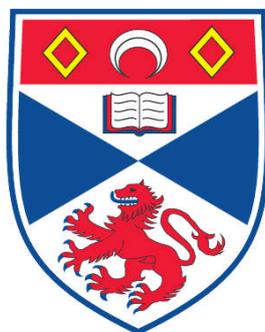


**THE SINGING LASS: A REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF THE POET  
MARION ANGUS (1865-1946) IN THE FORM OF AN ACCOUNT OF  
HER LIFE AND WORK, AND THREE EXTRACTS FROM *BLACKTHORN*,  
A NOVEL**

**Aimée Y. Chalmers**

**Part I**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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**THE SINGIN LASS: A REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF THE POET MARION  
ANGUS (1865-1946) IN THE FORM OF AN ACCOUNT OF HER LIFE AND  
WORK, AND THREE EXTRACTS FROM *BLACKTHORN*, A NOVEL.**

AIMÉE Y. CHALMERS

Submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of St  
Andrews.

## Abstract

Part I of this thesis comprises a biography which, for the first time, places Marion Angus within her historical, family and social context. A version of this was published as the introduction to my edited collection, *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus* (Polygon, 2006).

Assumptions made about the poet's activities and attitudes derive from critical reading of archival material: her published 'diaries', letters and prose, as well as her poetry. The appraisal of her work places it within literary contexts. The development of her linguistic awareness of the Scots language is traced and the extent of her commitment to it noted.

I conclude that assessment of her work has frequently been affected by erroneous judgements about her lifestyle and that the poetry, which has greater depth than it sometimes is given credit for, illuminates her struggle rather than defines her character. Her strength and resilience, as well as her contribution to Scots literature, should be respected and admired.

Part II comprises three extracts from *Blackthorn*, a novel based on aspects of the life and work of Marion Angus. My starting point was the marked contrast between her early prose and later poetry. This, I believe, reflects an actual family crisis which is central to my narrative. The extracts presented here (dated 1900, 1930 and 1945-6) present a credible alternative to inaccurate assumptions which were made about her life. I explore two actual significant relationships in her life: with a sister who becomes wholly dependent on her, and with a younger friend who looks after her in her final year. In the absence of any firm evidence of lovers, I speculate on other relationships.

## Declarations Required by University Regulations

I, Aimée Y. Chalmers, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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Thanks are due to the staff at the National Library of Scotland; New Register House; University of St Andrews Library; Aberdeen University Library Manuscripts and Archives Section; University of Stirling Special Collections; University of Strathclyde Archives; Scottish Borders Library Headquarters; Perth, Arbroath and Montrose Libraries; Angus Archives; Aberdeen Family History Centre; The Imperial War Museum and the British Library.

I acknowledge my debt to the friends and acquaintances of Marion Angus who wrote appreciations of her, and to those whose critical analyses have enhanced my understanding of her poetry. I am grateful to individuals who shared personal reminiscences.

I appreciate the support and advice I have had from staff at the University of St Andrews: my supervisors John Burnside, Meaghan Delahunt and especially my principal supervisor, Robert Crawford, without whom I might never have made it to the end of the road. Christopher MacLachlan and Alison Kennedy both provided helpful feedback; Sandra McDevitt, Postgraduate Secretary, was a reassuring voice and source of practical advice.

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I will always be grateful to the composer Richard Ingham for his musical celebration of the poetry of Marion Angus and for the experience of working with him and the Heisenberg Ensemble on 'Drift o Rain on Moorland Stane'. My debt to my husband, Ali Chalmers, who patiently read many drafts and offered constructive criticism and support, is massive.

### Note on Punctuation and Spelling (PART I)

Marion Angus's use of the apologetic apostrophe reflects common practice when she was writing, when many Scots words were assumed to be a corrupt form of English. But she was by no means consistent in its use. With the aim of making her work as accessible as possible I have chosen to retain an apostrophe for the final *d* of *an'*, *han'*; to omit them for the final *e* of *tak*, *mak*, *cam*, the final *th* of *mou*, *wi*, *quo*; the final *y* of *awa*; and the final *f* of *o*, *hersel*. Although I have omitted it for the final *w* of *sna*, I have retained it to replace *w* in compound words such as *ha'thorn*. I have not used an apostrophe to indicate the lack of a final *ll*, as in *sma*, *fu*, but have retained it for plurals or where an *s* is added, to indicate the longer vowel sound, as in *fa's*, and for compound words such as *fa'in*. It has not been used to replace missing internal consonants *y* and *v*, in such words as *ee*, *gied*, *hae*; the *ough* in *tho*. Negatives such as *daurna* and *hadna* are also written without apostrophes, as are Scots gerunds and participles, as in *singin*, *hopin*. It has been retained to distinguish between *i'* (in) and the pronoun *I*, *a'* (all) and the indefinite article, to indicate the *it* of *'tis*.

To prevent confusion where the meaning or pronunciation might be in doubt for a reader not familiar with Scots words, an apostrophe has been retained (and inserted in places for consistency), as in *lo'e* (love); retained to indicate the preliminary *sh* sound as in *s'all*.

As there was no Scots standard orthography at the time, it is not surprising that the spelling of certain words in her poetry is variable (hert, he'rt, hairt; mou'ed, moued; but, bit; flooer, floo'er, flo'er; sorrowfu, sorro'fu; s'all, sall; ne'er, niver, never; 'neath, 'naith). Some of these versions may have been chosen for reasons of rhyme or rhythm, some may have been prompted by different editors. The policy here has been to choose, as far as possible, the simplest used version of the word. Other spelling inconsistencies

are due to her early attempts to reproduce the local Arbroath dialect, although, in her later poetry, few words specifically reflect it.

Sometimes her choice of word assumes Scots pronunciation for English spelling, as in 'At Candlemas' (*The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion p.139*): 'Haste, I wad haste me,/ The whinny road along,/ Whinny, crookit road/ Whaur the grey ghaists gang.' The reason for the choice is not always obvious. There is a poem (in English) called 'The Ghost' and one (in Scots) called 'The Ghaist'. 'Mary's Sang' in *The Tinker's Road and Other Verses*, became 'Mary's Song' in *The Turn of the Day*.

A glossary of Scots words used in PART I can be found on page 289. I have not provided a glossary of Scots words for PART II because I have ensured the meaning of words can be easily deduced from the context of my creative writing. However, I explain here two words used in the novel which are from the Cant (Scottish Traveller language). 'Blue buck' is an expression used to denote someone of mixed parentage. 'Conyach' refers to the spirit, particularly as expressed in music or song.

**List of Abbreviations in Notes**

AA:	Angus Archives
AG:	<i>Arbroath Guide</i> (Arbroath: Buncle.)
AH:	<i>Arbroath Herald</i>
AHA:	<i>Arbroath Herald Annual</i>
AO	'The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie' (Arbroath: Buncle, 1897-1898)
AR	Andrew Russell
ASLS	Association for Scottish Literary Studies
BIHR	Borthwick Institute of Historical Research
CD	<i>Christabel's Diary</i> (Arbroath: Buncle, 1899)
EULSC	Edinburgh University Library and Special Collections
GRO	General Register Office
HBC	Helen B. Cruickshank
MCI	Mairi Campbell Ireland
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
PWL	Philip William Lilly
SUSC	Stirling University Special Collections
TLS	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
UAHC	University of Aberdeen, Historic Collections
WSM	Williamina Sturrock Matthew

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Approaching the Life of Marion Emily Angus (1865-1946)

When I applied to do a Ph.D. (Creative Writing) at St Andrews University, it was twenty-five years since I had studied literature. Though I had limited (5 years) creative writing experience, my work had been published in literary magazines and anthologies and I had completed an M.Phil. (Creative Writing), at the University of Glasgow. This persuaded me to attempt a doctorate.

I had never studied their work in depth, but was interested in the Angus Poets – Violet Jacob, Marion Angus and Helen Cruickshank. Like them, I come from the county of Angus, and felt an affinity to their writing. After surveying collections of their poetry, I decided to focus on Marion Angus, as I admired the mysticism of her work, its lyrical quality, and the way she used Scots to convey emotional depth. When I then read her early ‘diaries’, I was fascinated by the marked contrast between the young exuberant writer of prose, and the reticent elderly poet. I suspected there was more to this transformation than disappointment in love – the commonly held perception – and was drawn to find out what circumstances had brought about the change.

Some novelists working on historical figures have previous biographies to consult. I did not. The biographical information in the public domain was mainly from the short period of time in which Marion Angus was recognised as a poet, and contained many obvious anomalies. My initial genealogical research revealed her place in a large extended family, her birth in Sunderland, her removal to Arbroath. From church records I learned something of the concerns of her father’s congregation and imagined how these might have influenced her. Relevant back copies of the local newspapers filled in details of her local environment – the busy harbour, local mills, the migration of farm workers to

the town, the coming of the new water supply, the railway, the new gasoliers. I imagined her disgust at the smells, her excitement over the new library, what side of the argument she would have taken over the proposed organ in Erskine Kirk. In my enthusiasm I followed up many different strands and, in my naivety, tried to incorporate everything into my novel. It assumed biblical proportions.

As Marion Angus's published work was not only out of print but also difficult to find, my supervisor suggested I approach a publisher with a proposal to edit a more modern edition of her work, including a biographical introduction, selected prose and letters – neither of which had previously been collected – and a critical re-appraisal of her poetry. My proposal was accepted. I took leave of absence from my PhD for one year in order to compile and edit the collection.

Shortly after the publication of *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus* (Polygon, 2006), Katherine Gordon's collection of the work of Marion Angus and Violet Jacob, *Voices from their ain Country: The Poems of Marion Angus and Violet Jacob* (ASLS, 2006) was published. In relation to the work of Marion Angus, Gordon's book provides a more critical comparative analysis of Angus's poetry than mine. The strength of my work is in the breadth of archival research into Angus's life which informs it. This, I believe, enables readers to see her character and personality in a more rounded way.

I looked in depth at Angus's letters and fictional 'diaries', which were serialised weekly in the *Arbroath Guide* when she was a young woman. A copy of *Christabel's Diary* (1899) existed in book form in Arbroath Library but I recovered the uncollected 'Diary of Arthur Ogilvie' (1897-1898) from archives. 'Arthur' is a conventional thinker, self-important, cynical, dull. 'Christabel' is vivacious and witty, interested in everything. Through these characters, Marion's own voice can be discerned. Reading the 'diaries' confirmed my belief that assumptions previously perpetuated about her lifestyle were unjustified.

In the first entry of ‘The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie’, written in November 1897, ‘Arthur’ writes:

Life may be likened unto a novel in three volumes: whereof the first describes the sowing of wild oats, and the second the reaping of the same; happy is he who in the third volume finds time and strength to sow the purer grain – wheat, for the sustenance of his fellow-men, or even harmless, earth-adorning flowers; thrice happy he who plants forest trees, to flourish, yielding strength and pleasant shade [...].<sup>1</sup>

Despite putting family responsibilities before her own art, Marion found that time and strength, for ten to fifteen years in a long life. That her ‘earth-adorning flowers’ were published to literary acclaim, at an age when women tend to become ‘invisible’, and in a male-dominated literary culture, is testimony to their quality.

Some commentators have suggested that, as the unmarried eldest daughter of a minister of the church at the end of the nineteenth century, Marion’s outlook and social opportunities were restricted: ‘Marion Angus was born [...] the daughter of a Victorian U. P. [United Presbyterian] manse. So reticence is in order;’<sup>2</sup> ‘she led a sheltered life;’<sup>3</sup> she was ‘circumscribed by convention.’<sup>4</sup> These comments give a false impression. Her family was financially well provided for, regularly attended cultural and social events, travelled extensively in Britain and abroad, and mixed with educated business and professional people.

After a particularly ‘frivolous’ entry, ‘Arthur’ wrote:

My real object of course is to furnish posterity, my own, if it is destined to exist, or other people’s, with a true yet colloquial account of burghal life in Angus in the end of the nineteenth century; and one may as well acknowledge, from time to time, that we were not all or always of Spartan rigour in our lives.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Ogilvie [Marion Angus], *The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie* [AO], 2 November 1897, *Arbroath Guide* [AG] (13 November 1897), 2.

<sup>2</sup> J. Caird, ‘The Poetry of Marion Angus’, *Cenchrastus* 25 (Spring 1987), 45.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hendry, ‘Twentieth Century Women’s Writing: The Nest of Singing Birds’, in C. Craig (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature: Twentieth Century*, 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p.296.

<sup>4</sup> J. MacRitchie, ‘Arbroath’s Singin Lass’, *Arbroath Herald Annual* (December 1996), [n/p].

<sup>5</sup> AO, 13 February 1898, AG (19 February 1898), 2.

Yet Robert Kemp assumed in his obituary that she had ‘led the life almost of a hermit’.<sup>6</sup> Later, while admitting that he had ‘never met her or knew anything about her’ he still concluded ‘no life could be less conspicuous’ and stated that she sought ‘an anonymity in her life’.<sup>7</sup> This does not reflect her behaviour. The comment by ‘Arthur’:

I do not like a crowd, though I love my fellow men in a general sort of way. I love them most, like bagpipes, when not in too close proximity.’<sup>8</sup>

may give a more accurate impression. Parishioners confirmed she was ‘shy in her outward deportment’.<sup>9</sup> J.B. Salmond wrote: ‘she knew nothing of self-advertisement.’<sup>10</sup> But Colin Gibson was told that, though quiet in her ways ‘she could be bright company [...] and had a decided sense of humour’.<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, there was a time in her mid to late sixties when she wrote ‘I have been rather remiss of friends here and I fear offending them but my grief is so great and I have come through such suffering in my dear sister’s suffering that even kindly questions and conversation jars [sic].’<sup>12</sup> And once, fearing adverse publicity on the publication of a volume of poetry, she wrote ‘I am simply going to keep very quiet down here and avoid everyone I know till the wave of coldness and unpleasance is gone.’<sup>13</sup> Such behaviour is a normal reaction to stress. It does not make her a recluse. Helen Cruickshank’s description of Marion at a meeting of an organisation for writers, Scottish PEN (poets, playwrights, editors, essayists and novelists), is telling:

Her manner at first was diffident among strangers: but she was eager to meet others interested in writing, and to discuss the new hope for poetry in Scotland.’<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> R. Kemp, ‘Two Angus Poets Passed On’, *AHA* (December 1946), [n/p].

<sup>7</sup> R. Kemp, ‘The Wershness of Love’, *The New Alliance and Scots Review*, vol. II, 2 (May 1950), 31.

<sup>8</sup> AO, 23 July 1898, *AG* (27 July 1898), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Angus Archives [AA]: Marion Angus Papers, Andrew Russell [AR] (Minister of Erskine United Presbyterian Church 1945-1955), 3/1, [n/d].

<sup>10</sup> J. B. Salmond, ‘An Appreciation’, *AG* (24 August 1946), 6.

<sup>11</sup> C. Gibson, ‘They Sang of Angus’, *AHA* (December 1984), [n/p].

<sup>12</sup> University of Aberdeen Historic Collections [UAHC], Papers of Marion Angus, MS 2737/3 [April 1930].

<sup>13</sup> National Library of Scotland [NLS], Letters of Mairi Campbell Ireland [MCI]:MS 19328 fol. 125 (23 March [1931]).

<sup>14</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’ in M.Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Serif, 1950), p. xv.

