Publishing at "the request of friends": Alexander Ross and James Beattie's Authorial Networks in Eighteenth-Century Aberdeen

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Abstract: Authorship in eighteenth-century Aberdeen often functioned differently than in London and Edinburgh. The Aberdeen model of authorship relied heavily on an intricate network of booksellers, patrons, readers, and critics all involved in preparing a text for publication, for which the prevailing narrative for this period of an increasing tendency towards individual authorial genius does not allow. The career of poet Alexander Ross and his friend/mentorship with philosopher James Beattie offers a useful case study of the Aberdeen model – especially when approached through the lens of book history to consider the material practices attesting the production of a literary work. Both Ross's career in particular, and eighteenth-century Aberdeen in general, offer ways to historicize the concept of the "inspired genius" emerging at the end of the eighteenth century. Therefore, addressing the authorial careers of Ross and Beattie opens up new avenues for discussion, both of these poets in particular, and of discourses of eighteenth-century authorship in general.

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In the preface to his *Original Poems and Translations* (1760), Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and poet James Beattie (1735-1803) makes an implicit case for reading eighteenth-century authorship as a network of interconnected agents:

> Each of the pieces that compose this small miscellany has been read and approved by several persons of unquestionable taste, whose judgment was capable of no other bias than that amiable one, the partiality of friendship. This the Author chooses to mention; because he would not be thought to have engaged in this publication entirely in compliance with the suggestions of his own vanity: and he is afraid to urge *the request of*

friends as an excuse for his appearing in his present character; this plea having been so often abused, that it is become even ridiculous.[1]

Here, Beattie acknowledges that he is neither the vessel for the outpourings of an external muse, nor is he a solitary, self-made genius; instead, he asserts that in his role of author, he must rely on the support and feedback from others to manipulate his manuscript texts into something suitable for publication. Beattie thanks his reading public for their gracious reception of his text, appealing "to the Public Suffrage" and "the goodnatured [*sic*] Reader" who he hopes will forgive any missteps or oversights in presenting his text for public survey.[2] He then directly acknowledges the community of friends and mentors who surrounded him during the composition of the poems and preparation of the manuscript for publication.

The rhetoric surrounding discussions of authorship today is a far cry from Beattie's acknowledgments. Narratives of authorship most often imply a Whiggish trajectory of inevitable progression towards ever-greater liberty, enlightenment, and achievement: the heroic rise from humble vessel for a muse to the role of autonomous, creative genius. But this narrative is problematic, even potentially writing out of intellectual history the Scriblerian friendship of Alexander Pope, John Gay, and Jonathan Swift. Moreover, it eschews acknowledging the communal aspect of authorship (the peers, publishers, and patrons) in eighteenth-century Britain, particularly for those writing outside of London. Many poets of the early and mid-eighteenth century worked as part of intricate networks of fellow writers, embodying a range of authorial and authorizing roles. Accordingly, when we attend to the intellectual community surrounding the individual writer, we begin to see an intricate network of booksellers, patrons, readers, and critics involved in preparing a text to be consumed by the reading public.

To shed greater light on the community surrounding writers and the influence that such a community exerts on a writer's productions, I turn to eighteenth-century Aberdeen and its intellectual community, a community that produced a large portion of the foundational philosophers of the Enlightenment as well as a vibrant literary scene. I offer the case of the now-obscure schoolmaster-turned-poet, Alexander Ross (1699-1784), his publication of *The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1768), and his revision of this work for a second edition in 1778 under the title *Helenore*. I place Ross's career within the context of Aberdeen's intellectual culture and unpack his networked model of authorship as one made possible largely through his friendship with and quasi-patronage under James Beattie. I then briefly turn to the concept of Romantic genius and its relation to Ross's authorship, situating this concept within its eighteenth-century

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[1] James Beattie, *Original Poems and Translations. By James Beattie, A.M.* (London [Aberdeen], 1760), vii; emphasis in original.
[2] Ibid., vi.

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context and showing how early definitions of the Romantic genius implicitly rely upon community in the shaping of an author.

