

John Galt Memorial Lecture, Greenock, 4th May 2018

History, Narrative and Language in the Fiction of John Galt

I am by no means an expert on John Galt, but I am an admirer. I have read most of the work for which he is remembered, although he is not remembered very well or very widely. In fact, the name 'John Galt' is far better known now as that of the protagonist of the American writer Ayn Rand's 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Apparently, Rand did *not* take the name from our John Galt, although given Galt's energy and sense of purpose, and his appetite for commercial and entrepreneurial schemes which seemed not to diminish despite repeated failures, one could see how he might have been a model for Rand's intention to 'show how desperately the world needs prime movers and how viciously it treats them.'

Rand's brand of right-wing libertarian capitalism does not appeal to me, but much of what I read in the Scottish John Galt's work does. I am most interested in three things: how he deals with history and the passage of time, his innovative approach to narrative perspective, and his bold and confident use of Scots. I'll try to say a bit about each of these aspects of his work in the course of this talk.

I first came upon John Galt when I was in my twenties, madly trying to catch up on the literature of Scotland, which my entire school and university education had neglected to tell me existed. A girlfriend in my last year as a history undergraduate at Edinburgh (I studied no Scottish history either, unless it was tangential to, or affected, what was called 'British' but was really English history with peripheral Celtic bits tacked on as required) was appalled that I had not

read Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* – I put that right and rattled through *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite* in quick succession and began to suspect that there was a wider context to these works of which I was only dimly aware. But by then I was also reading Hugh MacDiarmid and that was when the doors opened and I started to work my way back through the ages. On this journey I was guided by really important single-volume surveys such as Alan Bold's *Modern Scottish Literature*, published in 1983, and Rory Watson's *The Literature of Scotland* published the following year.

Quite possibly it was Rory's section on John Galt that first led me to *Annals of the Parish*. That year, 1984, I went back to Edinburgh University, embarking on a PhD under the supervision of the late Nicholas Phillipson. This started out as a very vague plan to explore Scottish historiography across the ages, but Nick's particular interest was the Scottish Enlightenment so I sat in on his 4th Year Honours course, and became interested in the historical ideas of David Hume, Adam Smith, William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, John Millar and others, with their emphasis on the idea of human society developing through successive stages. These, usually four, stages were not uniform across different cultures but were nevertheless identifiable: the first stage of hunting was succeeded by that of pastoralism, then by agriculture and finally by commercial society as exemplified across Europe in the 18th century. In each stage certain things changed: the mobility of property and the forms it took, the relationship between production and consumption, the codification of social interactions through laws, customs, markets and religious practices, and so on. Delineating these stages of progress in different ages and different parts of the world necessarily involved a great deal of theory or conjecture, and required much thinking, both speculative and evidence-based, on for example the development

of language, economy and morality. Such ideas challenged not only the primacy of history as straight narrative – recording the successive acts, decisions and conflicts of great men – but also the notion of there being fixed moral values or universal truths (mainly derived from religion). It could also of course lead to determinism of a different kind – that historical development would always follow a pattern as a result of inevitable economic or social behaviours or attributes of human nature – something which we now know to be not only incorrect but capable of leading people into truly hideous errors.

My reading then brought me up against Walter Scott, successor to these intellectuals and inheritor of their ideas, who moulded them into fiction and gave us the historical novel, one of the great cultural outcomes of the Scottish bit of the wider Enlightenment. That Scott had taken to heart the previous generation's historical ideas is clearly evident in the first chapter of the second volume of his child's history of Scotland *Tales of a Grandfather*, entitled 'Progress of Civilisation in Society'. Scott's grandson Johnnie Lockhart loved most of these tales, but drew the line at that chapter, letting his grandfather know that he 'disliked it extremely and that he desired him never to say anything more about it'. Tedious though the chapter must have been to a child of eight, it is a fascinating exposition of Scott's attitude to history and social development. Scott's oeuvre, anyway, became the subject of my PhD.