In her late sixties and seventies, under severe emotional stress and with her physical strength deteriorating, Marion Angus still managed to travel around the country, meeting family, friends, poets, publishers and literary people of influence, attending national committee meetings of the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse and of Scottish PEN, speaking at The Scottish Women's Club, corresponding with other poets and writers, broadcasting, giving lectures, and even adjudicating with the poet laureate at a national verse speaking competition.

Helen Cruickshank points out that Marion 'had a keen sense of humour and, on occasion, a tart tongue'.<sup>15</sup> The novelist and college lecturer, Nan Shepherd, also a friend of Marion's, goes further: 'in conversation she was a master of astringent, not to say scarifying comment.'<sup>16</sup> In the same article she reports Marion did 'disconcerting things', played 'small, solemn practical jokes' to 'prick' the 'quick of dullness and pretentiousness and stupidity', and mentions that the 'flamboyant' volumes of her verse published by the Porpoise Press: 'scarlet spines and end-papers of flame: symbols of the barbaric fire that could suddenly scorch one from her mouth, though rarely from her verse', suited one side of her personality, 'the wild gypsy side.' This impulsiveness is a less well-known aspect of her character, confirmed by the Rev. Andrew Russell. For him, she may have been

one of the most unconventional people in Arbroath', 'the first lady in the town to smoke and the first lady in the town to ride a bicycle'.<sup>17</sup>

The Rev. Philip Lilley, who had grown up in Arbroath in another manse, counted himself a lifelong friend of hers. He wrote:

She was excellent company [...]. She enjoyed shocking correct and conventional people (at times she could say fairly devastating things) [...] she had a capacious and most generous heart.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note', p. xix.

<sup>16</sup> N. Shepherd, 'Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside', *The Deeside Field*, Jubilee Issue, 2nd Series, no 6 (1970), 10.

<sup>17</sup> AA: Marion Angus Papers, AR, 3/3 [n/d].

<sup>18</sup> Phillip William Lilly [PWL], 'Miss Marion Angus: An Appreciation', *Arbroath Herald* (23 August 1946), 7.

The process of writing is always one of absorbing and transforming experience. Evidence suggests that, like many writers, in her early writing particularly, Marion Angus drew on her own experiences and views. The diaries written for the *Arbroath Guide* may therefore reveal some of her youthful activities, attitudes and opinions. By the time she began to publish poetry, some twenty years after the diaries, she had honed her skill as a writer considerably. This, and the nature of the poetic medium, probably means that her poetry transforms her experience to a greater degree than did her earlier work. Yet in the past, the absence of known facts has meant that assumptions about her life and character have been made solely on the basis of her poetry. J.C. Smith wrote that ‘she understood what Mr De la Mare has called “pure mortal longingness” especially the longingness of ageing and forsaken women’.<sup>19</sup> John MacRitchie decided it was clear that ‘at some point Marion allowed herself to fall in love, and that her hopes were unfulfilled.’<sup>20</sup> Janet Caird elaborated: ‘it seems clear from the poetry that the poet had gone through a deeply felt experience of love and the loss of love which left life-long pain and regret.’<sup>21</sup>

Charles Graves, however, made no such assumptions. Considering ‘The Wife’ and Marion Angus’s ‘ability to convey a sense of impending tragedy in a few words’, he wrote: ‘We feel, in her poetry, that character is destiny [...]. It is as if the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination had run into other moulds, partaking of the nature of an enchantment rather than a philosophy.’<sup>22</sup>

Robert Kemp had fixed opinions about the imaginations of unmarried women in general and Marion Angus in particular. He wrote that ‘Marion Angus is in some degree the poetess of women who never fulfil themselves in the ordinary way of children and marriage and must fulfil themselves in the life of the imagination’.<sup>23</sup> A few years later he

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<sup>19</sup> J.C. Smith, ‘An Appreciation’, *AG* (24 August 1946), 6.

<sup>20</sup> MacRitchie, ‘Arbroath’s Singin Lass’, [n/p].

<sup>21</sup> Caird, ‘The Poetry of Marion Angus’, 45.

<sup>22</sup> C. Graves, ‘The Poetry of Marion Angus’, *Chapbook* 6 (1945), 97.

<sup>23</sup> Kemp, ‘Two Angus Poets Passed On’, [n/p].

suggested that ‘somewhere in the background of the poems is the lover, who did not respond, or went away, or died, or who may even have never existed except in imagination’.<sup>24</sup>

It would be foolish to deny that Marion Angus had experiences that caused heart-ache. If she did not, she would hardly be human. But that aspect of her life needs to be placed in the context of her background, her friends and family, her interests and activities. The pity is that rather than recognising her skill at transforming the particular into the universal, critics have sometimes allowed conjecture about her private life to stereotype and define the poet, thereby influencing their evaluation of her work.

Christopher Whyte considered it insensitive, intrusive and unnecessary to find out what motivated her writing:

The obscurities of Angus’ verse do not admit of easy solution. The urge [...] to break the code, may well be inappropriate [...] a violation, not of her feminine *pudeur*, but of the nature of the medium itself.’<sup>25</sup>

Dorothy McMillan has stressed the insensitivity of delving into Angus’s past: ‘Marion Angus makes us feel that women [...] are entitled to hug their secret selves.’<sup>26</sup> But if anonymity was what she wanted, why did Angus publish poetry under her own name, thus abandoning the ‘secret self’ she had used for her early, less emotionally charged writing? Why did she lay herself open to public scrutiny and speculation? Was it because her father and mother were both dead and she no longer felt the need to be circumspect about family business? Was it her way of getting people to listen to her? Did she crave creative recognition? ‘Life is a queer business [...] only worth while at all if one can look beyond it,’ she wrote.<sup>27</sup> Did she dare to assume that in post-First World War Britain her poetry would be accepted for what it was, her attempt to ‘look beyond’, her distillation of experience and observation? If so, she may have been disappointed. Despite

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<sup>24</sup> Kemp, ‘The Wershness of Love’, 31.

<sup>25</sup> C. Whyte, ‘Marion Angus and the Boundaries of Self’ in D. Gifford and D. McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 387.

<sup>26</sup> D. Porter [McMillan], ‘Scotland’s Songstresses’, *Cencrastus* 25 (Spring 1987), 50.

<sup>27</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.29 (18 February 1930).

praise for her work, she was stereotyped from the time her poetry first appeared, and the portrayal of her character was limited to a shadow of it. Helen Cruickshank talked of ‘wandering in the company of ghosts and shadows’ while reviewing her work.<sup>28</sup> Maurice Lindsay, writing in his introduction to *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, reduced Marion’s motivation to ‘the regretful, “might have been” nostalgia which attaches to the memory of interrupted human relationships’<sup>29</sup> Though he knew about her strong views on Lallans, he chose to omit reference to these. He wrote to Helen Cruickshank:

I don’t think her very low estimate of C.M. Grieve as a poet should be presented as if it were of importance at all, for quite clearly as a poet she is of very little importance compared to him [...]. Her views, if truly reported, bordered on the presumptuous.<sup>30</sup>

Yet Grieve himself obviously knew her opinion and was unperturbed. In 1925, as Hugh MacDiarmid he wrote:

I’m afraid their [Marion Angus and Lewis Spence] criticisms of my style and arguments only divert me, however indignant or conceited, etc. I make myself appear for ulterior motives.<sup>31</sup>

In 1928, regarding an article in *The Daily Mail* Grieve wrote, ‘I’m not feeling jealous or peeved – it’s only a question of relative values.’ He twice referred to the fact Marion Angus was ‘a friend of mine’, and boasted ‘I gave her her first “boost” and several subsequent ones’.<sup>32</sup>

Whether Marion’s views were presumptuous or not, her willingness to speak out on the issue indicates firm opinions and strength of character. Helen Cruickshank inserted, in her ‘personal note’ in the volume, reference to Marion’s ‘flair for getting quickly to the kernel of the matter’, and gave credit for ‘shrewd judgements’.<sup>33</sup> She remembered: ‘when she asked me what I thought of So-and-So’s poems, and I began a little doubtfully with

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<sup>28</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p. xvii.

<sup>29</sup> M. Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Serif, 1950), p.xii.

<sup>30</sup> UAHC, MS 2737/10 (31 May 194[8]).

<sup>31</sup> A. Bold and V. Grieve (eds.), *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh: Hamish Henderson, 1984), p.203.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.377.

<sup>33</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p.xvi.

“Well, they’re awfully clever...” “Clever!” she retorted quickly, “Yes, they’re clever. But you’ve damned him with that word. The man’s no poet.” And she dismissed the subject.’

Nan Shepherd wrote that Marion’s ‘abiding interest’ was ‘not in how people look but in how they feel.’<sup>34</sup> This is evident from Marion’s early writing, which was perceptive and challenging, through to her later poetry which retains these qualities but also engages the reader at a deeper psychological level. Marion Angus was no ‘wraith’, but a poet committed to understanding the subtleties of life.

## 2. Overview of the Creative Writing Process

When I began this project I had no evidence Marion Angus would have approved of my decision to write a novel, but suspected she might not have disapproved, since her own published ‘diaries’ place fictional characters with real people in a very specific place and time. I thought she might be glad someone was addressing the stereotyping that, after her death, cast her as one-dimensional. I hoped she might appreciate the respect I have for her strength of character and resilience, for her celebration of the land and for her support for and use of her – and my – Scots tongue.

After the publication of *The Singin Lass* in August 2006, I started again on the creative writing, throwing away most of what I’d already written. I still had no clear idea of what it would be about. What I did have was a much clearer idea of the strong personality of Marion Angus and of at least some incidents in her life which caused her to suffer. This – perhaps because of my professional experience of working with people on the margins of society, who are inevitably stereotyped – left me with a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to challenge the way she had been portrayed by some critics.

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<sup>34</sup> Shepherd, ‘Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside’, 14.

Following a chronological biographical approach, for a period of nine months I took great delight in writing. Ideas flowed, fact and fiction merged. But, although my novel was taking shape in my head, I was aware of two major problems. Firstly, I felt intimidated by Angus's middle-class background, her erudition and knowledge of literature. I allowed new characters to breenge onto the scene. The Greigs were fictitious, working class. Scots words found their wey intae my text. The rhythm o my writin felt mair like whit was in my heid.

My progress in this regard exacerbated the second problem, the structure of the novel. It was suggested by one commentator I had lost focus and should submit a biography of Marion Angus instead of a novel. I resisted this suggestion as I suspected a biography would have to be heavily weighted towards the social context. My fear was this might reinforce the stereotype I hoped to challenge. Also, as Angus's work is relatively unknown, a biography would have been no more than an academic exercise. I had never envisaged the doctorate in this way. It was also proposed I cut out all Scots language text.

Recommended reading about creative writing deepened my understanding of the nature of biographical fiction. An article by John Mullan, 'Elements of Fiction – Heavy on the Source' points out how the source material available for the subject of a biographical novel will dictate whether the author takes a purely speculative approach or attempts a more authoritative voice. Mullan posits that the more biographical fiction relies on evidence and academic credentials, the more it 'condemns itself to secondary status – something perhaps more entertaining than the truth, but something less than the truth too.'<sup>35</sup> In 'Elements of Fiction – Backwards not Forwards' the same author quotes Ford Maddox Ford, who wrote that to understand a character you

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<sup>35</sup> J. Mullan, 'Elements of Fiction – Heavy on the Source: John Mullan analyses *The Master* by Colm Tóibin', *The Guardian* (30 April 2005), 32.

should not start at the beginning of his life and present it chronologically: ‘You must first get him with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past.’<sup>36</sup> ‘More history, less nature’, an article by Edmund Whyte, points to the danger of concentrating on the ‘upholstery’ of a period rather than the ‘zeitgeist’ and suggests the novelist should create a historical era from ‘the inside out.’<sup>37</sup> While I could see these articles offered useful insights, I began to lose faith in my own ability and judgement. John Gardner’s book *The Art of Fiction* proved even more challenging. Gardner cautions against anything that impedes the flow of the ‘fictional dream’.<sup>38</sup> Reading his chapter on ‘Common Errors in Writing’, I recognised that, in terms of Gardner’s criteria, my writing was ‘not vivid enough’, used too much ‘abstract’ language, was ‘clumsy’, had ‘faulty’ rhythm. Even more demoralising, I recognised what Gardner described as ‘faults of soul’. My confidence shattered, the task ahead seemed too onerous in the time available. But, though I was willing to concede faults in my writing, I was not willing to give up. I remembered that my professional life had been spent encouraging other people to do things they thought they couldn’t do. I determined to continue writing my novel and in relation to the doctorate, with the support of my supervisors, I carried on.

At the start of the 2007-2008 academic year, two things helped me to progress. I was asked to write three sections of prose about three of the main relationships in Marion Angus’s life. This not only gave me a clear structure to aim for but also an achievable target. Secondly, it was agreed I should reinstate the Scots language.

‘Voice’ has been a recurring theme in my life. My father spoke Scots: my mother, Scots and English – she dealt with teachers, council officials, ministers and doctors. I

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<sup>36</sup> J. Mullan ‘Elements of Fiction – Backwards, not forwards: John Mullan analyses *The Master* by Colm Tóibín’, *The Guardian* (24 April 2005), 32.

<sup>37</sup> E. White, ‘More History, Less Nature’, *Times Literary Supplement* (25 July 2003), 11.

<sup>38</sup> J. Gardner, *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 115.

learned Scots rhymes and poems at home. But at primary school in the 1950s, I realised the extent of the gulf between education inside the classroom and outside. Scots was ‘slang’. *First Aid in English*, the school grammar book of the 1950s, reinforced this. ‘Scotland’ was mentioned as a country, but the language we spoke was ‘English’ or ‘Gaelic’ and the people of Scotland were invisible. As I wrote in a polemical piece in 2000,

The female negro maybe wasnae affa plaised tae be caa’d a negress, and  
her bairn a picaninny. But at least they was there ... there was nae  
mannies nor wifies nor bairnies ava.<sup>39</sup>

Little wonder then, that few people in Scotland give the language they speak much thought. Some switch between registers without thinking, unaware they are using Scots vocabulary or grammatical constructions. Some – even within universities – still refuse to give Scots the status of a language. Most people have never been taught how to write Scots.

Yet the evidence is that many people in Scotland are fluent in Scots and English, and research evidence proves that people fluent in a minority language who think of themselves as bilingual have educational advantages over those who are monolingual.<sup>40</sup> Conversely, the denigration of a minority language by the political and educational elite effectively cuts the link between language and cultural or literary heritage. This in itself damages self-confidence and self-image. This situation is not a topic for my thesis, but the facts are mentioned as further justification for my use of Scots.

The Scots language is designated as a regional language under Part II of the European Charter on Minority Languages, which was ratified by the UK Government in 2001.<sup>41</sup> However it was only recently that any significant official action was taken in

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<sup>39</sup> A. Chalmers, ‘Spikken the Hert’, *Chapman* 96 (2000), 55.

<sup>40</sup> Comhairle Na Gailscolaiochta (Council for Irish-Medium Education) lists nine advantages. <http://www.comhairle.org> (consulted 16 February 2009).

<sup>41</sup> The Scottish Government: European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/gaelic/gaelic-english/17910/europeancharter> (consulted 16 February 2006).

support of it, when the Scottish Government carried out an audit of current Scots language provision in Scotland.<sup>42</sup> The report of the audit states that Scotland has ‘an active, highly engaged and highly skilled, yet fragile community engaged in delivering Scots language provision.’ I want to be part of that community, that defends and celebrates the language I grew up with.