I argue that a networked model of authorship, such as that demonstrated in Aberdeen, presents us with a complementary idea of what being a professional author could have looked like in the mid-eighteenth century, rather than fixating on the predominant understanding of authorship as either stemming from reliance on and production for a patron, or from a Romantic conception of genius. We must look to more communal or collaborative models of authorship, such as those of Beattie and Ross, in order to develop a both broader and deeper understanding of the culture and practices of writing and publishing in eighteenth-century Scotland and Britain alike. To support this assertion, I wed critical conversations of authorship with those of book history, adopting Dustin Griffin's "critical skepticism" of ideologies of authorship along with Margaret Ezell's influential notion of "social authorship."[3]

Aberdeen's Book Market

On the development of authorship over the course of the eighteenth century, critics have had much to say. Many discussions focus on the tenuous idea that the eighteenth century saw the establishment of the professional author because of the eradication of the patronage system. The critical conversations of Martha Woodmansee, Everard King, and Scott Hess are grounded in ideologies of late-eighteenth-century philosophers that promote an emphasis on the intellectual property of the writer himself as divorced from his patron.[4] Others – including Dustin Griffin, Richard Sher, and Iain Beavan – adopt a different perspective on the narrative of the changes in authorial models, looking more to the politics of publishing and the oft-overlooked role of the booksellers rather than focusing on the creative output of the individual writer her/himself.[5] Rather than simply repeat what many scholars have said before about

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[3] Dustin Griffin, "Fictions of Eighteenth-Century Authorship." *Essays in Criticism* 43 (1993): 181; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[4] Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), "The Genius and Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the 'Author'," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17 (1984): 425-48; Everard King, *James Beattie's* The Minstrel *and the Origins of Romantic Autobiography*. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Scott Hess, *Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[5] Dustin Griffin, "The Rise of the Professional Author?" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume V 1695-1830.* Eds. Michael F. Suarez, S. J. and Michael L. Turner. 132-45. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200); Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America*. (Chicago:

challenging "the Whig myth of the author's liberation" or the emerging "aesthetic theories of creative genius," I intend to complicate dominant conversations of what it means to be a writer by proposing a more multifaceted narrative of authors and book production as illustrated by the brief authorial career of Alexander Ross and his connections with James Beattie.[6]

In the eighteenth century, the changes in patronage and publishing, both in forms of income and in ideology, are intricately connected with the various philosophies of the creative efforts of the author-figure as well as the economic roles of the publisher or bookseller. Also influencing these literary evolutions are the complexities of copyright law developing over the eighteenth century. Concomitant with copyright laws created to protect the rights and profits of the booksellers' Conger were new philosophies of aesthetics and originality as well as a shift in emphasis on what was the moral duty of writers.[7] Emerging ideas of aesthetics are assumed to have given greater consideration to the ideas of "genius" and "originality" – ideas widely celebrated and heralded in William Wordsworth's 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: a poet is "a man of genius and authority." But 30 years earlier in Aberdeen, 130 miles north of Edinburgh and 550 miles north of London, the author was conceived of not as genius but as a small part of a larger literary network of writers, publishers, patrons, and friends.

As a major center of Enlightenment thought, Aberdeen plays an important but under-explored role in the history of authorship and publishing. Sitting on the borders of the Scottish Highlands and boasting a small fraction of Edinburgh's and London's resources for printing, publishing, and reading, Aberdeen was "required to work much harder to build an economic foundation for [its] book trade and came to define [itself] quite differently" by claiming an emphasis on regional literature, as Stephen Brown and Warren McDougall note.[8] Even though Aberdeen had its printing and publishing niche, Edinburgh still dominated much of Scotland's printing; Brown and McDougall account that

University of Chicago Press, 2006); Iain Beavan, "Notes on Aberdeen Bookseller's Societies" in *Bibliotheck: A Scottish Journal of Bibliography and Allied Topics* 10 (1981): 158-69.

[6] Giffin, "Fictions of Eighteenth-Century Authorship," 181; Simon Stern, "Copyright, Originality, and the Public Domain in Eighteenth-Century England" in *Originality and Intellectual Property in the French and English Enlightenment.* Ed. Reginald McGinnis. 69-101. (London: Routledge, 2009), 69.

[7] Lyman Ray Patterson, *Copyright in Historical Perspective*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 151-52; Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market*, 60, 88; Reginald McGinnis, "Introduction" in *Originality and Intellectual Property in the French and English Enlightenment.* Ed. Reginald McGinnis. xi-xv. (London: Routledge, 2009), xi.