Scott lived from 1771 to 1832, and it soon became obvious that, if I was looking at Scott and the way he explored history through fiction, then I would also have to get to know more about his near-contemporaries James Hogg (1770–1835) and John Galt, who was born in 1779 and died, just short of his sixtieth birthday, in 1839. I read, in addition to *Annals of the Parish*, *The Provost*, *The Ayrshire*

Legatees and *The Entail*, and found in these books that Galt was a more literal, less romantic interpreter of the ideas of the Enlightenment historians than Scott ever was.

In his book, Rory Watson writes of John Galt's fiction: 'Galt did not consider these books to be true novels, preferring to call them sketches, observations or "theoretical histories" which outlined the manners and the changes in provincial society, often through the voice of a single character.... Galt has the eye of a social historian, and these amusing chronicles accumulate a host of minor but significant details in fashion, economics, manners and politics as the old ways of speaking and living gradually changed during the second half of the eighteenth century. Galt's intention was to chart the recent past just as Scott claimed to have done with *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*, and it can be argued that his diaristic approach allowed him to do a better job.' In the 2007, much enlarged edition of his book, Rory adds, '...allowed him to do a better job without (apparently) imposing his own voice on that of his characters. In this respect Galt, like Hogg, shows a clear interest in plural voices and limited and multiple narratives.'

That's a pretty accurate summation of Galt, I think, but let's explore his approach and attitude to history and time, his narrative technique and his use of Scots, in more detail.

It is interesting that a version of Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, which was eventually published in revised form in 1821, had been written eight years earlier. Galt's original title was *The Pastor*, and he had offered it to the Edinburgh-based publisher of the *Edinburgh Review* and of Walter Scott, Archibald Constable. But

Constable rejected it. 'I was informed,' Galt later wrote, 'that Scottish novels would not succeed [*Waverley* would not be published until the following year] and in consequence I threw the manuscript aside.' (Oddly enough, I experienced a similar rejection with my novel *The Fanatic*, which was knocked back by every Scottish publisher I submitted it to, including one Edinburgh house which told me it was 'too Scottish'. It was eventually published by a London house.) It was the success of the serialisation in Blackwood's Magazine of his comedies *The Ayrshire Legatees* and *The Steamboat* which was the breakthrough for Galt, and led to the redrafted *Annals* being published to great acclaim in 1821.

Annals of the Parish, then, had as long a gestation as *Waverley*, the early chapters of which Scott also laid aside for eight years before completing it and changing the world of fiction for ever. They are both 'Scottish novels', unmistakably so, which 'succeeded' despite Constable's earlier doubts, they both open in the 18th century several decades before the time of their publication, and both purport to show how greatly Scottish society has changed in the interim, but there the similarities end. Galt covers fifty years of history, ending ten years before the date of publication, whereas Scott sets *Waverley* seventy years back, covers about eighteen months and only leaps forward to the present in a 'postscript' to the action, in which he makes the suspect claim, only lightly evidenced, that 'there is no European nation which, within the course of half a century or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland'. (What, no French Revolution?) Galt actually takes us through the intervening years one by one, showing change through the eyes of an Ayrshire minister at a local rather than national level, and yet the novel is no less 'national' than the Jacobite adventures of Edward Waverley in 1745-6.

As S.R. Crockett wrote in an introduction to *Annals* in the Blackwood 1895-6 edition, Galt can be said to be the first, though pre-Kailyard, writer of the Kailyard School, that 'writing which glorifies the little quietnesses of the towns and villages of Scotland...He was the first that ever burst into that silent sea. For the Wizard was too great, too completely filled to the brim with incident and the creation of character. He could not be "taigled" with a whole book about the uneventful happenings of one small village. Princes had to rebel, and kings to totter, in order that the epic capacity of his pages might be filled.' But whereas sometimes the Kailyarders, writing in the closing years of the Victorian age, were guilty of cloying sentimentality and a highly selective presentation of real Scottish life, Galt is one of the least sentimental writers you will ever read. That is not to say that he is not sympathetic, humorous or humane; he is all of these things; but he is also a realist, who uses fiction to illuminate history; whereas one might say that Scott or Stevenson use history to ignite their fictions.