From an early age, without realising it, I absorbed the politics of language and culture. I took it as a personal betrayal in 1953 when the new queen was crowned Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, and not Queen Elizabeth I as – it was plain to me – she should have been. Living in England in the 1960s, I was defined by neighbours and friends in terms of being ‘Scottish’. My best English confused shopkeepers. If I came back from a holiday at home with Scottish pound notes, they weren’t good enough. In a 2001 memoir, ‘The New Brig’ I chart my growing awareness of a problem.

‘Your Grandad built that brig.’ They looked oot the car windae.  
 ‘Wat brig? Were?’  
 ‘There, look! The New Brig.’  
 ‘New?’  
 It was aye cried the New Brig, even though it wasnae new nae mair.  
 ‘We’re nearly hame,’ I said.  
 ‘Hame?’ They laughed at their mither speakin Scots, bairnies growin up  
 in England.<sup>43</sup>

Back in Scotland in the 1970s, I worked with Traveller families. The fact I could converse in Scots created a relationship of trust. I switched between languages (and clothes) as appropriate to the situation – campsite or education department. About this time, Tom Leonard’s poetry was banned from the school library shelves. This made me, like many others, eager to find out why. Leonard’s work opened my mind to language as an instrument of political power. His work continues today, to remind me of that fact.<sup>44</sup> Recently I spoke to a fellow doctoral student, who explained her parents had paid for

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<sup>42</sup> The Scottish Government, Publications, Audit of Current Scots Language Provision in Scotland. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/23133726/7> (consulted 23 February 2009).

<sup>43</sup> A. Chalmers, ‘The New Brig’, *Fife Fringe*, Issue 13 (Kelt: Windfall, 2001), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Tom Leonard, Glasgow, Scotland, <http://www.tomleonard.co.uk/main-publications.html> (consulted 10 August 2009).

elocution lessons to give her ‘very expensive vowels’ and to make sure she knew she was superior to all those who did not speak with ‘received pronunciation’. She was educated to understand that those of us with different ‘accents’ were not just ‘inferior’ but also ‘lazy’ because we did not take the trouble to open our mouths properly. My perception of inferiority was not without cause.

Working with young people from minority ethnic groups in the 1980s I discovered the inextricable links between language, culture and sense of place, and learned the value of bi-lingualism and multi-lingualism, the importance of the mother tongue in developing self-esteem and self-confidence and its role in academic achievement. At that stage the significance of the information for my own life passed me by.

Teaching English as a second language, in Greece, was a totally different experience. These students had a sense of pride in their own identity and language. English was, for them, just a useful world language to know. Nevertheless, the experience of teaching abroad proved to be informative. I railed against textbooks which implied England and the United Kingdom were synonymous, despaired at cultural stereotypes masquerading as jokes, as is evident from an early memoir.

‘ “Please serve tea in the garden,” said Lord Winston to his butler.  
 “I’ll serve it doon the front o yer breeks – ye stuck up gowk,” I willed the butler tae say back.’<sup>45</sup>

In the 1990s, back in Scotland, I carried out social policy action research in the area of equality of opportunity. The aim was to develop the voices of disadvantaged local authority service users so they could demand equal access to services. At the same time I absorbed ‘committee-speak’, that formal language of half-truths and manipulation, and honed my written skills in it to perfection.

‘Eence ye kent the richt wey o daein, ye could write a report oan oaniethin. As lang as ye just spikk fae yer heid.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> A. Chalmers, unpublished short story (1999).

<sup>46</sup> Chalmers, ‘Spikken the hert’, 55.

The spelling and grammar of my early ‘creative’ writing efforts – mainly memoirs – reveals my difficulty in finding an authentic written ‘Scots’ register. I studied Scots in literary journals, bought Scots language dictionaries, a Scots thesaurus, books on Scots grammar. I joined the Scots Language Society. As first minute secretary of the Scottish Parliament’s Cross Party Group on Scots, which campaigns for support for the Scots language, I practised by producing a minute of meetings in Scots with an English translation.<sup>47</sup> Whilst I enjoyed this as an exercise, I did not and do not believe Scots will ever supplant English as the language of business. And neither should it. William MacIlvanney, talking about the vigour and directness of Scots, said ‘You can’t [...] be hypocritical, I think it’s very difficult to be pompous in Scots’.<sup>48</sup> Not ideal for recording business meetings.

When I write in Scots I connect with early memories, with a history and culture I’ve come to value instead of denigrate. My expression of emotion in Scots feels more authentic, less contrived.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps that is why it is so important to me. In *The Mither Tongue* Billy Kay asserts:

Scots has a unique role as the tongue which is rooted deeply in the physical landscape we inhabit and has expressed our relationship with it for hundreds of years [...]. Scots is as essential to Scotland as her folk, her towns, her fields, her rivers. It is part of Scotland.<sup>50</sup>

And that is why it became so important for this novel.

Marion Angus became bilingual in Scots and English and came to be proud of her ‘Scots tongue’.<sup>51</sup> Accepting it might limit her potential audience, she wrote her poetry in it, not to make a political point, but because it best expressed her thoughts. As I am also

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<sup>47</sup> The Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Scots.  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/crossPartyGroups/groups/cpg-scots.htm> (consulted 23 February 2009).

<sup>48</sup> W. MacIlvanney quoted in B. Kay, *Scots: The Mither Tongue* (London: Grafton, 1988), p.178.

<sup>49</sup> The poems ...are vivid and demotic. Often with strongly dramatic or narrative elements, always with a strong and clear voice. There is ...a lucidity and an energy...’ Liz Lochhead (Tutor, University of Glasgow, 11 April 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Kay, *Scots: The Mither Tongue*, pp.178-9.

<sup>51</sup> NLS, Letters of Charles Graves, MS27476 fol.55 (10 April [1929]).

bi-lingual in Scots and English, I expected, in my creative writing, to use different registers in dialogue to reflect the reality of everyday communication in Scotland. I had no intention of writing a whole section of my novel in Scots. However, as it became obvious to me that some points of view needed more than Scots dialogue to make them authentic, my novel reflected that reality.

Senate Regulations for the Ph.D. in Creative Writing require the submission of a portfolio of original work and an accompanying, linked, research paper. Rather than engaging with theoretical accounts of biographical writing for the critical component of my thesis, I chose to focus on what seemed to me most relevant for my creative purpose: the family background of Marion Angus, her social milieu, her published and unpublished work. It seemed a logical way to proceed, given that biographical information about her was so scarce, and enabled me to form a clearer impression of what she was like. I then researched what other people had to say about her life and her work.

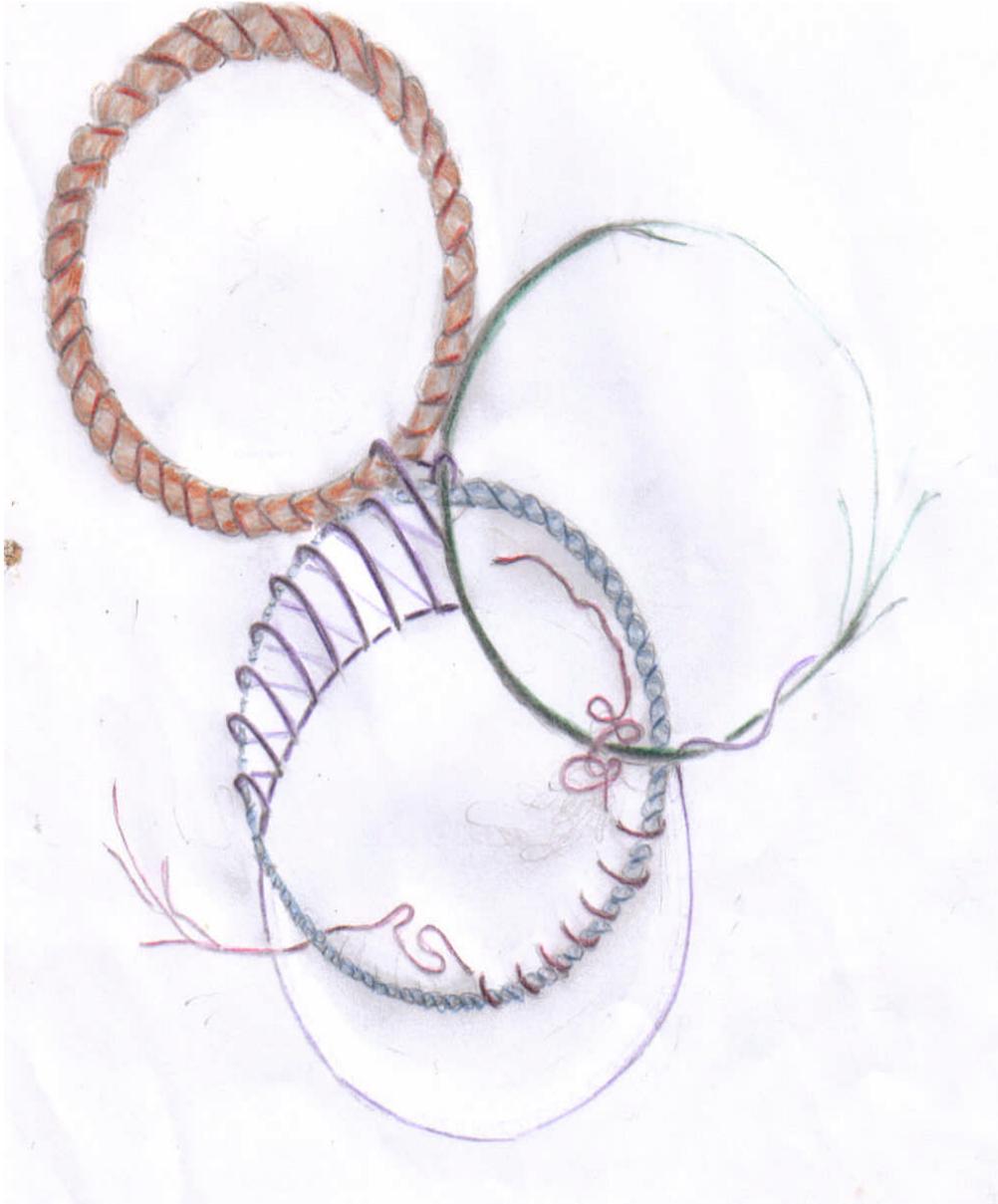
Because my critical work preceded, to a large extent, the creative, I present in PART I of my thesis, 'Alarums and Excursions', a fuller biographical account of the life of Marion Angus than is available elsewhere. In addition, in 'The Work of Marion Angus', I anthologise examples of her prose and poetry, and gather together a range of contemporary opinions. My research in this regard resulted in the tracing, for the first time, how her use of the Scots language developed, and how her attitude to it changed over time.

As my response to her poetry is emotional rather than analytical, and as my intention was that the critical writing would be a spur to creative writing, I did not attempt an in-depth critical analysis of her poetry or prose.

Part II comprises three extracts from my fictional biography about Marion Angus. The setting is the north-east of Scotland, the place which is 'hame' to me, as it was to

Marion Angus.

The following diagram, which I drew to clarify the structure of my novel, helped me visualise the linkage between the three relationships.



The novel starts where the three main circles interlink. Marion Angus's life is represented, in a clockwise direction, by the central blue circle. The green circle represents Wull Greig. The straggly thread stitched into the blue is Ethel, Marion's sister.

The lower circle, emanating from the green, represents Williamina Matthew, who gives Marion Angus security in the last year of her life. It links back to the golden circle, which represents the poet Violet Jacob. Although Marion and Violet only met once, in the last year of their lives, population movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, from rural areas to towns, created circumstances that allowed Marion and Violet to have something in common – friendship with Wull Greig.

Through my novel I hope to humanise Marion Angus. Nostalgia for a lost love is not the only reason why an elderly single woman might hesitate to participate in literary society. It would also please me if I can demonstrate the point that has been made many times before, not least by Marion Angus: Scots writing can be accessible to all, not just those who speak Scots. It may even add to the quality of a poem or a novel. There is surely room for cultural and linguistic diversity.

**PART I: THE LIFE AND WORK OF MARION EMILY ANGUS**



**Marion Emily Angus – aged approximately 35 years**  
Photo by kind permission of Alan Byatt

Biography: 'Alarums And Excursions'

*The forebears o my kin*

The Angus family tree extends back to John Angus (born Dunfermline 1650).<sup>1</sup> There must be a strong probability that Marion Angus was related to another John Angus (1515-1596), Precentor and Almoner of Dunfermline Abbey during the Reformation (vicar of Inverkeithing 1562), who is credited with anticipating the Reformation in music 'by providing metrical pieces which the people could sing in the vernacular'.<sup>2</sup> Marion's paternal grandfather, Henry Angus, born 1795 in Inverkeithing, was described as 'one of a long line of Scottish ministers from the eastern Scottish counties'.<sup>3</sup> Henry was 'a man of great mental ability and commanding personality'.<sup>4</sup> He became minister in St Nicholas Lane United Presbyterian Church, Aberdeen (later the Church of St Nicholas).<sup>5</sup> Marion's grandmother, Ann Booth, was daughter of one of the elders of the church.<sup>6</sup>

Her father, also Henry, born 1834, was the third child in a family of twelve, six brothers and six sisters. He graduated with honours from Marischal College in Aberdeen, was medallist in mathematics, and a founder member of the Hellenic Club. Between training sessions at the Divinity Hall of the United Presbyterian Church in Edinburgh he worked as a tutor at Percy Street Academy, Newcastle-on-Tyne, then taught mathematics at the Edinburgh High School. He was called to Union Street Chapel, Sunderland, where he was ordained, in March 1859.<sup>7</sup> Three years later he married Mary Jessie Watson at the family home, 35 Dee Street, Aberdeen. Mary Jessie, born 1837, was the third child, the only daughter of Marion [Weir] and William Watson.

<sup>1</sup> Aberdeen Family History Centre: 'The Angus Family History (Dunfermline Branch)', typescript compiled by D. Angus (Vancouver) and A. Byatt (Chelmsford), [n/p].

<sup>2</sup> E. Sprott-Towill, *People and Places in the Story of the Scottish Church* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1976), p.5.

<sup>3</sup> W. Duke, 'Women Poets of Today', *Glasgow Herald* (15 January 1936), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Unattributed obituary: 'Death of the Rev. Henry Angus, D.D.[son of Rev. Henry Angus of Aberdeen]', *Arbroath Herald AH* (22 May 1902), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. R., Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900*, 2 vols., (Edinburgh: Small, 1904), p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Angus and Byatt, 'The Angus Family History', [n/p].

<sup>7</sup> Unattributed obituary: 'Death of the Rev. Henry Angus', *AH*, 5.

Marion Angus's biography of her grandfather, *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen*, from which the following information comes, provides lively anecdotes about her grandfather's life and character.<sup>8</sup> He came from 'a long line of small proprietors – sheep farmers in a high semi-moorland district of Lanarkshire', but was sent to Edinburgh to be educated (p.1). During his legal apprenticeship, he moved in Edinburgh literary circles. The theatre was 'his supreme delight' and vacation times were 'employed in reading the novels'(p. 8). He remembered his mother's uncle Robert Stodart, 'the inventor of the pianoforte' and passed on to his granddaughter the story of a passing stranger who had called at the farm one summer morning in his grandmother's time. 'I was reddin' up,' Marion's great-great grandmother had said, 'so the stranger lad gaed in aboot the garden and set him doon, and when I came oot bye with the whisky he was singing away rail blythe.'

'You'll be a rhyming billy,' she said.

'They call me Robbie Burns.'