[8] Stephen Brown and Warren McDougall, "Introduction" in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 2: Enlightenment and Expansion 1707-1800.* Eds. Stephen Brown and Warren McDougall. 1-22. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 15.

of the 243 imprints listed for Scotland in 1707 (ESTC), only six were published outside Edinburgh, all at Glasgow and representing a miniscule 0.25 per cent of the trade that year. By 1800, however, Glasgow was producing 23 per cent of the national total, with Edinburgh's share declining to a still robust 60 per cent.[9]

Iain Beavan calculates that in the eighteenth century, Aberdeen's printing trade produced "a little over 500 separate titles" and that printers "often relied on subscription publication simply because they were not financially able to advance money on speculation."[10]

Nevertheless, this community boasted a lively host of publishers, printers, and sellers whose role is critical to re-thinking the modern narrative of authorial models.[11] These dominant players in the Aberdeen book industry include John Forbes II (*fl.* 1675-1704; his successors *fl.* 1704-14), James Nicol (*fl.* 1717-36), James Chalmers I (*fl.* 1737-64), Francis Douglas (*fl.* 1750-68), John Boyle (*fl.* 1768-93), James Chalmers II, who operated under the imprint "J. Chalmers & Co." (*fl.* 1764-97), and Andrew Shirrefs (*fl.* 1783-91). Beavan surmises that "the retail market, levels of capitalisation and the practicalities of distribution created an approach to publishing in Aberdeen different from that in metropolitan centres."[12] Accordingly, because of its relatively small stakes in the British book market, despite its intellectual influences, much of Aberdeen's literary production came to fruition through connections: connections with printers and publishers and their connections to other publishing houses and booksellers in Edinburgh and London. These connections – these networks – encouraged an interactive model of networked authorship, woven among writers, critics, publishers, printers, and sellers throughout Scotland and across Britain.

Illustrating these networks and arising out of the intellectual context of Aberdeen's innovative book market is James Beattie's *Original Poems and Translations* (1760). This work is of particular value for illustrating Aberdeen's publishing community because of what the narrative of its publication history suggests about the role of community in the

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[9] Ibid., 14

[10] Iain Beavan, "Aberdeen and the North-east" in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 2: Enlightenment and Expansion 1707-1800.* Eds. Stephen Brown and Warren McDougall. 166-76. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 169.

[11] J. P. Edmond, *The Aberdeen Printers: Edward Raban to James Nicol, 1620-1736*. (Aberdeen: J. & J. P. Edmond & Spark, 1884), i-v; Donald W. Nichol, . "Aberdeen, Imprints and the ESTC: Towards a Definitive Bibliography." *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment*. Eds. Jennifer J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock. 309-15. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 310-12; "Aberdeen and the Northern Countries" in *A Reputation for Excellence, volume 4*. Scottish Printing Archival Trust. (http://scottishprintarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Vol-4-Aberdeen-Northern-Counties.pdf), 1-4.

[12] Iain Beavan, "Aberdeen and the North-east," 169.

production of a work. *Original Poems* was first printed and sold in London by Andrew Millar on the Strand – a publisher with established connections to Enlightenment literature, such as publishing the histories of Joseph Robertson and David Hume.[13] According to Millar, he had become acquainted with Beattie and his work when he stopped through Aberdeen on a fishing trip.[14] In the following year, *Original Poems* was reissued in Aberdeen by Francis Douglas with a cancel title page bearing Douglas's imprint as well as the phrase "sold by him [Douglas] for the Benefit of the Author." The Aberdeen issue of the work identifies Beattie as the financier of the Scottish issue, even though he held no such role for the London issue. Beavan notes, "once his reputation was established, James Beattie…was readily published in Edinburgh and London, but an Aberdeen reissue of his earliest work, *Original Poems* (1761), required subscriptions."[15] The original issue of this work was published not by subscription, but was financed by Millar. And, as quoted in the introduction, the preface to this work outlines Beattie's thoughts on the agency and genius of the author arising from the influences of the writer's network of friends, readers, and fellow-thinkers.

Many members of Beattie's authorial network were also members of Marischal College and the Aberdeen Philosophical Society (also known as the "Wise Club"). Beattie's network included his early patron, James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714-99), as well as the intellectual influences from the lineage of philosophy instruction at Marischal: Thomas Blackwell (1701-57), David Fordyce (1711-51), and Alexander Gerard (1728-95), the latter having been Beattie's philosophy instructor while he was a student at Marischal College from 1749-53. He also interacted with philosophers Thomas Reid (1710-96), George Campbell (1711-96), John Gregory (1724-73), and James Dunbar (1742-98) through the Philosophical Society, taking part in the critical conversations that would become part of the Scottish Enlightenment. Ronnie Young notes that Beattie's "strong connections with Marischal College, Aberdeen…created a complex yet surprisingly localised context for the development of critical discourses on poetic genius."[16] Young summarizes the role of the Aberdeen community and its role in shaping Beattie's poetry and philosophy alike, particularly the philosophies put into practice at Marischal College regarding the role of education:

> In the kind of thought emanating from Aberdeen during the period the individual poetic genius is represented as not just the 'heaven-taught'

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[13] Barbara M. Benedict, "Readers, Writers, Reviewers" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830.* Eds. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee. 1-19. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

[14] Donald W. Nichol, "Aberdeen, Imprints, and the ESTC," 312.