As an aside, it's worth remembering that another contemporary of Scott, Hogg and Galt was Jane Austen (1775–1817). I mention this because there is an argument for saying that Galt is a bit like a Scottish version of Austen. Don't take my word for it: the late Ursula Le Guin thought there was something in this. Writing just over a year ago, she said:

I started *Annals of the Parish* expecting something like Scott, but very soon I was thinking, 'This is like Jane Austen!' Now that's very rare. Nobody, really, is like Jane Austen. Her style and sensibility were thoroughly of her time and age and class, but her voice and her art are singularly incomparable. And Galt certainly has none of Austen's brilliance, her reach of mind, her diamond flash of wit. But his humour, though softer, is like hers – dry, subtle, morally loaded,

and really funny. It may be characteristically Scottish, but it reminds me of the Western American humour that's so understated, so quiet and peaceful-seeming that you can go on for quite a ways before you realize that you just got shot dead.

Le Guin says something else very apposite in the same article: 'In pure, ignorant defiance of the decree of the Iowa Writing School that controls almost all modern fiction, Galt *tells without showing*.' This may partly explain why Galt became unfashionable and unread in the late 20th century, but it is a key to understanding what he was trying to do – which was emphatically *not* trying to write according to anybody else's rules. And, as I hope to suggest later, far from being antiquated in some respects Galt is startlingly modern in his approach.

In creating the Ayrshire parish of Dalmailing, and then telling its story from 1760 to 1810 through the memory of its minister Micah Balwhidder, Galt was trying to represent, by means of localisation and miniaturisation, wider social, commercial and cultural changes in that period. He uses local, often slightly adapted, place-names, local language and sketches of village and small-town life to illustrate these five decades of changes, and because he does so through the eyes and in the voice of Mr Balwhidder he persuades us that this is a witness's account, not a concoction of John Galt, novelist. Here is an extract from Mr Balwhidder's second year in the parish, 1761 [some Scotticisms underlined]:

Before this year, the drinking of tea was little known in the parish, saving among a few of the heritors' houses on a Sabbath evening; but now it became very rife: yet the commoner sort did not like to let it be known that they were taking to the new luxury, especially the elderly women, who, for that reason, had their plys in out-houses and by-places, just as the witches lang syne had their sinful possets and galravitchings; and they made their tea for common in the pint-stoup, and drank it out of caps and luggies, for

there were but few among them that had cups and saucers. Well do I remember one night in harvest, in this very year, as I was taking my twilight dauner aneath the hedge along the back side of Thomas Thorl's yard, meditating on the goodness of Providence, and looking at the sheaves of victual on the field, that I heard his wife, and two three other carlins, with their Bohea in the inside of the hedge, and no doubt but it had a lacing of the conek, for they were all cracking like pen-guns. But I gave them a sign, by a loud host, that Providence sees all, and it skailed the bike; for I heard them, like guilty creatures, whispering, and gathering up their truck-pots and trenchers, and cowering away home.

Balwhidder is not lacking in self-awareness, nor is he either excessively humble or unconsciously conceited: he is just who he is, and Galt seems to have an uncanny ability to occupy the mindset of a Scottish minister and exclude himself, the author, entirely from the proceedings. It's a brilliant piece of impersonation and the result is a completely credible witness to the passage of 60 years, even though the witness is recording events not year by year, but in retrospect, from the end of his life looking back.

By contrast, on almost the only occasion when Scott employs first-person narrative, in *Rob Roy*, it rapidly becomes obvious that it is not Frank Osbaldistone telling the story as an old man at the tail-end of his long life in about the middle of the 18th century, but an 'author' writing in the year of publication, i.e. 1817. Apart from the first-person singular, there is no discernible difference between the narration of *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of Midlothian*. Galt's approach to fiction is a kind of literary version of method-acting.

In an astonishing burst of literary activity between 1821 and 1823, Galt published *The Ayrshire Legatees*, *Annals of the Parish*, *The Provost*, *Sir Andrew Wylie*, *The Entail*, *The Steamboat*, *The Gathering in the West*, *The Spaewife* and

Ringan Gilhaize. That's eight novels, some of them three volumes in length, in three or four years. I feel queasy just thinking about that.