'Weel, I wad like fine to see mysel' in print. Ye'll maybe mak' a bit verse on Jean Stodart, but no till I get my Sabbath goon on.' (pp. 89-90)

As Sheriff-Substitute of Aberdeenshire Sheriff Watson was liberal in politics and a social reformer who established the industrial school movement in Aberdeen, in an attempt to improve conditions for poor children. Marion recalled his warm and emotional nature, and his familiarity with poetry. 'I felt like one/ who treads alone/ some banquet hall deserted,' he recited to himself in Marion's hearing when she was a little girl and he was an old man (p.17-18).<sup>9</sup> For her, this phrase was always associated with 'The scent of boxwood [...] red and yellow snapdragon and a mossy sundial,' and the image of her grandfather, 'stooping a little, but tall and handsome still' (p. 91).

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<sup>8</sup> M. Angus, *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen: The story of his life, and his work for the young* (Aberdeen: Wyllie, 1913).

<sup>9</sup> T. Moore, 'The Light of Other Days' (lines 19-21), *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, 6<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.224.

*A bit lassie*

Marion Emily Angus, known as ‘Minnie’, second child and first daughter of Henry and Mary, was born at 23, Park Place West, a terraced house on the south side of Sunderland, on 27 March 1865.<sup>10</sup> Little is known about the eleven years she spent there, except that thanks to her father, Union Street Chapel was replaced with the beautiful new Trinity Church, and he was held in high esteem by his parishioners.<sup>11</sup>

After the births of Henry (1864) and Marion Emily (1865), came Annie Katharine (1867), known as Kate, William Watson (1869), Ethel Mary (1871) and Amy Margaret (1873).<sup>12</sup> Brother Henry attended Bruce’s Academy in Newcastle, but, according to Winifred Duke, Marion’s own education was ‘a very ordinary and home-spun affair’.<sup>13</sup> Life in the manse would have been lively with six children under the age of nine, and Marion would have been expected to help with the younger children. Helen Cruickshank, who believed herself to be a close friend, thought Marion had only one sister, when in fact she was from a family of seven. That might indicate Marion chose not to talk about her family.<sup>14</sup> But it may reveal more about the nature of the friendship, rather than Marion’s reticence, for in correspondence Marion revealed casually to a friend that two brothers in England had been ill.<sup>15</sup> The topic was not one she deliberately avoided.

There is no record of Marion’s referring to Sunderland, or mentioning her early life beyond reference to the books she enjoyed as a child, which included Sir Walter Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather* (‘one of my favourite books’)<sup>16</sup> and *Alice in Wonderland*. In the persona of Arthur Ogilvie, she wrote, on hearing of the death of Lewis Carroll:

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<sup>10</sup> General Register Office [GRO] (England): Register of Births, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1865, sub-registration district of Sunderland, ref. 10a/518.

<sup>11</sup> Unattributed obituary: ‘Death of the Rev. Henry Angus, D.D.’, *AH*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Angus and Byatt, ‘The Angus Family History’, [n/p].

<sup>13</sup> Duke, ‘Women Poets of Today,’ 8.

<sup>14</sup> J. MacRitchie, ‘Arbroath’s Singin Lass’, *Arbroath Herald Annual AHA* (December 1996), [n/p].

<sup>15</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.29 (18 Feb [1930]).

<sup>16</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.32 (9 March [1930]).

How his creations amused me in the old days; the Rabbit, the Hatter, the Red Queen, the Knight who never rode abroad without his mousetrap and his frying pan, on the grounds that, 'one never knew when such things might not be required.' Why, it is a pleasure merely to recount their names.<sup>17</sup>

Despite her birthplace, it is likely she was brought up to think of herself as Scots, both inside and outside the home. Her parents were Scots, and her father's links with colleagues and friends in Aberdeen remained strong. Her history was Scottish. The kirk was Scots. Her parents would probably have spoken with a cultured Scots accent. According to her reading, her father's study was lined with books by Scottish authors and poets: Walter Scott, Robert Burns, Thomas Carlyle. Scots words and place names would have been familiar to her through the stories in these books, family tales, children's rhymes, and the ballads.

She would have attended church services from an early age. An entry by Arthur in his diary draws on personal memory and in all probability must be based on her experience:

Can we not all give instances of a particular odour recalling to us some childish scene or suggestion of long ago? The smell of a cigar, of oranges, of paraffin, carries back one mind or another to some day of pleasure in the far past; to yet another the smell of escaping gas recalls a panorama seen many years ago; while with not a few an 'extra strong' is mentally associated with a musty pew in childhood, when the preacher seemed so dull, and the kind old lady passed along the stimulating sweetmeat on the quiet.<sup>18</sup>

The Sabbath apparently held no fears for her. In the persona of Arthur she reported:

Thus we were allowed to disport ourselves at home on Sunday afternoons, much as we pleased; but there might not be any noisy games, nor any shouting such as might disturb chance passers-by beyond the shrubbery. As small boys, we might play ships in the bath, or even fall into it with impunity [...]. Reading of all sorts was freely allowed, nay even approved, since it implied some degree of silence; unless, indeed, the binding was yellow; which too flauntingly declared that the contents were not purely devotional.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> AO, 31 January 1898, *AG* (5 February 1898), 2.

<sup>18</sup> AO, 3 September 1898, *AG* (10 September 1898), 2.

<sup>19</sup> AO, 14 August 1898, *AG* (20 August 1898), 2.

Just before Marion's eleventh birthday, her father accepted a call to Erskine United Presbyterian Church in Arbroath.<sup>20</sup> Marion would have known about Arbroath Abbey, founded by King William the Lion in 1178, the Assembly of the Estates of Scotland in 1320 to draw up the Declaration of Arbroath, the Bell Rock Lighthouse built on a rock in the ocean, 12 miles from Arbroath. And was Arbroath not Fairport, described by Sir Walter Scott in *The Antiquary*? She probably felt she was coming home.

The family moved in February 1876, in the middle of a cold spell that lasted for two months. If the biting wind slackened enough to let her look around, she would have seen a beautiful natural setting, a shallow basin on the coast. She described the town later, in one of her 'diaries'.

Walked up the Dens this afternoon and admired the glorious sunset. Looking back at the town from the wooden Bridge over the railway, one is impressed by its work-a-day appearance. The prominent feature is the forest of tall chimneys, standing huddled together down the course of the Brothock [...]. From the Ness, the masts of the fishing boats and of a schooner or two, and the quay, remind one of the township's old maritime importance [...]. In the town, the Abbey ruins and the Water Tower, our two great monuments, mark the changes in the way of social and civil government, for they denote that we have transferred our allegiance from the once great and powerful ecclesiastical authority to the Police Commission.<sup>21</sup>

Another entry recorded:

Chance led me today to look at the map of the burgh; and it struck me [...] what a crooked cranky, confused contorted little town we live in; the streets describing every sort of pattern except those sanctioned by a rational geometry.<sup>22</sup>

Arbroath was then at the height of its industrial output. Half the population of 11,000 were spinning flax or weaving sailcloth. Machinery trembled, rattled, droned. The air was thick with fibrous dust from the weaving mills and smelt of hides from the tanneries, chlorine from the plash mills where the fabric was bleached, and the reek of the barrels where the famous Arbroath 'smokies' were cured. The harbour bustled with

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<sup>20</sup> Small, *History of the Congregations*, p.103.

<sup>21</sup> AO, 18 November 1897, *AG* (20 November 1897), 2.

<sup>22</sup> AO, 28 January 1898, *AG* (6 February 1898), 2.

fishing boats, barques and schooners.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Arbroath was a fraction of the size of Sunderland, and Marion may have glimpsed a degree of freedom.

She had no doubt imagined her new home, 'Hyde Park House' in Bank Street, Arbroath, to be as grand as the name. But it was a pun. 'Hyde Park' was built across the road from a tannery, and the 'Bank' was the slope down to the dirty, evil-smelling Brothock Burn.

It is likely her mother had some wealth, and with her father's annual stipend of £360, well above the level of other minister's salaries at the time, the family had a good income. The high stipend probably reflects the prosperous congregation of Erskine Church, drawn mainly from the successful business class, and their willingness to pay generously for a preacher of distinction. Mr Angus was certainly much better off than the mill workers, who earned from £25 to £60 a year. Two domestic servants were engaged to help with the household tasks: Georgina Brown, a housemaid from Arbroath (four years older than Marion), and Leah Selby from Brechin, a cook.<sup>24</sup>

George Watson Angus, another brother, was born a few months after the move, but died the following spring, 11 months old, of scarlatina.<sup>25</sup> Aunt Jessie came down from Aberdeen to help. The family bought a plot at the Western Cemetery, where George was buried.<sup>26</sup>

Though there are no existing school records, Marion attended Arbroath High School, where she won prizes for essays in 1880 and 1881 on the subject of 'The Sea' and 'The Power of Kindness over Lower Animals'.<sup>27</sup> Comment by Arthur, about a circus in town, shows inside knowledge of formal education:

For an hour or so I am a boy again, without the boy's heart sinking at the

<sup>23</sup> G. Hay, *History of Arbroath to the Present Time*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Arbroath: Buncle, 1896); P.C. Carragher, *Arbroath: The Royal Burgh of Romance* (Saltcoats: Wallace, 1909).

<sup>24</sup> GRO (Scotland): British Census (1881) RD 272 ED 4 Page 7 (Hyde Park House, Bank Street, Arbroath).

<sup>25</sup> GRO (Scotland) Register of Deaths, Arbroath and St Vigeans, RD 272/1 Entry 164 1877.

<sup>26</sup> Records of Leisure and Recreation Department, Arbroath (George Watson Angus, 11 months, interred Plot D 360 Western Cemetery, 18 April 1877).

<sup>27</sup> 'English Department Prizes for 1880', *AH*, 3 July 1880, p.1: 'English Department Prizes for 1881' 2 July 1881, 1.

irrepressible thought of versions unprepared for the morrow. If ever I had charge of children I should send them hither to learn grace and manners of deportment; and if I were the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, hither should I send all the schools, class by class and standard by standard, for here they would learn, better than from a century of annual sermons, that gentleness, patience and persuasion – with a little firmness in reserve – will accomplish more in ten minutes than whacking and shouting and blustering will effect in a day.<sup>28</sup>

The established church in Scotland had gone through a period of great schism in the nineteenth century with congregations seeking spiritual independence from the state and freedom of patronage by local gentry. Two different breakaway churches, the Secession Church and the Relief Church, united in 1847 as the United Presbyterian Church, which was unique in that while the minister chaired the Kirk Session, a Junior Court, which conducted the business and financial affairs of the church was chaired by the Preses, usually a local business man. In Marion's youth the United Presbyterian Church was seen as a radical force in society. It had supported women's suffrage since the 1870s. A successor of Marion's father paints a dynamic picture of Erskine United Presbyterian Church under the charge of Mr Angus:

In his pulpit [...] appeared some of the greatest scholars and preachers of the age [...] He had his church looking at the problems of his age and trying to solve them. The formative years of Marion's life were spent in this church with its stimulating environment and companionships. The membership of the church had in it very many of the leading, powerful people of Arbroath and the surrounding area.<sup>29</sup>

Surviving sermons of Henry Angus reinforce this opinion. They allude to the classics, European culture, politics, history, literature, and the fine arts and give the impression of a highly educated individual of great depth and vision, with a commitment to making the world a better place to live.<sup>30</sup> The church itself, a narrow fronted grey ashlar building with arched windows, sat behind railings just back from the pavement in the recently renamed Commerce Street, as described in *Christabel's Diary*.

<sup>28</sup> AO, 20 August 1898, *AG* (27 August 1898), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Angus Archives [AA]: Marion Angus Papers, Andrew Russell [AR], (minister of Erskine United Presbyterian Church 1945-1955), 3/5, [n/d].

<sup>30</sup> Rev. H. Angus, *The Church's Song of Praise* (Arbroath: Buncle, 1892); *The True Source of Human Greatness* (Arbroath: Buncle, 1897); *Four Sermons* (Arbroath: Buncle, 1903).

But Commerce Street – and my mind is a blank! Nobody seems to stop to talk there for the pleasure of it – the flow of business might be interrupted. Lumbering drays stand before shop doors, and there are obstructions always in the way – long or round or oblong or weird shaped – the commerce, I presume. Poor street, saddled with a name ‘unto which you were not born!’ – a Bradford or a Manchester or a Liverpool name. They might have called you Kirkgait, with the gait spelt the proper way. The Kirks are there, though one is just stepping round the corner, and the other [Erskine] retires modestly, or is it gingerly, into her niche.<sup>31</sup>

Inside the church was a wooden herringbone ceiling. Above the pulpit a high dome was painted blue with gold stars. From her front side pew Marion had a view of the whole church. Across from her sat the influential Corsar family, mill owners who made their fortune from the sailcloth for which Arbroath was famous. The townspeople called the church ‘Corsar’s Kirk’, and the service could not start until the Corsars were in their pew. Margaret Buncle, a year older than Marion, sat in the row behind the Corsars. Her family owned the *Arbroath Guide*, a local newspaper ‘more cultured’ than the *Arbroath Herald*.<sup>32</sup> Marion and she became lifelong friends.

In 1876 there were still some cases of church discipline, when young women were brought before church elders for ‘ante-nuptial fornication’. But under Mr Angus these petered out. The singing in church was still led by the Precentor. In the winter of 1879 there was great upheaval in the congregation, tense meetings and secret votes, when he requested ‘consideration of a harmonium as an auxiliary to the service of praise’.<sup>33</sup> But the organ, when it came, was an excellent one, powered by water, and the church acoustics were good.

It was not just the church that was lively. There were numerous activities, clubs, cultural societies and public meetings taking place in the town. Marion may have been one of the many spectators, or one of the fifty-seven participants, at the first Spelling Bee ever to be held in Arbroath in 1876. She may have attended dancing or elocution classes,

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<sup>31</sup> Christabel Massingbird [Marion Angus], *Christabel’s Diary* [CD], 28 March 1899 (Arbroath: Buncle, 1899), p.13.

<sup>32</sup> AA: Marion Angus Papers, AR, 3/7, [n/d].

<sup>33</sup> National Archives of Scotland [NAS], General Register House, CH3/963/3, Minutes of Erskine United Presbyterian Church Session, October-December 1879.

or the cookery school. A major annual event was the St Thomas Market in July, when stalls lined the High Street. Working men and women from town and country, beggars, fiddlers, ballad singers, took over the streets in enormous crowds.

She must have seen the fishwives, dressed in heavy kersey wool skirts over stiff petticoat layers, who lived at the 'fit o the toon', in houses so close to the sea their backyards were bathed by the waves. They spent their days 'sheelin' mussels, baiting lines, gutting and preparing haddocks for smoking, and walking miles to sell their fish.

As is clear from *The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie*, Marion was well acquainted with the 'rose-purple rays streaming over the golden sands of Barry.'<sup>34</sup> She knew Elliot Beach, the Links of Lunan, cliff walks and: 'a small but cool pellucid pool in a sequestered spot at the Cliffs'.<sup>35</sup> In the diary she wrote of green wooded dens where, 'children were romping, their voices loud and clear in the silent air, while swallows skimmed the surface of the burn.'<sup>36</sup> On day trips she crossed Strathmore into the glens of Angus, and climbed the hills, from where she would have seen the great granite summit of Cloch-na-Ben in the distance. In the summer months she went on family holidays to the Highlands and into Deeside: wild places where she loved to walk.