[15] Iain Beavan, "Aberdeen and the North-east," 170.

[16] Ronnie Young, "James Beattie and the Progress of Genius in the Aberdeen Enlightenment." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36 (2013): 246.

recipient of god-given capacity but also as the beneficiary of such comparatively secular, and to some extent accidental, factors.[17]

David Radcliffe echoes these ideas, suggesting that Beattie's poetry, especially his more well-known work, *The Minstrel; or, the Progress of Genius* (1771), can be read as semi-autobiographical in that it "describes what Beattie learned as a child and taught as a professor."[18] We can see these Enlightenment philosophies of practical education and individual improvement at work in Beattie's *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (1770) as well as George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), both of which complement the contemporary philosophies of David Hume and Immanuel Kant on education and experience. Beattie's own "progress of genius," therefore, largely grew out of the various intellectual communities with which he was involved. In addition to his professional communities, Beattie established a habit of assisting many of his students with their financial needs and assisting them with their educational and literary pursuits, acting in part as a patron, as Dorothy B. Johnston notes.[19] Altogether, these networks served as an incubator for Beattie's evolving concepts of authorship, from the friends he acknowledges in the preface of *Original Poems* to the ideas of the individual poet's development he explores in *The Minstrel*, a topic I return to in concluding this essay.

Indeed, Beattie's very notion of authorship as arising both out of networks as well as the individual's progress was born out of the ideas produced through his local communities. As a student and later a professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischal College in Aberdeen, Beattie was a key member of the community of writers, publishers, readers, and critics constituting what I am defining as the Aberdeen model of authorship. This model was one of reliance on a network of readers, printers, marketers and critics, a model that eschews the engagement of a patron and that also eschews the author praising his own talents in individual composition. When we consider how this model is sustained in Beattie's poetic career we illuminate another facet in the prism that is being an author: the role of the friend. Following this model, Beattie draws attention to publishing at "the request of friends" in his *Original Poems*, and he encourages family friend Alexander Ross to publish his "small work" and to try his hand at professional authorship.[20]

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[17] Ibid.

[18] David Hill Radcliffe, "Completing James Beattie's *The Minstrel*." *Studies in Philology* 100 (2003): 535-36.

[19] Dorothy B. Johnston, "James Beattie and His Students at Marischal College, Aberdeen." *Northern Scotland* 11 (1991): 11-28.

[20] James Beattie, *Original Poems and Translations*, vii; Alexander Ross, *The Fortunate Shepherdess, A Pastoral Tale; In Three Cantos, in the Scotish Dialect. By Mr. Alexander Ross School-Master at Lochlee. To Which is Added a Few Songs by the Same Author.* (Aberdeen, 1768), ii.

The Making of an Author: Alexander Ross

The case of Alexander Ross, the elderly schoolteacher-turned-poet, especially the publication history of his poem *The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1768), offers an excellent case study for the working of the Aberdeen model of authorship. Today, Ross remains a figure virtually unknown in British literary studies. When his name does surface, it is often a passing reference in scholarship devoted to Beattie, and even then it is often only to mention that Beattie was personally acquainted with Ross and that he wrote his only work in Scots in dedication to Ross: "To Mr. Alexander Ross at Lochlee" (1768). The now little-known Ross may seem an odd choice for considering the discussion of emerging discourses of authorship since this author has failed to secure a foothold in the British literary canon. However, I argue that Ross's engagement in authorship through the composition, publication, revision, and republication of *The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1768) and *Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1778) represents a key moment in the narrative of authors and authorship in the eighteenth century, particularly of authorial networks. Indeed, as one contemporaneous reviewer claimed, "[t]here is no doubt," that Ross's *The Fortunate Shepherdess* "had been extensively circulated in manuscript for a long while among the village populations," a claim that anticipates Ezell's model of social authorship.[21]

Ross was born in April 1699 in north-east Scotland, a region pairing rich oral traditions with a vibrant intellectual community that together have undoubtedly influenced the form and content of his works, as Thomas Crawford, David Hewitt, Alexander Law, Peter Zenzinger, and Christopher McLachlan have discussed.[22] Ross worked as a schoolmaster in the small, desolate parish of Lochlee; later, from 1732 until his death in 1784, he lived and wrote in Glenesk in north-eastern Angus. Throughout his long life, Ross wrote extensively, primarily for personal devotion, as the abundance of religious paraphrases and biblically-based poems in his manuscripts suggest, and as Beattie suggests in his account of Ross in a letter to Thomas Blacklock: "He told me he had never written a single line with a view to publication; but only to amuse a solitary

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[21] "A Scotch Pastoral" in *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* 12.300 (1866): 375.