Galt achieves something similar to the *Annals* with *The Provost*, in which Provost James Pawkie of Gudetown recounts the story of his role as a magistrate over the course of half a century. Pawkie is not as sympathetic a character as Balwhidder: as his name suggests he is both rather pleased with himself and his office, and also craftier than Balwhidder ever could be, more of a fixer and dealer as befits his role in local politics. The humour is therefore more satirical than in the *Annals*, but Pawkie is not a wicked man and again it is through a quiet accumulation of information and anecdotes over a long period of time that the reader becomes acquainted not just, or even primarily, with the Provost's character but with the historical development of the community in which he exists and acts.

In *The Ayrshire Legatees*, Galt used the epistolary form to describe the adventures of the Reverend Dr Zachariah Pringle and his family when they journey to London to collect the legacy left them by a relative who has died in India. Here, the humour is even more pronounced, as the letters written home by the naïve but 'grounded' Pringles reporting on London life together with the commentary on their news from the folk at home, provide sharp social observations both on the metropolis and Scots country life; and in this case, the satire unfolds not in retrospect from a position of old age, but in as it were 'real time' as the letters are written, dispatched and read. So, once again, Galt demonstrates what Rory Watson calls a 'capacity for sympathy with his narrators, even while he uses their voices to cast indirect reflections on their own failings.'

Again, even when he writes a 'big' novel, *The Entail*, with an authorial, third-person narrative written essentially in English, the Scots voices of his characters somehow manage to have a relationship with that narrative in a way that, for example, simply doesn't happen in a Waverley novel. (Scott, interestingly, was of the view that Galt sometimes 'Out-Scottifies the Scotch dialect'.) It can be quite a confrontational relationship, partly because of the strong character of, for example, Leddy Grippy. In fact, sometimes she or another character, such as her husband Claud, have such long speeches that they almost *become* the narrative.

When they reached the office of Mr. Keelevin, they found him with the parchments ready on the desk; but before reading them over, he requested the Laird to step in with him into his inner-chamber.

'Noo, Mr. Walkinshaw,' said he, when he had shut the door, 'I hope ye have well reflected on this step, for when it is done, there's nae power in the law o' Scotland to undo it. I would, therefore, fain hope ye're no doing this out of any motive or feeling of resentment for the thoughtless marriage, it may be, of your auld son.'

Claud assured him, that he was not in the slightest degree influenced by any such sentiment; adding, 'But, Mr. Keelevin, though I employ you to do my business, I dinna think ye ought to catechize me. Ye're, as I would say, but the pen in this matter, and the right or the wrong o't's a' my ain. I would, therefore, counsel you, noo that the papers are ready, that they should be implemented, and for that purpose, I hae brought my twa sons to be the witnesses themselves to the act and deed.'

Mr. Keelevin held up his hands, and, starting back, gave a deep sigh as he said,—'It's no possible that Charlie can be consenting to his own disinheritance, or he's as daft as his brother.'

'Consenting here, or consenting there, Mr. Keelevin,' replied the father, 'ye'll just bring in the papers and read them o'er to me; ye need na fash to ca' ben the lads, for that might breed strife atween them.'

'Na! as sure's death, Mr. Walkinshaw,' exclaimed the honest writer, with a warmth and simplicity rather obsolete among his professional brethren now-a-days, however much they may have been distinguished for those qualities in the innocent golden age; 'Na! as sure's death, Mr. Walkinshaw, this is mair than I hae the conscience to do; the lads are parties to the transaction, by their reversionary interest, and it is but right and proper they should know what they are about.'

'Mr. Keelevin,' cried the Laird, peevishly, 'ye're surely growing doited. It would be an unco-like thing if witnesses to our wills and testaments had a right to ken what we bequeathe. Please God, neither Charlie nor Watty sall be ony the wiser o' this day's purpose, as lang as the breath's in my body.'

'Weel, Mr. Walkinshaw,' replied the lawyer, 'ye'll tak your own way o't, I see that; but, as ye led me to believe, I hope an' trust it's in your power to make up to Charles the consequences of this very extraordinary entail; and I hope ye'll lose no time till ye hae done sae.'