This was the environment in which Marion Angus spent her childhood. She would have been well known, given her father's position and the relatively small population of the town. Her propensity to roam would have made her even more visible: 'Being a wanderer by nature', she wrote to William Jeffrey, she knew 'every road and bye-path from the cliffs and the sea to the wild glens of Angus – Clova and Prosen.'<sup>37</sup>

### *The singin lass*

Probably about the time Marion left school, the family moved to a newly built manse, a

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<sup>34</sup> AO, 31 Oct 1898, AG (6 November 1898), 2.

<sup>35</sup> AO, 9 August 1898, AG (13 August 1898), 2.

<sup>36</sup> AO, 25 June 1898, AG (2 July 1898), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Edinburgh University Library Special Collections [EULSC], Papers of Maurice Lindsay: MS 2030/30/414 a-c ([autumn] 1944).

handsome, semi-detached red sandstone building. Lochshade, 15 Dalhousie Place, was on the edge of Arbroath, near the Keptie Pond. The porch had a mosaic tile floor and an unusual stained glass window of textured green glass. The house was finished to a high standard, with large bay windows, wood panelling and Italianate classical cornices. Bells summoned the servants from the back kitchen that looked out on outhouses in the long back garden. A wide staircase, with a toilet on the first landing, was lit by a large skylight in the roof. From the first floor bedrooms a narrow stair led to a large, wood-lined, coffin-shaped attic. There was a glimpse of sea in the distance. On the sitting room window there is a mysterious handprint, described by the current owners as ‘like the hand of a five year old on the window’.<sup>38</sup> They called a glazier to examine it, but he could neither remove it nor explain it. A text published in the 1890s offers a suggestion, if not an explanation. Robert Kirk, the seventh son of a minister at Aberfoyle, was a student of Theology at St Andrews University who had been drawn to the study of psychic phenomena in the early eighteenth century. In 1893 Andrew Lang produced a commentary on his work, in which he reports that the ‘Subterranean inhabitants of Mr Kirk’s book are [...] a lingering memory of the chthonian beings’.<sup>39</sup> They were only visible to those who had the second sight, a gift which includes ‘not only the power to see distant or future events, but the viewless forms of air.’ He records that the Psychical Society compared tales of fairies with modern instances of psychical phenomena and reports the experience of a Mrs Clarke: ‘a number of the gentle people (‘sleagh maith’), occasionally frequented her house [...] often conversed with her, one of them putting its hands on her eyes during the time, which hands represented, from the sensation she had, to be about the size of those of a child of four or five years of age.’<sup>40</sup> By strange coincidence, Winifred Duke concludes an article on Marion Angus: ‘To read her verse is

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<sup>38</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Recorded Conversation with P.D. and L. Whamond, Lochshade, 20 April 2003, 1/1.

<sup>39</sup> A. Lang, *Commentary on The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies: A study in folklore and psychical research*. Text by R. Kirk (1691), Comment by A. Lang (London: Nutt, 1893), p.xiii.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxv and p.li.

like sitting in an empty room where fingers tap on the window pane, and outside the house something passes on noiseless feet.’<sup>41</sup>

Life for Marion’s brothers had a practical focus. Brother Henry attended the Gymnasium, Old Aberdeen, then Aberdeen University, where he studied medicine. William attended Aberdeen Grammar School. Cousin Robert from London, whose father had died suddenly as the result of poisoning, attended Robert Gordon’s College in Aberdeen. Marion did not enrol for higher education. She may have regretted this, but, willingly or otherwise, accepted the duty of the older daughter of the manse. Her friend Margaret, in the meantime, became a Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music in London.<sup>42</sup> Other women of Marion’s age and class were enrolling at St Andrews University by this time.<sup>43</sup>

Whether Marion resented the end to her formal education is not documented. However, what is apparent is that throughout her life, as well as pursuing her love of the hills, she sought to educate herself through reading and to enrich her mind through culture. Winifred Duke noted, ‘It needed no schoolroom or University to instil into her mind that [...] passionate affection for the wild and remote in nature which has always called to her.’<sup>44</sup>

As a young woman she fully participated in the social life of Arbroath. But her main duty would have been to assist her mother and father in the smooth running of household and church business. She visited the sick. A contemporary recalled the following incidents.<sup>45</sup>

It was spring, my sister had reached the early convalescent stage of a long severe illness. I looked in as usual to see her before returning to work in the afternoon. She was lying on her couch by the window and at her side I found Marion Angus paying one of her periodic visits. She was reading to my sister and I well remember the book of her choice was J.M.

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<sup>41</sup> Duke, ‘Women Poets of Today’, 8.

<sup>42</sup> *AG* (15 January 1898), 2.

<sup>43</sup> The Lady Literate in the Arts (a certificate for women) began 1877.

<sup>44</sup> Duke, ‘Women Poets of Today’, 8.

<sup>45</sup> AA: Marion Angus Papers, AR, copy of letter of John S. Mill (17 May 1947), 3/4.

Barrie's 'The Stickit Minister'.<sup>46</sup>

His letter stresses her friendliness and charm:

I was paying my first visit back to the town after having migrated to the south. On Sunday morning I attended service at Erskine Church. After service I remember Marion Angus coming over to me with eagerly outstretched hand and charm of manner which was all her own just to give a kindly greeting.

Another pen-picture of his shows her at leisure.

There had been a heavy fall of snow followed by a day or two of keen black frost. The "Lochie" was fit for skating with the ice in perfect condition. I went to enjoy this healthy exercise and as I approached from the High School end remember seeing Marion Angus and her sister coming down from the manse with their skates over their arm[sic]. They were good skaters and [I] can well remember the youthful admiration I experienced in seeing them with hands crossed, in perfect unison, sailing gracefully over the ice.

There are hints in Marion's early prose that might back up some of the speculation based on her poetry about youthful romantic entanglements: mysterious strangers, 'gentle' souls; parental interference, rejection. In *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen*, with characteristic ambiguity, she makes a comment which could be construed as either dismissive of emotionality or evidence of it. Talking of her grandfather's first love, she remarks; 'her uncle [...] had other views for his niece, and with sad hearts, no doubt, but as far as one can see none of the fuming and rebellion of modern disappointed lovers, the two bade each other farewell.'<sup>47</sup> Loaded with heavy irony, a diary entry details Arthur's emotional turmoil:

I am not as I was. So long have I flowed down the stream of life with even current – today sailing smoothly over the sparkling, sunlit shallows, anon gliding no less placidly through the deep still waters, overhung by weeping willow and tremulous aspen – so long have I drifted on the bosom of this calm current that I had come to think it would be ever thus, until, with the great ocean, the full river of my life was reunited. It may not be so, for already I am in tortuous and broken narrows, fraught with peril for the voyageur [sic]; and methinks I hear the dull reverberations of deep sound, and feel the quickening flow, which warn of rapids and

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<sup>46</sup> 'The Stickit Minister' (1893) is by S.R. Crocket, often linked with Barrie and the Kailyard School. J.M. Barrie's book was 'The Little Minister', in which one of the characters was Mr Micah Mathew, a tailor in Arbroath.

<sup>47</sup> Angus, *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen*, p.11.

eddies in my course ahead. Shall I stick to my bark – birch-bark – or try a pair-oar? <sup>48</sup>

Although the number and nature of her romantic relationships remains speculation, we do know she had a circle of close friends. In her lengthy obituary for Robert Corstorphine, the son of an English Master at Arboath High School, she reveals not only her affection for him, but also details of their life as young adults.<sup>49</sup> During his holidays from St Andrews University he ‘brought with him to the household, of which I was one, a sense of coming adventure, of something about to happen.’ She describes waiting up until after midnight for him to return from a fishing trip, in order to ‘hear the results of the day’s sport and the usual travellers’ tales.’ Unlike her, Robert did not care for poetry, though one day:

his hair tousled in the wild spring wind, he stopped me and, without greeting of any kind, began to repeat in a solemn tone and with a frown the first stanza of Wordsworth’s poem, *To the Daffodils*, ‘I wandered, lonely as a cloud’.

As young adults they had freedom to roam:

A party of us, with Robert as leader, set off on a hill-climbing expedition, and after long tramping ‘o’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent’ found ourselves as day was waning in lost and unknown country, high up between Angus and Aberdeenshire, with the dreaded hill mist enveloping us.

The fog grew more and more dense. The whole world became blotted out, and we were mere blind shadows against a curtain, or a pall of moisture. We girls huddled together, miserable, cold and wet, in highly unsuitable sailor hats and the long skirts of the period. Robert, in a kind of grim enjoyment, bade us not to move at the risk of our lives, as we were on the edge of a precipice.

We load him with opprobrious abuse: we despise his guidance. He produces a flask of whisky and water which we gladly sip and then subside into sulky silence.

It was mid-summer, yet long seemed the hours until sunrise. At last a cock crew somewhere far off – a faint ray of sunshine pierced the haze, a breeze stirred, the mist slowly dispersed. We looked about us and saw the hillside slope unbroken downwards towards the glen. There was no precipice. ‘But there might have been,’ said our guide. ‘It’s always best to be on the safe side – with girls.’ The adventure ended in laughter over breakfast at the inn, where, after careful sharing of our combined

<sup>48</sup> AO, 30 August 1898, AG (3 September 1898), 2.

<sup>49</sup> M. Angus, ‘Robert H. Corstorphine (1874-1942)’ in *Robert H. Corstorphine 1874-1942* (Arbroath: Buncle, 1942), p. 3-5.

pocket money, we found we had just enough to pay the bill.

She describes another occasion, sitting by the fire one autumn evening with Robert and a group of friends, 'in a solitary mansion house set among lonely hills':

'I have heard the "Death Watch" in this house', Robert said. 'It sounds not in the least like the tick of a watch, as most people think, but rather the "tap, tap" of some blunt instrument, muffled by the walls surrounding it.

Later, 'in the dead of night', when Marion imagined 'the whole house, as the moorland without, was wrapped in slumber', a curious sound came from the wall close by her bed. Three taps and silence. Three taps again. In a manner which reminds the reader of Edgar Allan Poe's poem, 'The Raven' (''Tis some visitor', I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door—/only this, and nothing more'), she describes 'stealthily opening the door' and peering into the corridor. A shadowy figure vanished round the corner.

'I heard the "Death Watch" last night' so I told the company at breakfast.  
'What? Not really!'  
'Yes, really,' was my reply, 'it wears a Jaeger dressing gown and bedroom slippers.'<sup>50</sup>

At some stage Marion was given an allowance that gave her more independence, and it is likely she was sent to France to study the language, for she spoke it fluently and makes frequent reference to France in her work. 'Arthur' remembers 'the spring I spent in the Rue d'Auvergne, sent to learn the language'.<sup>51</sup> 'Christabel' has fond memories of 'the Judas tree that bloomed in front of old Madame de —'s chateau, near Dijon'.<sup>52</sup> Marion's poem 'In Ardelot' in *The Tinker's Road and Other Verses* (Glasgow: Gowans and Grey, 1924) celebrates a 'gentle' love amongst rocking pines:

All gentle souls  
My heart enthrall,  
And you most gentle  
Were of all.

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<sup>50</sup> The Raven Site. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Raven' (lines 5-6).  
[http://www.heise.de/ix/raven/Literature/Lore/The\\_Raven.html](http://www.heise.de/ix/raven/Literature/Lore/The_Raven.html) (consulted 10 August 2009).

<sup>51</sup> AO, 6 April 1898, AG (9 April 1898), 2.

<sup>52</sup> CD, 14 March 1899, p.10.

[...]

In Ardelot,  
In Ardelot,  
By rocking pines  
Of Ardelot.

Ardelot is a wooded area of Nord Pas-de Calais. She also spent time in Switzerland and in an 1899 newspaper article ‘Round about Geneva’, which was subsequently printed as a book, she describes visits to various places around the lake: Geneva, ‘famous for rather inferior watches and clocks and a theologian called Calvin’; Lausanne, ‘a quiet place and without its [Geneva’s] brilliance’; Ouchy, ‘a pretty suburb’, Vevey, Montreux and The Castle of Chillon.<sup>53</sup>

Henry graduated as a doctor in 1888, and after a two-year trip to Otago in New Zealand went to practice in Bingley, Yorkshire. Annie Katharine went to be his housekeeper.<sup>54</sup> In Bingley Annie met the Rev. Richard Garrett Johnson, a ‘clerk in Holy orders’, curate of Holy Trinity Church, who was living at the Red Lion Hotel, Wath-upon-Dearne, and they married.<sup>55</sup> Marion’s brother Henry married Elizabeth Stephenson, the daughter of his former midwifery professor, in Aberdeen in 1893. William became an engineer and went to live in Newcastle.

In 1891 Marion’s father, along with his wife and Marion, Ethel and Amy, were still living at home with one servant, Christina Allan from ‘Fordun’ [sic] in Kincardineshire.<sup>56</sup> Rev. Angus had had the degree of Doctor of Divinity conferred on him by Aberdeen University in 1889. In 1893 he went to Mazomet in France representing the Kirk. According to his obituary, at one stage he also took charge of the Protestant church

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<sup>53</sup> M. Angus, ‘Round About Geneva’, *AG* (11 February 1899); *Round About Geneva* (Arbroath: Buncle, 1899).

<sup>54</sup> GRO (England), British Census (1891) RG 12/3533 fol.131 (17, Charles Street, Bingley).

<sup>55</sup> GRO (England), British Census (1891) RG 12/3854 fol.40 (Red Lion Hotel, Wath-upon-Dearne).

<sup>56</sup> GRO (Scotland) British Census (1891) RD: 272/00 ED: 028/000 Keptie Ward, Royal Burgh of Arbroath ([Lochshade] 15, Dalhousie Place, Arbroath).

in Algeria for a season.<sup>57</sup> Marion continued to participate in church life. There was the Church Young Women's Guild, the Mission Sunday School and practical support for missionary Jessie Cruickshank in the leper colony at Calabar.<sup>58</sup> From 1894 she was secretary of the 'Women's Working Guild', involved in meetings of the Zenana Mission Committee, the Indian Famine Fund Service of Praise in February 1897, when £6/11/6d was raised.<sup>59</sup> Despite her close involvement with her father's kirk, she must have by this time developed a mind of her own. At any rate she was not unduly restricted in her activities, for she went to hear the Rev. John McNeill, a well-known evangelist associated with the Young Men's Christian Association, in Arbroath in December 1897, though the Preses of Erskine Church had refused to let him use their kirk. She reported that during his address he said that his mother was a good woman, she was in Heaven, but he was sorry to say his grandmother was a bad woman; she was in hell.

Two young men got up. John McNeil stopped and said, 'Where are you going?' One of them said, 'Hell. Have you any message to give your Granny?'<sup>60</sup>

A young unmarried minister, Rev. William Jack Nichol Service arrived as an assistant at the Parish Church in 1898. About the same time, Marion's sister, Ethel, took over as secretary of the Guild. Given subsequent developments, it is tempting to speculate she may have been hoping to impress Rev. Service, but there is no evidence to support this.

Over the years, news from across the world filtered into the family home from the large extended family scattered across the globe: Uncle William was Deputy Surgeon-General in India; Henry spent two years in New Zealand; Uncle George and Uncle James worked as jackaroos (apprentices on an Australian sheep-station) in Queensland, Australia; Uncle Joseph and Uncle John were Importers and Agents in London; cousin

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<sup>57</sup> Unattributed obituary: 'Death of the Rev. Henry Angus, D.D.', *AH*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> NAS, CH3 963/3 (17 November 1886).

<sup>59</sup> NAS, CH3/963/3 (24 March 1884). [Zenana Missionary work was conducted by Christian women among Hindu women.]

<sup>60</sup> UAHC, MS 2337/39, (c.1948).