[22] Thomas Crawford, David Hewitt, and Alexander Law, eds. *Longer Scottish Poems, Volume 2: 1650-1830*. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), 78-80; Peter Zenzinger, "Cultural Paradoxes in Alexander Ross's *Fortunate Shepherdess*" in *Scottish Literature* 35 (2007): 271-94; Christopher McLachlan, "Scots Poetry before Burns." *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 2: Enlightenment and Expansion 1707-1800.* Eds. Stephen Brown and Warren McDougall. 361-69. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

hour."[23] He circulated his manuscripts among his friends and acquaintances, reaching a wide reading audience, before securing the publication of *The Fortunate Shepherdess*, a 4,000-line epic poem that is written in Scots and that draws upon many of north-east Scotland's oral traditions. This poem offers the tale of young Nory, the heroine of the poem's title, and her romantic adventures and misadventures in the Scottish Highlands. When thieves set upon her family's flocks being tended by her beau, Lindy, Nory runs off to reclaim the stolen sheep, but quickly becomes lost. She is then discovered by a young squire who immediately falls in love with her and takes her in at his estate. There, Nory thrives in the lifestyle of the genteel and soon accepts the squire's proposal of marriage; Lindy, meanwhile, is captured by the thieves, and accepts, albeit reluctantly at first, the marriage proposal from the spirited young Highland woman, Bydby. The two couples live happily ever after in this romance evocative of Allan Ramsay's pastoral comedy *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), and throughout the poem are stirring depictions of the Scottish countryside, encounters with fairies and elves, and revelations of origins and reunions with long-lost loved ones.

Ross only published a handful of works: *The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1768), *Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess* (1778), and a few Scottish vernacular folk-style songs, mainly at the behest of James Beattie. The rest of his corpus remains sequestered in scrawled and stained manuscripts housed at the National Library of Scotland. Ross's published works – including his reworking of the folk song "Marri'd and Woo'd an' A'" later anthologized by Robert Burns and James Johnson in *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1805) – are all written in Scots; meanwhile his three, manuscript volumes that have remained unpublished contain several shorter poems that are largely religious in nature, rendered in standard poetic, English diction of the Augustans. These works include two translations from Latin, four original poems, and seven scriptural paraphrases derived from the Old Testament. The only secular and also Scots work contained in Ross's manuscripts is an unfinished companion piece to *Helenore*, called *The Fortunate Shepherd, or The Orphan*, believed to have been written upon *The Fortunate Shepherdess*'s initial success.[24]

The few biographical records we have of Ross's long life – aside from Roger J. Robinson's brief note in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) and Margaret Wattie's brief sketch of his life included in her 1938 *Scottish Text Society* edition of his Scots poetry – are primarily found through anecdotes from James Beattie, characterizing Ross as "a good-humoured, social, happy old man; modest without clownishness, and lively without petulance."[25] The 1812 and 1866 printings of *Helenore*

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[23] Quoted in: William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*. (Edinburgh, 1807), 152.

[24] Margaret Wattie, "Introduction." *The Scottish Works of Alexander Ross*. Ed. Margaret Wattie. ix-lx. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, Ltd., 1938), xxix.

[25] Quoted in: William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*, 152.

contain fuller biographical accounts; in 1812, Ross's grandson, the Rev. Alexander Thomson, compiled what he titled "*The Life of the Author comprehending a particular description of the romantic place where he lived, and an account of the manners and amusements of the people at that period.*" As this lengthy title suggests, this document contains more information about the geography and ethnography of Aberdeenshire region rather than simply a biography of Ross himself. Expanding on this model of life writing, John Longmuir's "Life of Ross" prefaced to *Helenore* in 1866 also contains more ethnographical than biographical information. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* offers a slightly more developed account of Ross's life, but much remains unknown to date. What we are able to gain from these accounts, however, is that Ross was a humble, well-respected, and congenial man who spent his adult life working for more than 50 years as a tutor and schoolteacher (and "also session-clerk, precentor, and a notary public") in rural North-East Scotland.[26] From his humble beginnings as a farmer's son, he rose to being a poet of much esteem, at least in Scotland, through the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. He possessed great skill in language, tutoring Latin in his rural parish, and writing effortlessly in Latin, English, and Scots, as evidenced in the manuscript volumes held in the National Library of Scotland. In fact, Robert Burns wrote in a letter to Mr. John Beugo that his copy of *Helenore* was a "precious treasure," and in a letter to Rev. John Skinner, Burns described Ross's Scots songs as being imbued with "wild happiness of thought and expression."[27] Thus, albeit brief, Ross's authorial career and influence has much to offer to our understanding of the way authors, professional and aspiring, navigated the world of patronage and publishing in eighteenth-century Aberdeen and influenced the literary world around them.