'Mr. Keelevin, ye'll read the papers,' was the brief and abrupt answer which Claud made to this admonition; and the papers were accordingly brought in and read.

To quote Rory Watson again, this 'oral flow, with its encapsulation of regional and national attitudes' is key to Galt's understanding of 'how "voice" reveals character, and how that "local" voice can be used to make double-edged social comments on the wider world of his more sophisticated readers.'

On the other hand, this is how S.R. Crockett sees it: 'When Galt writes in Scots, he writes the language and not the dialect belonging to any particular locality. He is in the main stream. He belongs to the great tradition. Practically, he writes the Scots of Robert Burns....Galt's variety of his Scottish tongue is full of fine old grandmotherly words, marrow with pith and sap. Scott, like Stevenson, wrote his vernacular a little from the heights...but Galt writes his Scots like one who has been cradled in it, who lisped it in the doorways and cried it to other loons across the street. He lived among men and women who habitually spoke it.'

That description seems to contain a contradiction: how can Galt's Scots be both 'doorway, street' Scots and yet not a dialect belonging to any particular locality? Well, here is how Derrick McClure reconciles the apparent difficulties:

'Galt's skill in exploiting the Western Scots dialect for literary effect was acknowledged from the first appearance of his novels. However, his great

achievement in the field of verbal realism is far greater than simply a fluent, lively and philologically accurate representation of Ayrshire speech...’ What he is doing, McClure argues, is reflecting the facility of certain members of the society he is describing to switch or modulate ‘through various degrees of “Scotsness” from unadulterated Ayrshire dialect to quasi-literary English.’ Because so many of his novels are first-person narratives, there is no hard boundary between narrative and dialogue excluding Scots from the former, as there is in Scott, or indeed most other 19th- and 20th-century and Scottish fiction.

Furthermore, the balance between Scots and English, or the relative density of one or the other at different times, is an important part of Galt’s craft: his use of language, says McClure, ‘contributes in large measure to one of the most important features of his books: the self-revelation of the narrators’. When we get to his novel *Ringan Gilhaize*, a further element is introduced, which is that Ringan tells his story in the tone and cadences of a man completely versed and immersed in the idioms of both the King James Bible and the Scottish legalism of the Covenant. So, the Scots folk narrative and the English historical narrative of his tale (covering an immense period of 138 years from Scottish Reformation to battle of Killiecrankie) is contained within this majestic, Biblical style that, again, thoroughly convinces the reader that the narrator is Ringan Gilhaize, not John Galt. And this was precisely what Galt had set out to do, as he explained in his *Literary Life*:

‘I have supposed a Covenanter relating the adventures of his grandfather who lived during the Reformation. It was therefore necessary that I should conceive distinctly what a Covenanter would think of a Reformer in the church, to enable him to relate what such a person would do in the time of

John Knox. There was here, if I may be allowed the expression, a transfusion of character, that could only be rightly understood, by showing how a Reformer himself acted and felt in the opinion of a Covenanter. To enable the reader to estimate the invention put forth in the work, and to judge of the manner in which the Covenanter performed his task, I made him give his autobiography, in which was kept out of view every thing that might recall the separate existence of John Galt.'

And he goes on:

'*Ringan Gilhaize* is no doubt a fiction, and as such may be called a novel, but memory does not furnish me with the knowledge of a work of the same kind. The sentiments which it breathes are not mine, nor the austerity that it enforces, nor all the colour of the piety with which the enthusiasm of the hero is tinged. But in every case where I have seen it noticed, his sentiments have been regarded as mine, which, though perhaps respectable to me as a man, I disclaim as an author, merely, however, because they are not mine.' He went on to say how in some reviews Ringan's motives and actions, acting as a persecuted Covenanter, were ascribed to him, the author, and that he was 'exceedingly mortified' that Ringan Gilhaize was mistaken for John Galt.'

Galt explained that the book 'was certainly suggested by Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*, in which I thought he treated the defenders of the Presbyterian Church with too much levity'. He was 'hugely provoked' that Scott, the descendant of a man fined forty thousand pounds Scots for being a Presbyterian, 'should have been so forgetful of what was due to the spirit of that epoch as to throw it into what I felt was ridicule'.