John in Somaliland became, at the age of 25, the youngest Captain in the British Army at the time; cousin Henry surveyed the whole route of the Cape to Cairo Railway by riding and walking from South Africa; cousin Rachel worked as a nurse in the West Indies and was awarded The Order [Cross] of St John of Jerusalem; two other cousins emigrated to Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, in Canada. Letters would also have come from Robert Corstorphine, who travelled extensively in ‘far-off foreign countries’ in his pursuit of botanical specimens.<sup>61</sup> Snippets of some of these events cropped up in Marion’s fictional ‘diaries’.

But if it has been hot at Arbroath, it has been hotter on the Nile, where our brave Seaforths and Camerons have won fresh laurels [...]. Another chapter in African history is closed, and soon we shall hear: ‘Khartoum. All change here. Through trains for Port Elizabeth, via Uganda and Delagoa Bay, third platform on the left please’ and read; ‘our pleasure sailings on Lake Tanganyika have now recommenced for the season. Scenery unrivalled. Cuisine excellent. All home comforts. Thos. Cook and Son, London.’<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, Arbroath itself was changing. The demand for sailcloth had diminished and the mills were less busy, but other manufacturing industries were taking over. The town had good transport links, a new library and picture gallery, but no adequate water supply. Marion documented many of the town’s problems and developments through her fictional ‘diaries’. The new water supply was one of Arthur’s first targets:

the water is as pure as it is scarce, though as hard as flint or the problem itself. At the worst, one can wash in rain water, and drink Apollinaris.<sup>63</sup>

Even the opening of The Library and Picture Gallery [established 1896], which occupied Marion’s old school, afforded an opportunity to raise the ‘water’ topic:

I [...] tried Mrs Henry Wood, receiving a volume whose mere title page speaks volumes, nay, pleads pitifully, for an extended water supply, additional or anyhow [...].<sup>64</sup>

The identity of the writer of the diaries was never divulged:

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<sup>61</sup> Angus, ‘Robert H. Corstorphine’, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> AO, 5 September 1898, *AG* (10 September 1898), 2.

<sup>63</sup> AO, 4 November 1897, *AG* (13 November 1897), 2.

<sup>64</sup> AO, 15 June 1898, *AG* (18 June 1898), 2.

Out of misadventure comes gladness, and out of Mrs Smithers comes amusement, for she confided to me, the dear thing, that she knew the lady who writes the 'Diary' in the 'Guide'. 'But', said I, 'I thought it was a gentleman'. 'Oh, Mr Ogilvie,' she replied, 'don't you see through her disguise?' and she tossed her little head in a knowing little way. David, to whom I repeated the whole conversation, says I ought to feel immensely flattered: which I do.<sup>65</sup>

Reporting on actual events in the social life of Arbroath (musical evenings, public concerts, Church bazaars and soirées, theatre productions, trips to Dundee) brings real characters, as well as the fictitious Arthur and Christabel, to life:

Miss Westwood sang Mascheroni's 'For all Eternity' [...] on the wings of this enchanting piece of music, memory bore me away – to the Alcazar d'Hiver, where first I heard it [...] in my mind's ear, two score of muted violins under bows all slowly moving in unison, were singing with indescribable, dreamy sweetness, this incomparably beautiful air.<sup>66</sup>

...

Arthur went to the Choral Union concert: 'where I sat at the extreme end of the gallery and had my poor eyes dazzled by the gasoliers'.<sup>67</sup>

...

To the bazaar [...]. Let  $x$  be equivalent to a certain number of shillings, and  $y$  to a tea-cosy, a mandoline, a bike, a pointer puppy and a black doll. Then minus  $x$  is equal to minus  $y$ , and this I have proved to my own dissatisfaction.<sup>68</sup>

...

The Parish Church soirée [...] was particularly happy in its speeches [...]. The naïve tale of the young lady who was quite willing to be married in the Parish Church (or anywhere else for that matter), could only a partner be found for her, is charming.<sup>69</sup>

...

Not that I despise, but only regret, the hopeless inadequacies of a stage six yards by three, while the vision of the tops of the longer organ pipes, as seen over the proscenium from the gallery, enchains my fancy'.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> AO, 8 February 1898, AG (12 February 1898), 2.

<sup>66</sup> AO, 22 December 1897, AG (25 December 1897), 2.

<sup>67</sup> AO, 30 March 1898, AG (2 April 1898), 2.

<sup>68</sup> AO, 30 April 1898, AG (7 May 1898), 2.

<sup>69</sup> AO, 28 February 1898, AG (5 March 1898), 2.

<sup>70</sup> AO, 21 February 1898, AG (28 February 1898), 2.

Just home from ‘Davy Garrick’ in Dundee. This play [...] always delights me. And as for Compton himself, why it is worth all the dismal hardships of a return journey by the last train to have heard his mellifluous voice again.’<sup>71</sup>

Sport was another interest. On a number of occasions Christabel mentions walking:

‘along the cliffs ... as far as the Mason’s Cove, and home by the turnpike. A bracing, bright spring day’.<sup>72</sup> Cycling is referred to: ‘a long round on a bicycle on a hot day to

Brechin, Montrose, and home’.<sup>73</sup> She describes an incident on the golf course at Elliot:

With a raucous croak [a gull] alighted among the long grass, where it lay adrift from my indexterous aim, seized [my ball] in its beak, fluttered in the air with it a few yards, and deposited on the edge of the green at the second hole.<sup>74</sup>

Arthur writes authoritatively about cricket:

In the visitor’s second innings, Boyce did the ‘hat trick’. His third ball, which did for Milne off his pad, seemed to me to be a slinker, and I heard Gauld, who was batting at the other end, confirm this opinion afterwards.<sup>75</sup>

His comments in relation to football matches suggest Marion had personal experience of spectating:

Gayfield has a beautifully suggestive name; the gaiety is absent however, on a dull November day, when one’s feet are cold and wet and the Maroons play.’<sup>76</sup>

Albeit from behind a disguised identity, Marion shouts from the pages of her ‘diaries’: ‘Look at me! Look how lively and interesting I am!’ If she has had unhappy or unwanted emotional entanglements or failed relationships, if she has had to fight for a degree of independence, if she has struggled with concepts of family duty and the responsibilities of the eldest daughter, she is not cowed. To an extent that seems to go well beyond mere wish-fulfilment, she seems confident, proud, defiant, challenging.

<sup>71</sup> AO, 26 February 1898, *AG* (5 March 1898), 2.

<sup>72</sup> *CD*, 3 May 1899, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> *CD*, 15 June 1899, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> *CD*, 18 April 1899, p. 19.

<sup>75</sup> AO, 8 May 1898, *AG* (14 May 1898), 2.

<sup>76</sup> AO, 28 January 1898, *AG* (5 February 1898), 2.

Everything is still possible. Just one entry in the diaries gives a hint that family relationships might not always have been harmonious:

I hear of another welcome bill which has as its object the prevention of vexatious actions. Unruly pupils, insubordinate sons, revolting daughters, obstreperous sisters-in-law, take notice!<sup>77</sup>

*Christabel's Diary* (1899) ends suddenly after a six-month period, as if it had been interrupted in some way. This may have been due to a family crisis that arose. Marion's two youngest sisters, Ethel and Amy, fell in love with the same man, the new minister at the Parish Church of Arbroath.<sup>78</sup> Quite apart from personal trauma and grief, in the close-knit community of Arbroath at that time there was great potential for embarrassment.

The next known event is that, at the 1901 census, Marion was a 'boarder', 'living on own means', in Walmer House, a boarding house in Bridge of Allan, with her friend Margaret Buncle, 'Printer and Publisher'.<sup>79</sup> Bridge of Allan had been a flourishing spa centre for much of the previous century, but by the beginning of the twentieth century it was no longer so popular. As well as the family, there were two elderly 'annuitants' staying in Walmer House with Margaret and Marion. Three designations for guests were found on the same census extract: 'boarders', 'lodgers' and 'visitors'. Whether 'boarder' indicates a long or short-term stay is not known, but it is possible Margaret and Marion were planning to attend a Church of Scotland Women's Guild meeting held in Stirling about that time.

*The sea-gaun bird forebodes me grief*

During 1901, William Service chose Amy, the younger sister, as his prospective bride. Ethel was devastated and was sent to live with Henry in Yorkshire. Henry employed a

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<sup>77</sup> AO, 9 July 1898, AG (16 July 1898), 2.

<sup>78</sup> Borthwick Institute of Historical Research [BIHR]: Retreat General Correspondence for 1902 (reference RET1/5/1/105): Henry Angus (19 May 1902 and 10 July 1902).

<sup>79</sup> GRO (Scotland), British Census (1901), RD: 485 /BO ED: 004/000 Parish of Logie, Police Burgh of Bridge of Allan, (Walmer House).

companion nurse to take her to Scarborough, but her mental health deteriorated: she heard voices threatening her, tried to run away, contemplated suicide. She feared there was a plot to burn her alive. She was admitted to The Retreat in York, a well-known hospital run by Quakers, on 15 March 1902. Case notes and correspondence from the Retreat archives reveal a heartbreaking story.<sup>80</sup> Dr George Swanson, prior to her admission, reported on her feeling of unworthiness, though she could not tell him what it was she had done. When pressed, she said ‘I can’t tell you but they [her family] all know it.’ The doctors at the Retreat made little progress. Ethel insisted she was ‘very wicked, and could never be saved’. By the middle of April she was pleading to be allowed home ‘because she would never see her people again if she did not go home at once’. On 12 May 1902 her father wrote a brief, urgent, letter to the hospital asking if they would let him know ‘what improvement if any – seems to have taken place in the condition of my daughter Ethel’.<sup>81</sup> He could never have received a reply. Later that week, after a sudden and very short illness, he died.

Ethel did not attend the funeral, which was one of the largest and most representative ever seen in Arbroath at that time. There were three services, one at the Church, where the pulpit and choir balcony were swathed in black fabric, one at the family home, Lochshade, and one at the Mortuary Chapel, where the galleries were ‘filled mostly by ladies’. Mr Angus was praised as a preacher and pastor and as ‘the kindest of men’ with ‘a delightful humour, a rich fund of story and anecdote’ and ‘a refinement of feeling which made him wince under the touch of the gross and vulgar’.<sup>82</sup>

Marion’s brother Henry’s next letter to The Retreat stated: ‘My youngest sister [Amy], whom you saw, tells me that at the first Ethel said her illness would kill my father, and possibly the anxiety may have hastened his end.’ In a subsequent letter he revealed that

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<sup>80</sup> BIHR: Retreat Admission Forms (reference RET1/5/1/15): Female Case Book (ref RET: 6/5/1/18).

<sup>81</sup> BIHR: Retreat General Correspondence for 1902 (RET 1/5/1/105): Rev. H. Angus (12 May 1902).

<sup>82</sup> Unattributed obituary: ‘Death of the Rev. Henry Angus, D.D.’, *AH*, 5.

The arrangement we made with regard to my sister [coming home] does not seem to meet with much approval. A medical relative of mine [Dr Watson, his mother's brother] thinks we have made a grave mistake.<sup>83</sup>

He added

I am not sure whether you know that my relatives attribute my sister's serious illness to the fact that her younger sister is engaged to a man whom Ethel was in love with.

Henry regretted the family could no longer afford to pay the fees of 3 guineas a week.

Marion's pattern of life changed significantly in July. Her good friends, Margaret Buncle and Robert Corstorphine, married.<sup>84</sup> They left on a three-month honeymoon.<sup>85</sup> Despite Dr Watson's disapproval, Ethel came home and Marion became carer for her and her mother. A tall granite cross was erected on the family grave in memory of Dr. Angus. The manse being a tied house, Mrs Angus had to leave. The household goods were split up and her married children took what they wanted.<sup>86</sup> Mrs Angus chose to holiday over the summer in Aviemore, then, with her three unmarried daughters, moved into a rented house, Inchgower, in Cults, Aberdeenshire. Just below the railway station, it was a handsome house like the one they had left, except made of granite.

Things did not always run smoothly, and Annie, possibly on holiday in Scotland, took Ethel to Luss for a time. Henry Angus wrote again to The Retreat: 'My sister [...] though much improved, is not yet well enough to take her ordinary place in the household. After I wrote to you in September my mother and sisters seemed to lose control over her and she gave them much trouble and anxiety.'<sup>87</sup>

A year later, on 23 July 1903, Amy married at Inchgower and left Aberdeen, for Arbroath.<sup>88</sup> A few years later Rev. Service took up a new charge at the West Parish

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<sup>83</sup> BIHR: (reference RET1/5/1/105) Henry Angus (19 May 1902 and 10 July 1902).

<sup>84</sup> GRO (Scotland), Arbroath RD 272/1, Entry 89 (7 July 1902).

<sup>85</sup> Note in *AH* (15 July 1902), 8.

<sup>86</sup> Noted in Holograph Will of Mary Jessie Angus: SC1/37/135, recorded Aberdeen (2 March 1914).

<sup>87</sup> BIHR: (reference RET 1/5/1/ 105) Henry Angus (9 November 1902).

<sup>88</sup> GRO (Scotland), Marriage Records, RD 231/01 no 3 (23 July 1903).

Church in Greenock.<sup>89</sup> Marion must have felt the full weight of responsibility on her shoulders. Her sister Ethel's mental health was not good and her mother, according to Helen Cruickshank, was an 'invalid'.<sup>90</sup> To bring in an income, Marion and Ethel took in private pupils.<sup>91</sup> Marion also wrote short stories for publication, whether for financial reward or creative fulfilment is not known. Neither is much known about her social life, though she was associated with the Shakespeare Appreciation Society and is likely to have joined the church. As the family had relatives and influential family contacts in the area it is unlikely they were isolated.

During these years Marion found solace in wandering the braes of Deeside, which she loved, and which made a lasting impression on her. Many of her poems celebrate the area. As she wrote to Nan Shepherd in later years, she often longed with 'a kind of passion [...] to hear and see and live among [the hill-burns].'<sup>92</sup> Katherine Gordon notes that although her speakers often 'speak from a familiar landscape' they are 'isolated from others around them by their sorrow, loneliness or haunting memories.'<sup>93</sup>

Uncle William Watson died in June 1912.<sup>94</sup> Aunt Tweedie 'well off and with a personality', was left alone at The Lea, Corstorphine.<sup>95</sup> This was probably when Marion's grandfather's diaries came into her possession. At any rate her anecdotal account of his life, *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen*, which draws heavily on her grandfather's diaries, was published in 1913 by D. Wyllie in Aberdeen. Marion's mother died at home on 14 January 1914. She left everything to her unmarried daughters, but said in her will, 'if they wish to give anything to their sisters & brothers it must be as they think best.'

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<sup>89</sup> H. Scott D.D., (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, 8 vols, Synods of Fife, Angus and Mearns, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1925) William Jack Nichol Service, p. 426.

<sup>90</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note' in M. Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Serif, 1950), p. xvii.

<sup>91</sup> UAHC, Papers of Marion Angus, MS 2737/47 (7 November 1968).

<sup>92</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/5 (22 June [1935-36]).

<sup>93</sup> K. H. Gordon (ed.), *Voices from their ain Country: The Poems of Marion Angus and Violet Jacob* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2006), p.15.

<sup>94</sup> Unattributed, 'In Memoriam: William Watson, MD, IMS', *Transactions of the Edinburgh Field Naturalists and Microscopical Society* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1912).

<sup>95</sup> AUHC, MS 2737/49, (19 November 1968).