The Fortunate Shepherdess was first published in Aberdeen by Francis Douglas as an octavo after the poem had "lain many years by the Author" as Ross wrote in his preface; this work has the distinction of being among the last works Douglas ever published.[28] The poem was well received and beloved by local readers; it "was an immense favourite in Scotland for many years," a critic in the *London Review* wrote almost a century after its first appearance.[29] Following the success of this publication, Beattie encouraged Ross to revise the work, which was eventually published ten years later in 1778 under the title *Helenore*. This edition included a few revisions to the text and orthography as well as additions made to the plot, along with a dedication to the

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[26] Roger J. Robinson, "Ross, Alexander, of Lochlee (1699–1784)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2006. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24112.

[27] Robert Burns, *The Domplete Works of Robert Burns, Vol. I*. Ed. James Currie. (Glasgow, 1825), 276, 257.

[28] Alexander Ross, *The Fortunate Shepherdess*, ii.

[29] John S. Gibb and D. Hay Fleming. "Helenore, or the Fortunate Shepherdess" in *The Scottish Historical Review* 9 (1912): 291; "A Scotch Pastoral," 375.

Duchess of Gordon and the new title *Helenore*, after the heroine of the poem. Affixed to this second edition, published by James Chalmers in 1778 as an octavo, was a poem in Scots penned by Beattie, "To Mr. Alexander Ross," a poem in Habbie stanza that Beattie first published under the pseudonym "Oliver Oldstile" in the June 1, 1768 issue of *Aberdeen Journal* (a work published by Francis Douglas in Aberdeen, the publisher of Ross's first edition); the second edition also includes a slightly smaller selection of Ross's Scottish songs. A posthumous third edition appeared in 1789, printed and sold by J. Boyle, this time a duodecimo. Chalmers reprinted a decimo-octavo edition in 1793, and in 1796 Burnett and Rettie reprinted a duodecimo format of *The Fortunate Shepherdess.* Edinburgh publishers began publishing the third edition of *Helenore* in 1804, and both Aberdeen and Edinburgh continued printing this work throughout much of the nineteenth century, speaking to the poem's contemporaneous critical aplomb and longevity through the nineteenth century.

On Ross's choice of publisher, Beavan wonders why Douglas instead of Chalmers was initially tasked with the job of printing and selling the poem's first edition: "It is not obvious why Douglas was entrusted with this publication, rather than Chalmers, whose firm was likely to have done a superior job." Beavan goes on to trace the differences in the kinds of publications put out by Douglas and Chalmers, differences he describes simply as "interesting": Chalmers was more well established as a non-scholarly printer, preferring a role "as printers to the town, to that of printers to the university"; Douglas was the more scholarly printer, despite his "unorthodox" early career choices of baker, newspaper proprietor, even poet.[30] Politics or societal positions aside, it is easy to surmise that it was Ross's connection with Beattie that led to the decision to publish first with Douglas: Beattie had only a few years previously worked with Douglas to print and sell his *Original Poems and Translations*; Beattie and Douglas maintained their book-based relationship, with Beattie subscribing for four copies of Douglas's *A General Description of the East Coast of Scotland* (1782) printed by the author and retired publisher on his farm in Paisley. Additionally, less than 10 years prior to Ross's publication of *The Fortunate Shepherd*, Douglas printed his own poem in Scots, *Rural Love, a Tale* (1759). From this, we can assume that Beattie was aware of Douglas's own taste for poetry in the Scottish vernacular and for printing the works of aspiring or amateur authors. In sum, this relationship through publishing houses, of Beattie drawing on his connection with Douglas to ensure a successful publication for Ross's poem, illustrates the intricacies of the networks surrounding the transition from the early modern model of patronage to the more modern, autonomous model of authorship. Ross published *The Fortunate Shepherdess* with Douglas only after Beattie urged him to do so,

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[30] Iain Beavan, "Bibliography and the Enlightenment: Some Supplementary Notes on the Aberdeen Booktrade." *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment.* Eds. Jennifer J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock. 316-24. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 317-18.

and only after Beattie managed the proper connections and routes for Ross to successfully release his manuscript into the hands of an eager readership.