Galt was not alone in being provoked by *Old Mortality*. Thomas McCrie, biographer of Knox, and James Hogg were among those who took offence. In McCrie's case this was partly because he took a fairly dim view of novels as frivolous items anyway, quite apart from any historical and theological objections. Hogg's response was that of an author writing out of a folk tradition in which religion, the supernatural, oral history and peasant memory were all combined, and which was naturally sympathetic to the cause of poor, principled, deeply religious people (the very people from whom Hogg himself sprang) standing against the oppression of their unprincipled, irreligious social superiors. And to a great extent this was the root of Galt's objections too. By telling Ringan's story through the mind and mouth of an avowed Covenanter, he was implicitly criticising Scott's appropriation of Robert Paterson, the 'Old Mortality' of the title who went around repairing Covenanters' graves and from whose tales the contents of Scott's novel supposedly derived. No, Galt is saying, if a man with Covenanting sympathies were to tell such a story, *this* is how he would do it. Thus Galt not only 'imaginatively repossesses the past', as one critic, Charles Swann, has put it, but through the first-person narrative smashes the barrier between past and present which Scott's method inevitably creates. Charles Swann, criticising Scott's novel, asks, 'Do we ever see why anyone might want to be a Covenanter?' Galt's novel supplies the affirmative answer.

But Galt's novel does much more than that, because whatever Galt's sympathies with the cause of the Covenant he does not shy away from depicting the tragic impact adherence to that cause has on Ringan. Francis Jeffrey, reviewing *Ringan Gilhaize* in the *Edinburgh Review* as one of several 'Secondary Scottish Novels', admired the ambition but complained of the execution of the novel. It had, he

thought, 'no interesting complication of events or adventure, and no animating development or catastrophe' such as one expected from the 'master of historical romance', i.e. Scott. But that wasn't the kind of book Galt had set out to write, and in any case Jeffrey was wrong, because there is a catastrophe at the end of the accumulation of disasters which destroy Ringan's family, driving him to insanity and to the act of assassination, when he is the instrument of providence in that it is he who fires the bullet which mortally wounds Claverhouse at Killiecrankie. It is inconceivable that a hero of one of the Waverley Novels would perform such an irrevocable act. The contrast between Ringan and Edward Waverley, who never actually strikes a blow for the Jacobite cause despite being praised for his valour at Prestonpans and elsewhere, but spends his time saving the lives of enemy soldiers, could not be clearer. Even Henry Morton, the reluctant, moderate hero of Scott's *Old Mortality* who allies himself to the Covenanters, is too closely aligned to his author and to his author's readers' sentiments to feel like a real historical character of the 1670s. Ringan, on the other hand, is *changed* by history, by the murder of his wife and daughters, rape of his niece, and execution of his last surviving son. Under his appalling suffering, he becomes 'an infirm, grey-haired man, with a deranged head and a broken heart.' Where Scott wrote of the Covenanter preachers as fanatics and madmen, Galt showed how a man would be driven to that state of madness. Here are some passages from the last chapter, in which Ringan kills Claverhouse:

I ran to and fro on the brow of the hill—and I stamp'd with my feet—and I beat my breast—and I rubbed my hands with the frenzy of despair—and I threw myself on the ground—and all the sufferings of which I have written returned upon me—and I started up and I cried aloud the blasphemy of the fool, "There is no God."

But scarcely had the dreadful words escaped my profane lips, when I heard, as it were, thunders in the heavens, and the voice of an oracle crying in the ears of my soul, "The

victory of this day is given into thy hands!" and strange wonder and awe fell upon me, and a mighty spirit entered into mine, and I felt as if I was in that moment clothed with the armour of divine might.

...

I prepared my flint and examined my fire-lock, and I walked towards the top of the garden with a firm step. The ground was buoyant to my tread, and the vigour of youth was renewed in my aged limbs: I thought that those for whom I had so mourned walked before me—that they smiled and beckoned me to come on, and that a glorious light shone around me.

Claverhouse was coming forward—several officers were near him, but his men were still a little behind, and seemed inclined to go down the hill, and he chided at their reluctance. I rested my carabine on the garden-wall. I bent my knee and knelt upon the ground. I aimed and fired,—but when the smoke cleared away I beheld the oppressor still proudly on his war-horse.

