his Scottish writings.

Graham, though cosmopolitan, always considered himself a Scot and was extremely conscious of his roots and, once having understood his origins, it was important to him, in an attempt to synthesise his Scottish and foreign experiences (Davies, 1973:176), "to set them against the whole of his experience" (*ibid*. p177). This is very evident in his many digressions.

Moreover, he muses as to whether a Scot could ever be a renegade as "he would remain a Scot of Scots no matter how he changed…so deep into his being has bitten the affection for the life, the customs, the mists, the mountains, and traditions of the land which he has taken good care to leave." ('A Renegade' in *Progress*). And we instantly recognise that he is not just describing an archetype, but ironically also himself.

Despite being "someone who was half inside and half outside the rural environment [he] described" (Munro, 2019:202), Graham had "an easy familiarity with, and a shrewd appreciation of, the regions [he] described, [and] an intense identification with the life and the people depicted" (Walker, 1985:30) which, as he saw them vanishing before him, he yearned to record, not just for his own pleasure, but for posterity. A feat, I hope you'll agree, he achieved superbly.

MacDiarmid, writing for the centenary of Graham's birth, proclaimed, "He was indeed a prince and paladin of our people…There is no finer figure in all the millenary pageant of Scotland's writers." (MacDiarmid 1952:40).

I will leave the final word to John Walker: "To render in aesthetic terms the way of life, character and metaphysical concerns of a nation is no mean achievement. Through his Scottish writings Graham has performed this feat admirably for his country, which has not always appreciated him or his work." (1985:30-31).

W R B Cunninghame Graham

Segovia, June 2021

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