In addition to connecting him with a publisher, Beattie worked actively with Ross in the pre-publishing phases of the poem – the preparation of the manuscript, securing the copyright, providing paper for the first printing and ensuring that any profit from the sales, an estimated 20 pounds, would reach Ross (Beavan, "Bibliography" 317); he also engaged in the marketing of Ross's work as well, attempting to "excite some curiosity about his work" by writing his dedicatory poem, "To Mr. Alexander Ross."[31] After the first printing, as discussed above, Beattie pressed Ross to re-publish the poem after Ross had labored over several revisions, again closely supervising the publishing process. Beattie then suggested that Ross dedicate the poem to the Duchess of Gordon, a prominent political figure, supporter of Scottish Highland culture, and an admirer of Ross's initial publication. For his efforts, as Robinson points out, "the duchess gave Ross 15 guineas."[32] But, the acts of patronage and the patron-writer relationship here are all complex; the Duchess of Gordon was not acting as a patron to Ross, nor was Ross subsisting entirely on his publication profits.

When we trace the chronology of Beattie's publications and his friend- and mentorship with Ross alongside the narrative of Ross's publications, we see an intricate intellectual network necessary for these men to be successfully published authors. What we do not see is the strong presence of a patron – although both men acknowledge the support of patron-like figures (although not formal patrons, per se) in promoting their works through the exchange of dedications and small stipends, including Francis Garden, Lord Gardenstone; James Burnett, Lord Monboddo; and Jane Gordon, Duchess of Gordon.[33] Nor do we see these professional authors touting their autonomy or their creative, Romantic genius necessary for the "rise" to authorship. Instead, we see two men relying on each other's friendship, inspiration, mentorship, and business and political connections to compose and publish poetic works. Beattie and Ross both wrote poetry as a pastime; their primary occupation was not that of the "professional" author writing poetry but as philosopher and schoolteacher, respectively. The cases of these two men writing and publishing literature as tangential to their primary educational occupations present us with an understudied model of what it means to be an author, navigating the intricate network of patrons and publishing in the middle of the eighteenth century.

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[31] Quoted in: William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*, 153.

[32] Christine Lodge, "Gordon, Jane, duchess of Gordon (1748/9–1812)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, October 2007. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11059; Roger J. Robinson, "Ross, Alexander."

[33] Roger J. Robinson, "Beattie, James (1735–1803)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Oct 2006. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1831; Roger J. Robinson, "Ross, Alexander."

The Progress of Genius

Beyond *The Fortunate Shepherdess*'s publication history and the ways that Ross's expansive catalog of unpublished writings offers a wealth of information and insights for scholars of literary history, Ross's own biography presents a compelling study for literary critics. Indeed, most unique about Ross's life is his relatively late move to authorship. Although he was writing and circulating his poetry among his community for several years before preparing his work for publication, he was nearly 70 when he first published *The Fortunate Shepherdess* "at the desire of some people of genius and taste"; Ross was close to 80 when he revised the poem for the second edition with the added inscription to the Duchess of Gordon.[34] Altogether, his brief engagement as popular and professional author problematizes the narrative of the "rise" from author laboring under the gaze of a patron to self-sufficient professional author, channeling his own solitary, creative genius.

Ross was a popular author – popular in both senses of the word: his work appealed to the laboring classes of north-east Scotland, and his work was highly regarded for nearly a century after initial publication.[35] McLachlan traces the recurring pattern of Scots poetry publication, such as found in other of Burns' predecessors including Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson:

> The poet begins in a local and personal way, his work circulating in manuscript or in occasional and ephemeral printed forms until support and encouragement from a readership, perhaps generous enough to subscribe to a collected volume of verse, brings about a first publication. Whether provincial or Edinburgh-printed, this first issue is relatively cheap and crude, but if successful there follow further, revised editions, often taken up by one of the better-known printer-publishers.[36]

This pattern certainly applies to Ross, with some modifications of course, and drawing attention to the social, communal, networked aspect of the author's identity. As the "Schoolmaster Poet," Ross and his model of authorship and subsequent memorializing fit easily, even naturally, within the phenomenon of the "heaven-taught poet" persona emerging later in eighteenth-century Scotland with the likes of Robert Burns, the

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[34] Alexander Thomson, "Life of the Author" in *Helenore: or the Fortunate Shepherdess, a Pastoral Tale, to which is added the life of the author, comprehending a particular description of the romantic place where he lived, and an account of the manners and amusements of the people at that period*. iii-liv. (Dundee, 1812), xxxvii.