*The day's at the turn*

At the outbreak of the First World War Marion and Ethel gave up the tenancy of their house. Ethel went to Calais as a member of a Voluntary Aid Detachment and worked in a field hospital at Calais. William Stephenson Angus, her nephew, joined the army in 1917 straight from school and became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the North Staffordshire Regiment. He was a patient (suffering from flu), in the same hospital in 1918 but Ethel, by that time, had been injured by falling glass and had left.<sup>96</sup>

Marion worked at Stobs, an army training camp near Hawick. Set amongst bleak moorland, it was turned into a camp for civilian internees and later for prisoners of war. An article in *Hawick Archeological Transactions* (1988) reveals that two hundred huts, with concrete bases and corrugated iron roofs, each capable of accommodating thirty prisoners, were built inside a 'Death Line' of barbed wire.

The YMCA and Church of Scotland Tent [...] provided some recreation for troops who couldn't afford to take a train to Hawick each night. [...] Stobs Refreshment and Tea-room [...] was situated on the road from the Railway Station up into the camp.<sup>97</sup>

Marion may have been responsible for this YMCA recreation hut. There were 4,592 prisoners in the camp by May 1916, under The Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel H. J. Bowman.<sup>98</sup> Marion's nephew later described her experience. The 'long hours and hard conditions' proved to be physically and emotionally exhausting. Yet he wrote that afterwards she 'spoke [...] with the greatest respect and admiration for the ordinary private soldiers and their simple good sense and kindness'.<sup>99</sup> And for the first time in her life, in her fifties, she was totally free of family responsibilities. She told Marion Lochhead later that she began to write poetry seriously after the war. 'Penchrise' in *The Tinker's Road and Other Verses* and in *Turn of the Day* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press,

<sup>96</sup> Angus and Byatt, 'The Angus Family History', [n/p]: AUHC, MS 2737/47, (7 November 1968).

<sup>97</sup> E. J. Murray, 'Stobbs Camp 1903-1959', *Hawick Archeological Society Transactions* (1988), 13.

<sup>98</sup> S. Manz, 'New Evidence on Stobs Internment Camp 1914-1919', *Hawick Archeological Society Transactions* (2002), 59.

<sup>99</sup> AUHC, MS 2737/47 (7 November 1968).

1931), is a hill above Stobs Army Camp:

I shall be grave and old,  
I shall be cold and wise,  
When I forget the moorland  
Lifting to Penchrise;  
The lovely, ancient moorland  
Beneath the dappled skies.

There every trembling willow  
Can show a silver crest  
To the bright crystal water  
Streaming from the west.  
And Joy, the Gypsy, found me there  
And clasped me to her breast.

After the war, Henry, his wife Elizabeth and their three children, Janey, William, and Robert, still lived in Bingley, Yorkshire. Her sister Annie and her husband had no children. They had moved to Surrey during the war and thence to Sudbury in Suffolk. William had married his sister-in-law's sister, Adaline Stephenson. They lived in Stocksfield, Northumberland. Amy and her husband, still in Greenock, had no children.

Marion and Ethel set up home in Peebles, where their Uncle Robert had once been a minister.<sup>100</sup> Although Robert Angus had died in 1868 at the age of 38 years the family had remained friendly with the Rev Robert Burgess, his successor, who was one of the pallbearers at the funeral of Rev Henry Angus, Marion's father. While they lived in Peebles Marion and Ethel were reportedly friendly with the novelist Anna Buchan (O. Douglas) and her brother J. Walter Buchan, with whom they shared a manse upbringing. Anna's sister-in-law, Lady Susan Tweedsmuir, later quoted Anna's belief that all minister's daughters 'had a long apprenticeship in being bright and pleasant.'<sup>101</sup> Marion and Anna probably drew on this training in their own relationship, as Marion was known to have 'despised' the novels of John Buchan, the older brother of whom Anna was intensely proud.<sup>102</sup> There is no way of knowing whether this animosity is related to the

<sup>100</sup> Small, *History of the Congregations*, p.126.

<sup>101</sup> Lady S. Tweedsmuir, 'The Quiet Perfection of O. Douglas', *The Evening Dispatch*, 26 October 1950, 6

<sup>102</sup> AUHC, MS 2737/47 (7 November 1968).

fact her work did not feature in the anthology of Scots vernacular poetry edited by Buchan in 1924.<sup>103</sup> In a newspaper article written in 1928, Marion is quoted as saying that although Mr John Buchan had ‘advised her to publish in London’ she had decided, ‘with her great love of Scotland and belief in Scottish nationalism, to publish her work in Edinburgh.’<sup>104</sup> In Anna’s book, *The Proper Place*, Nicole might just be voicing Anna’s recognition of the differences between Marion and herself when she comments:

I look at all the spinsters that I meet and wonder what story attaches to each. What a lot of different types there are! I like best the solid, quiet, dependable ones – those the world couldn’t do without. The worst type is the persistently bright and vivacious, the arch old-young women who hint at many sighing lovers in the past.<sup>105</sup>

In 1921, on a visit to Aberdeen, Marion met a friend who wanted to sell her house on Springfield Road. Impulsively, she bought it, ‘more or less on the spot.’<sup>106</sup> Marion called the house ‘Zoar’, which was the first place of refuge of Lot after he fled Sodom with his wife and two daughters:

Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there – is it not a little one? – and my life will be saved!<sup>107</sup>

Marion’s Zoar was set in the high surrounding wall of Springfield House. Helen Cruickshank described it as an

old-fashioned cottage at Hazelhead, with its quaint corner-fireplace, faded chintz and old china, and a devoted sister in the background, plying visitors with dainty sandwiches while talk of poets and poetry circulated with the tea.<sup>108</sup>

Nan Shepherd thought the sitting room with its low ceiling, books, pictures and flowers was ‘a room with a personality’.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> J. Buchan (ed.), *The Northern Muse: An Anthology of Scots Vernacular Poetry* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1924).

<sup>104</sup> J.L. Hodson, ‘New Scottish Poet: Woman’s Fanciful Verse: Reaction from Housekeeping’, *Daily Mail* (Northern Edition), (16 November 1928), 5.

<sup>105</sup> O. Douglas [Anna Buchan], *The Proper Place* (London: Nelson, 1929). p.375.

<sup>106</sup> AUHC, MS 2737/47 (7 November 1968).

<sup>107</sup> Genesis 19. 20-22.

<sup>108</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p. xvi.

<sup>109</sup> N. Shepherd, ‘Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside’, *The Deeside Field*, Jubilee Issue, 2nd Series, no 6 (1970), 9.

There is not a great deal of information about the next ten years, while Marion lived at Zoar, other than her literary activities. She was able to do what she wanted to do, write poetry, and began to make contact and develop friendships with people in the literary scene. Many of the literary elite were involved in the emerging Scottish Nationalist movement, but Marion's earlier 'belief' in Scottish nationalism seems to have become jaundiced by the people who were promoting such politics. She wrote:

I come in contact sometimes with the Nationalist people. They [...] are all at odds with the others and none of them seem to know what they want. I am told, "the movement is rapidly gaining ground" yet somehow I remain cold.<sup>110</sup>

Perhaps the remoteness of Aberdeen was a factor. Sir Alexander Gray, poet and professor, who was also involved in the Aberdeen branch of PEN wrote, 'the waves of Nationalism beat idly against us here. The Aberdonian is unperturbed about it.'<sup>111</sup>

After having individual poems published in magazines and periodicals Marion must have been proud to have her first volume of poetry published, yet did not choose to define herself solely as poet. She inscribed a copy of *The Lilt* to a second cousin: 'To Kathleen, from the author Minnie Angus.'<sup>112</sup> As volume followed volume she became, by the late 1920s, comparatively well-known. An article by J.L. Hodson, who interviewed Marion for the *Daily Mail*, described her as

a grey-eyed, wide-browed woman' with a 'swift smile' and a capacity for very great emotion – Sir John Martin Harvey's tragic acting almost tortures her'.<sup>113</sup>

Hodson confirms Ethel's presence in the house in Aberdeen with Marion and reports that Ethel 'chaffingly' interrupted Marion during the interview.

Marion told Hodson she wrote poetry as 'an escape from trivialities and the monotony of housework', 'a sort of reaction from ordinary life'. She described how ideas

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<sup>110</sup> NLS, MCI, MS 19328, [July /August 1930].

<sup>111</sup> Stirling University Special Collection [SUSC], Helen B. Cruickshank Papers [HBC], MS.1 (5 December 1930).

<sup>112</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Alan Byatt, photocopy of original [1922], 2/1.

<sup>113</sup> Hodson, 'New Scottish Poet', *Daily Mail*, 5.

‘come to her in bed when she is drifting through that border-land between life and – what?’, but that she ‘lets them lie in her mind for a day or two’. She also explained how she now ‘alter[ed] more’ than she had initially. ‘Sometimes’, she said, ‘in altering I rewrite the whole poem.’ Later, Marion commented to J.B. Salmond, ‘I have a peculiarity – I like to send things off directly they are composed.’<sup>114</sup> Perhaps it was only when the poem was sent away that the revision process stopped. Her tendency to re-write was also confirmed by Maurice Lindsay and Helen Cruickshank, who described her as ‘an inveterate reviser of her own work’.<sup>115</sup>

As a result of Marion’s involvement in PEN she helped to organise a meeting in Aberdeen in 1930. Helen Cruickshank reported the occasion:

Once we ventured as far as Aberdeen for a week-end organised by Alex Gray and Marion Angus [...]. That Sunday morning I was introduced to the spell of Old Aberdeen in an excursion led by Professor Gray and on the same afternoon to the gnostic charm of the poet Marion Angus.<sup>116</sup>

She described Marion in the following terms:

In appearance she was of slight, almost frail, build, her most striking feature being her intensely blue eyes: eyes ‘put in by smutty fingers’, with a *far-ben* look, accentuated perhaps by the straight grey fringe of hair which she wore rather long.’<sup>117</sup>

Though friendly with Sir Alexander Gray, poet and professor, and Alexander Keith, Marion did not always find her work was appreciated in Aberdeen. She wrote to Helen Cruickshank:

Greatly I enjoyed my visit to Edinburgh [...]. Let no one speak to me of the coldness of Edinburgh. It is a calumny [...]. How I long for companionship such as you or one or two others I met at PEN [...] this seems a barren place sometimes.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> J. B. Salmond, ‘An Appreciation’, *AG*, (24 August 1946), 6.

<sup>115</sup> M. Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Serif, 1950), p.v.

<sup>116</sup> HBC, *Octobiography* (Montrose: Standard, 1976), pp.75-6.

<sup>117</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p. xv.

<sup>118</sup> UAHC, MS2737/1 (29 March [1931]).

As Marion's reputation grew, invitations to participate in related activities flowed in. She gave readings and broadcast on poetry.<sup>119</sup> She was described by her nephew as 'a powerfully expressive reader of her poems'.<sup>120</sup> She would have liked to do more radio work and even went to the length of asking her friend Mairi Campbell Ireland to write to the BBC praising her programme in the hope of getting more work.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, she could not have boasted about them, for Helen Cruickshank professed not to know anything about Marion's broadcasts, in an annotated letter from William S Angus which she passed to Nan Shepherd in 1969.<sup>122</sup>

But in the meantime, Ethel's health deteriorated. In February 1930, Marion nursed her through a bad attack of flu, then succumbed herself to the virus, but had 'so much accumulation of work waiting' that she could not afford the time to go to bed.<sup>123</sup> At the beginning of April 1930 Ethel was admitted to Glasgow Royal Asylum, Gartnavel, as a voluntary patient. To Helen Cruickshank Marion wrote:

the road I have been and shall come is dreadful for my dear sister a fortnight since had a very bad and serious mental breakdown, sudden and unexplained [...]. I have had so bad a shock that I cannot even see my friends yet. But I must get over this.<sup>124</sup>

She decided their house had to be sold:

My path at present is so dark and uncertain that I can only see one step or two at a time. I shall probably not be very long permanently living in Aberdeen and may give my house to a friend for the summer months before selling it.<sup>125</sup>

This impulsive act may have been triggered by a combination of financial factors: the loss of Ethel's contribution to household expenses, the cost of 3 guineas a quarter hospital fees, at the upper end of the financial scale, which would have given Ethel a 'relatively

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<sup>119</sup> 'Historic Romances of Scottish Towns'. Radio Programmes, Scotsman 18 September 1930, Scottish Home Service, BBC, p.14, Scotsman Digital Archive.

<http://archive.scotsman.com/article.cfm?id=TSC/1930/09/18/Ar01405> (consulted 13 February 2009).

<sup>120</sup> UAHC, MS2737/35 (15 September 1950).

<sup>121</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.83 (16 September [1930]).

<sup>122</sup> UAHC, MS2737/35 (15 September 1950), annotation by HBC.

<sup>123</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.29 (18 February [1930]).

<sup>124</sup> UAHC, MS2737/2 (10 April [1930]).

<sup>125</sup> UAHC, MS2737/3 [April 1930].

high' degree of comfort in the West House.<sup>126</sup> Although Ethel would have had her own bedroom and there were large day areas, overcrowding was a problem in the 1930s.<sup>127</sup> Further strain may have been put on Marion's finances by the collapse of the stock market. The decision to admit Ethel to Gartnavel Hospital in Glasgow rather than a hospital in Aberdeen may have been taken so that Amy and her husband could share the responsibility of hospital visits. There is no evidence Marion considered buying a house nearer Glasgow. She seems to have no forward plans at all:

It breaks my heart to leave this nice little house where my sister and I have been so happy but one has to go where one is led (or driven) and I feel like a leaf before the wind only a leaf has no business worries nor sleepless nights nor human feelings of anxiety or grief.<sup>128</sup>

She may even have sold the house because of feelings of guilt. Did Ethel feel exposed by 'The Lissome Leddy', 'Lost Things', and 'Mary's Sang' which appear to draw on her tragic experience? Andrew Russell reports that Ethel was known as 'Mary' in Arbroath.<sup>129</sup> Whatever the reason, the house was sold in the same impetuous manner as it had been bought.

It must have been a great strain, living a peripatetic existence: finding temporary accommodation; storing belongings; organising visits; keeping in touch with friends; making arrangements to pick up mail; living from a suitcase.<sup>130</sup> And all this was compounded by the stress of Ethel's illness and the duty Marion felt to visit regularly. Her burden grew increasingly heavy. She became physically and mentally exhausted, yet, throughout the 1930s, managed to maintain a presence in the literary world. She was a member of the executive committee of the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse. The committee included Tyrone Guthrie, theatre director, a distant relative on her

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<sup>126</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Alistair Tough, Archivist and Records Manager, NHS Greater Glasgow (3 March 2005), 1/2.

<sup>127</sup> J. Andrews and I Smith, *Let there be light again: A history of Gartnavel Royal Hospital from its beginnings to the present day* (Glasgow: Gartnavel Hospital, 1933).

<sup>128</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.43 (8 May [1930]).

<sup>129</sup> AA: Marion Angus Papers, AR, 3/2 [n/d].

<sup>130</sup> see Appendix for list of known temporary addresses.

maternal grandfather's side.<sup>131</sup>

It was agreed 'that a Scottish Recitations, on the lines of the Oxford Recitations, be held in Edinburgh'. The event eventually took place on 18 October 1930, and Marion was one of the Scots adjudicators. However, she had right to be less than delighted. Firstly, Anna Buchan and Dr J.C. Smith were the initial choice of the committee as adjudicators. Secondly, when they were unavailable, John Buchan was proposed to adjudicate with her. Thirdly, the committee records of July show that she and Laurence Binyon had agreed to adjudicate, but while Mr Binyon had been offered an honorarium of £10 plus travelling expenses, Marion was offered only travelling expenses.<sup>132</sup>

Eventually she adjudicated with the Poet Laureate John Masefield, and Thomas Henderson, a well-known Scottish literary historian. Marion's correspondence refers to her embarrassment at providing one of her less accomplished poems for the Scottish recitation, but the selection must have been changed, according to newspaper reports.<sup>133</sup>

The first test poem she adjudicated was Bonnie George Campbell:

Hie upon Hielands  
And laigh upon Tay  
Bonnie George Campbell  
Rode out on a day.