I loaded again, again I knelt, and again rested my carabine upon the wall, and fired a second time, and was again disappointed.

Then I remembered that I had not implored the help of Heaven, and I prepared for the third time, and when all was ready, and Claverhouse was coming forward, I took off my bonnet, and kneeling with the gun in my hand, cried, "Lord, remember David and all his afflictions;" and having so prayed, I took aim as I knelt, and Claverhouse raising his arm in command, I fired. In the same moment I looked up, and there was a vision in the air as if all the angels of brightness, and the martyrs in their vestments of glory, were assembled on the walls and battlements of Heaven to witness the event,—and I started up and cried, "I have delivered my native land!" But in the same instant I remembered to whom the glory was due, and falling again on my knees, I raised my hands and bowed my head as I said, "Not mine, O Lord, but thine is the victory!"

When the smoke rolled away I beheld Claverhouse in the arms of his officers, sinking from his horse, and the blood flowing from a wound between the breast-plate and the armpit. The same night he was summoned to the audit of his crimes.

...

Thus was my avenging vow fulfilled,—and thus was my native land delivered from bondage. For a time yet there may be rumours and bloodshed, but they will prove as the wreck which the waves roll to the shore after a tempest. The fortunes of the papistical Stuarts are foundered for ever. Never again in this land shall any king, of his own caprice and prerogative, dare to violate the conscience of the people.

It is powerful and convincing stuff. Interestingly, Robert Louis Stevenson, in a letter written when he was twenty and immersed in Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, a history of the Civil War from a diehard Royalist perspective, wrote the following: 'It is a pet idea of mine that one gets

more real truth out of one avowed partisan than out of a dozen of your sham impartialists – wolves in sheep’s clothing – simpering honesty as they suppress documents. After all, what one wants to know is not what people did, but why they did it – or rather, why they *thought* they did it; and to learn that, you should go to the men themselves. Their very falsehood is often more than another man’s truth.’

Galt, however, doesn’t leave the last word to Ringan. He appends a postscript, which opens with a strong defence of his use of Scots in the novel, and then goes on to link the language question to some remarks about the ‘Scottish political character’. There is a misconception in England, he says, that ‘the moral spine in Scotland is more flexible than in England. The truth however is, that an elementary difference exists in the public feelings of the two nations quite as great as the idioms of their respective dialects. The English are a justice-loving people according to charter and statute; the Scotch are a wrong-resenting race, according to right and feeling; and the character of liberty among them takes its aspect from that peculiarity.’

When I read that phrase, ‘a wrong-resenting race, according to right and feeling’, it reminds me of the words of another Ayrshire novelist, William McIlvanney, who during the 2014 referendum debate wrote: ‘I’ve suggested before that a motto for modern Scotland might be – instead of the old, belligerent “Wha daur meddle wi’ me?” – something more gently insistent, like “Wait a minute! That’s no’ fair.”’ I’d be very surprised if Willie had not been familiar with the work of John Galt.

To rub home the point, Galt appended the entire text of the Declaration of Arbroath (which he also makes Ringan quote from in the course of the novel), the most famous articulation of the Scottish people's claim of right to political resistance against tyranny. Galt was, therefore, consciously and deliberately politicising the Scottish past and linking it to the present in a way that never really happens in one of Scott's novels.

None of this makes Galt some kind of crypto-Scottish Nationalist. He was in many respects a deeply conservative man, firmly embedded within the Union consensus of his time. But it makes him interesting and alive to political possibilities, and in that respect at least as relevant and worth reading today as his contemporaries Walter Scott and James Hogg. It's just a great shame that he is not read by more people. Certainly, if I had not read *Ringan Gilhaize* I would never have set out to write *The Fanatic*. As a writer, I find his ways of dealing with history and the passage of time, his narrative techniques and his use of Scots, all of which I have tried to show this evening are closely connected, both fascinating and instructive. And I am very grateful to have had the opportunity, in giving this lecture, to revisit and reread him again after a long absence.

James Robertson