[35] Peter Zenzinger, "Cultural Paradoxes in Alexander Ross's *Fortunate Shepherdess*," 294

[36] Christopher McLachlan, *Before Burns: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Poetry*. (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2002), 569.

"Ploughman Poet" (1759-96), Robert Tannahill, the "Weaver Poet" (1774-1810), and James Hogg, the "Ettrick Shepherd" (1770-1835). It is no coincidence that this trend of the "heaven-taught" authorial persona runs concomitant with the emergence of the notion of the Romantic author as inspired genius. Accordingly, I briefly return to James Beattie and his more famous poem, *The Minstrel, or, the Progress of Genius* (1771) in order to better situate contemporary notions of genius in the making of an author in eighteenth-century Aberdeen.

Beattie begins his short preface to *The Minstrel* by acknowledging the inspiration for this poem as coming from Thomas Percy's "Essay on the English Minstrels" prefixed to his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). He outlines his intent in the poem, claiming that his "design was, to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude and illiterate age" and in tracing this progress, to provide readers with "variety of amusement, and even some topics of instruction both moral and philosophical." Still, despite parsing out the progress of individual genius Beattie maintains that his authorial identity stems from the influence of his friends: "My Friends are pleased with what I have done; but, as they cannot entirely acquit themselves of partiality, advise me to lay a specimen before the Public."[37] Thus, for Beattie, the progress of genius originates from the "primitive" literary arts, and that the Romantic genius must then attend to the native, noble, and naïve poetry unadulterated by the artifice or artistry of belles-lettres. If we return to folk art forms, we will address a more rustic, unpolished oral tradition and folklore-inspired poetry. Such rustic genius can be found in the works of Alexander Ross, a genius which, according to Beattie, stems from his isolation from emerging modernity and the limits imposed by geography and limited intellectual resources:

> The author [Ross] excels most in describing the solitary scenes of a mountainous country, and the manners and conversation of the lowest sort of our people... This sphere is, indeed, the only one of which he has had any experience. He has been for these forty years a schoolmaster in one of the most sequestered parishes in the Highlands of Scotland, where he had no access either to company or books that could improve him. His circumstances and employment confine him at home the whole year long; so that his compositions, with all their imperfections, are really surprising.[38]

And, because Aberdeen had established regional, folkloric literature as its printing and publishing niche, as Brown and McDougall discuss, this region is the prime location for Beattie to trace the progress of genius and for us to trace the history of networked and

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[37] James Beattie, *The Minstrel, or, the Progress of Genius.* (London, 1771), v.
[38] Quoted in: William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie*, 152

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genius-driven authorship alike, such as can be found in Alexander Ross and his Scots muse.

As can be observed through Beattie's authorial career, from unpacking the preface to *Original Poems*, to contextualizing his actions in encouraging the humble Ross to publish his *Fortunate Shepherdess* in Scots and showcase Aberdeen's rich cultural and literary heritage based on Scottish regionalism, to exploring the development of the individual poet and his role in society, Beattie himself progressed from envisioning authorship as an act defined by the network, context, or community to envisioning authorship in a more emergent Romantic theory of genius and its role in authorship.

Taken together, these men's models of authorship and publishing problematize the narrative of a meteoric rise to autonomous, professional, authorial creativity. Addressing the authorial careers of these two Scottish intellectuals opens up new avenues for discussion, discussion both of these poets in particular, and of discourses of authorial practices in general. Accordingly, unpacking the discourse of the "heaven-taught poet" emerging in the eighteenth century promises to speak to the way we rewrite or at least re-imagine the narrative of authors and authorship. In fact, adopting a model of authorship in the mid-eighteenth century that illustrates the nuances and complexities of textual productions can illuminate the way we conceive of authors and ownership of textual and other media productions today, rethinking the way we valorize the individuality of authorship. We therefore must continue to visit and revisit the works of Alexander Ross in conversation with his authorial network, including James Beattie, in order to create a more complete publication history of this enigmatic author, as we construct an increasingly nuanced narrative of authorship as a profession and identity more broadly. Placing Ross's brief authorial career within the context of Aberdeen's authorial networks and within the framework of emerging images of Scottish authorship provides a meaningful lens through which to better understand not only Ross's work, but also literary Aberdeen in the eighteenth century.

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