The second was the Nithsdale ballad 'Kirkbride'.

Bury me in Kirkbride,  
Where the Lord's redeemed ones lie,  
The auld kirkyaird on the grey hillside  
Under the open sky.

She thought that 'although it was quite a revelation to hear such beautiful speaking', most speakers 'lacked a proper accentuation of the rhythm' and she felt 'there was a certain lack of necessary coarseness in the renderings of "Kirkbride"'. The finalists read Lawrence Binyon's 'Death of Adam' and Robert Bridges' 'Testament of Beauty' to the

<sup>131</sup> UAHC, MS2737/50 (26 November 1968).

<sup>132</sup> NLS, Accessions 3435, Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse [1930].

<sup>133</sup> Unattributed article: 'Poet Laureate in Edinburgh: Dr John Masefield at Verse-Speaking Festival', *The Evening Dispatch* (18 October 1930), p.2; 'Scottish Verse Festival', *The Scotsman* (18 October 1930), 10.

Poet Laureate. The business meeting of the association was held in the afternoon, and Dr Masefield spoke on 'Narrative Poetry'. It was an experience she enjoyed: 'Masefield is the most endearing soul so gentle and wistful and simple. I feel there was no need to think what I should say to him.'<sup>134</sup>

According to her correspondence with Mairi Campbell Ireland, she gave numerous lectures during the 1930s, in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock and Aberdeen.<sup>135</sup> One, advertised in *The Press and Journal* was to members of the English Association of the University of Aberdeen in December 1930.<sup>136</sup> Entitled 'Some Aspects of Scottish Poetry', it was a version of a lecture she had already given to the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse. It traced the development of Scottish Poetry from the days when 'spontaneous notes fell from the lips of the peasant's son, the shepherd boy, and the boys bred in the noisome closes of old Edinburgh', to the present time. She is reported as saying

One would have hoped that the art of the old balladists [sic] would have endured and become adorned more and more richly with the growing experience of the race. The severe tenets of Calvinism cut its followers off from aesthetic achievement by their repudiation of earthly beauty.

She noted that while modern Scottish poets referred back to 'many of the old motifs', and some 'handled original themes with less sentimentality and more subtly than of old', she had some concern that too many 'versifiers' were inclined to assume that 'excellent vernacular meant excellent poetry'. Yet, in defence of Scots, she ended her address with 'a note of apprehension lest the vernacular die out'.

Our Scottish poets are using the old speech somewhat timorously and tentatively. It is like an old gown which becomes us very well but is going out of fashion. A generation or two and the children will speak it no more in the village street, nor the old folks by the winter fire. From where will come the poet who, with a complete command of English poetic diction, will yet retain the colour, the style and the individuality of the Scot? Dare one think of an Englishman as being the future poetic

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<sup>134</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.92 ([20 October 1930]).

<sup>135</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fols.21 (11 January [1930]), 29 (18 February [1930]), 30 (9 March [1930]), 94 [1930].

<sup>136</sup> The English Association, Public Notice of Lecture, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 6th December 1930, 3.

interpreter of our country?

She hoped not. Perhaps she hoped others might recognise that she had that complete command of English poetic diction while retaining the colour and style of the Scot, but she did not make the claim herself.<sup>137</sup> Later she complained that the bacteriology room in Marischal College, where she gave the lecture, had been cold and she developed a cold and flu that lingered until well into January, leaving her vulnerable and isolated.<sup>138</sup>

Constant worry took a toll on her health. She could not even find refuge at her younger sister's home, for she was concerned about Amy too. She noted in a letter that Amy was 'so worn and sad and weary with grief that I am becoming anxious for her.'<sup>139</sup> On various other occasions she wrote of helping out at the manse. But Amy's grief may not have been solely over Ethel. She was childless, and fourteen years younger than Marion, would have been entering the menopause. The poem 'The Blue Jacket' published in *The Turn of The Day* in 1931, records the distress of a childless 'little sister' – 'a baby I maun hae'.

Much of Marion's time was spent over in the west of Scotland. One of the places she stayed was a rented cottage in Rhu, where her friend Philip Lilley lived. He wrote later of how their friendship had developed during the last fifteen years of her life.<sup>140</sup>

[I] had the great privilege of intimate friendship with her. Her letters were full of stimulus and help, amusing and gay, if latterly tinged with wistfulness.

He also noted that those who knew her in Rhu 'were strongly attracted by the elderly lady with the expressive blue eyes and the soft gentle voice', and talked about her 'deliciously unpractical ways'.

The truth is that with her dreamy and (in the best sense) other-worldly

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<sup>137</sup> Unattributed article: 'Will Braid Scots Die Out? Timorous Use of Old Speech: Miss Marion Angus's Forecast', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 9 December 1930, 6.

<sup>138</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.113 [postmark 14 January 1931].

<sup>139</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.88 (September [1930]).

<sup>140</sup> PWL, 'Miss Marion Angus: An Appreciation', *AH*, 23 August 1946, 7.

temperament, she found this rough world a rather different [sic] place.

Depression interrupted her flow of writing. To Helen Cruickshank she wrote ‘I wonder if I will ever write another line. My soul has gone silent.’<sup>141</sup> And in similar vein she told Nan Shepherd:

You will see that like a pigeon with a broken wing I have perched here half-heartedly waiting in a hopeless kind of way for what will happen next [...]. I feel as tho’ I had lost [...] all my small (yet to me precious) springs of song.<sup>142</sup>

On 1 June 1931 Ethel was allowed out of hospital.

I am in a state of utter weariness broken and worn out [...]. We had been hoping for weeks that my sister was taking a turn for the better and on the advice of a doctor here who recommended a change of scene in cheerful surroundings my sister and her husband and I motored her 50 miles to a private nursing home two [sic] days later we brought her back again in a state of utter collapse we thought she would die on the journey. [...] we realize that we must leave her under the care of others and not even see her quite so often. It has been a time of the utmost stress and bitter disappointment. She has filled our whole thoughts for months and I see always before me her savaged face and emaciated form. There must be another life to compensate to such gentle souls as she for the misery of this one.<sup>143</sup>

Having attempted suicide that day, Ethel was taken back to Gartnavel and committed by her sister Amy.<sup>144</sup> The petition to the Sheriff states that she thought she was ‘full of wickedness’ and that ‘all the world except her own family knows this’.<sup>145</sup> She was described as being ‘depressed and confused and not in touch with her surroundings’. The cause of her ‘attack’ of ‘insanity’ was recorded as ‘unknown’. Marion reported to Nan Shepherd that Amy and her husband were ‘devoted’ to Ethel. In the circumstances, this level of concern may have proved too much for Ethel to bear.<sup>146</sup>

During these years Marion did not know her movements in advance. In the same letter she told Nan Shepherd:

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<sup>141</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p.xvii.

<sup>142</sup> UAHc, MS 3036/5 (22 June [1932-35]).

<sup>143</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.141 (6 June [1931]).

<sup>144</sup> NHS, Greater Glasgow Archives, Gartnavel Hospital, ref. HB13/7/138, patient no 13107.

<sup>145</sup> NHS, Greater Glasgow Archives: Admission Papers, Glasgow Royal Asylum, Gartnavel (3 June 1931).

<sup>146</sup> UAHc, MS 3036/2 (9 June [1935]).

I am thinking of going to stay with a cousin but whether I shall go further north afterwards is still quite vague and uncertain. I being so lame and rather frail can only visit where I am quite at home in the house’.

Her hosts were not always as keen on poetry as she was. Even though ‘nice people’, those at Lasswade were ‘deaf, dumb and blind to anything in the shape of poetry.’<sup>147</sup>

Despite Marion’s trials, Nan Shepherd notes her passion was not ‘spent’. ‘I have never known anyone so hungry for vicarious experience,’ she wrote.<sup>148</sup> Marion continued to write poetry, sending regular contributions to the ‘Casual Column’ of *The Glasgow Herald* and magazines such as *The Scots Magazine*, *The Scots Observer* and *The Modern Scot*. The *Modern Scot* aimed to provide a common platform for writers associated with the ‘so-called Scottish Literary Revival’,

not all of whom were associated with the separatist political movement [...] but they are all more or less concerned with the development of an autochthonous Scottish culture.’<sup>149</sup>

When approached by Alexander Keith for a poem for an anthology for the Vernacular Society, Marion wrote back that she could produce nothing new in the timescale as she was ‘helping my sister [Amy] in house cleaning – not inspiring!’<sup>150</sup>

However she enclosed verses she had already submitted to the *Scots Magazine*, which were not to be published at least for another month:

so if you care to include them in the collection [...] which I suppose is not for the general public there can’t be any objection, though I am always profoundly at sea in matters of literary etiquette.

She could seem almost obsequious in her gratitude to a favourable reviewer. In 1931 she wrote to Neil Gunn from Strands Hotel, Wasdale, Cumbria, a low, whitewashed inn well-known to writers at the time: ‘I hope you will not think me presuming, in writing a few lines to you out of a grateful heart’.<sup>151</sup> On another occasion she wrote:

I shall not mention the feeling of humility which overcame me nor the

<sup>147</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/5 (22 June [1935]).

<sup>148</sup> N. Shepherd, ‘Marion Angus’, *Scots Magazine*, October 1946, 37.

<sup>149</sup> J. H. Whyte (ed.), *Towards a New Scotland* (London: Maclehose, 1935), p.v.

<sup>150</sup> UAHC, Papers of Alexander Keith, MS3017/8/1/1-3 (5 April [no year]).

<sup>151</sup> NLS, Dep. 209, Box 17/1, Neil Gunn Papers [n/d].

wish that I had done something more deserving, but rather the happiness of knowing that you in whom all lovers of literature are taking such pride should have been the one to speak with encouragement.<sup>152</sup>

She enjoyed corresponding with Nan Shepherd:

To read a letter from you fills me with something of the thrill of surprise and delight which one feels when coming upon the unknown lyric. It has the colour of light and the dream of the half realised become wholly so.<sup>153</sup>

Nan sent gifts of lavender, to soothe, and rosemary, to cleanse. The rosemary, Marion reported, she had planted in her sister's garden, 'pronounced your name three times over it and poured on it a libation to the gods of all sweet things'. Marion called Nan 'a happy, rare spirit' and imagined her 'roaming in your loved haunts with your gold flecked hair about your sunburnt cheek and the light of your imagination in your dusky eyes'. 'Never let your golden heart be tarnished,' she wrote.<sup>154</sup> She visualised Nan:

stepping lightly over the moorland, your golden hair blowing in the wind [...]. For me you are a part of the wild hill country and a kind of emanation of the spirit which lives there.<sup>155</sup>

Mairi Campbell Ireland assiduously pursued her correspondence with Marion, also sending small gifts and appearing to be seeking contacts in the literary world. Initially the correspondence was quite formal, but Marion became grateful for her support and, before Ethel's illness, had invited her to stay:

Tho I had the pen of an angel I could never truly express all my gratitude to you nor adequately say how much help and comfort your letters have been to me [...]. Now I want to ask you first if you could not come to Aberdeen and spend a night with me. I have no maid at present but I could make you comfortable in bed and I should so love to meet you. I am of course very dowie but you could forgive that.<sup>156</sup>

Though eager to meet, she did not compromise her views, voicing contrary opinions on a number of occasions. On Ronald Campbell Macfie she wrote:

You won't be pleased with me when I say that altho I see the force, intensity and rich ideas in the work and pretty [sic] I don't really admire

<sup>152</sup> NLS Dep. 209, Box 17/1 (6 March [no year]).

<sup>153</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/2 (9 June [1935]).

<sup>154</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/6 (15 May [late 1930s]).

<sup>155</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/8 (5 July [1932]).

<sup>156</sup> NLS, MCI, MS 19328 fol. 161 (27 May [1930]).

it. He falls I think between 2 stools Art and Science and he has no allure in his verse or not much heart.<sup>157</sup>

In the same letter she expressed an equally blunt view on C.M. Grieve.

Did you see an article by C M Grieve in a Scots Observer recently on a Highland poetess of a hundred years ago [...] He spoke greatly enthusiastically about her but not caring much for the repetitive nature worship of the Gael it left me slightly cold. McDiarmid alias Grieve is a queer being. What he will do next no-one knows. He is a genius of sorts but such a prickly thistle [...] and must always be slanging someone.

Mrs Ireland's husband wrote to Marion complaining he had not been mentioned in a letter, and remarking on her poetry. She immediately wrote back:

I see you have a pretty wit and a ready pen and also I imagine a sarcastic tongue. I hope however you have now somewhat recovered from the terrible blow I quite innocently inflicted on your sensitive feelings by forgetting to mention your name in my letter. Never never think that I even pictured or thought of you as "Mrs Ireland's man" I could see from your wife's happy face and the tones in which she spoke of you that you quite filled her heart which an indefinite person never could do. I see you think my poems (to call them so) are incomprehensible! You have thus revenged yourself on me to a great extent for the fancied slight received from me. Only one thing I can say in return to show how forgiveness exceeds cruelty that I shall never explain them to you. Now will you please tell your dear clever kind wife that I shall be writing to her very shortly. At present my sister's husband here has pleurisy and we are all upset and employed in nursing him. Until he has somewhat recovered I have little time for real correspondence only I felt moved to send a line to say how much I appreciate wit in a letter and how you amused and delighted me.<sup>158</sup>

Marion had already begun to resent having exposed herself so much to Mrs Ireland:

Forgive me all my disappointing failures and don't judge me just now seeing that the waves are going over my head and the waters are very deep.<sup>159</sup>

The correspondence eventually petered out, as a hint of sarcasm crept into Marion's letters:

It was quite a surprise to me to read such full appreciative account of RCM's [Ronald Campbell MacPhee] book in the papers which you sent me. Revues have been so scanty in other and I suppose more notable journals. I cannot judge of the capabilities of the journalists in the case of the church paper but at least they give an intriguing description of what I

<sup>157</sup> NLS, MCI, MS 19328 fol. 35 (30 March [1930]).

<sup>158</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.120 6 March [1931].

<sup>159</sup> NLS, MCI MS19328 fol. 96 (October [1930]).

am sure must be a book well worth reading. I wonder what scientists think of the book and I most sincerely hope it has given the author satisfaction and his results financial and otherwise for tho it may not be a great success it is certainly the work of a man of original and independent thinking.<sup>160</sup>

She seemed to become impatient and to want the correspondence to end:

The trouble with most of us is that we have too many acquaintances who from a sense of duty or connection we keep chattering and writing to and yet saying nothing and wondering all the time why we do it and yet can't break free. With all my heart I wish you God speed in your literary work in your happy home and little boy and in the handsome original of the photograph you enclose. Life has not disappointed you and holds much more in the future. I cannot write at present. I think it likely that if things go on as at present or nothing more happens I may go to Edinburgh in a week or a little more and come to Glasgow occasionally. I have no plans really made yet just going on from day to day trying if I can to comfort my other sister here in Greenock but I fear in this I fail for my own heart aches all the time.<sup>161</sup>

One of Marion's regular visits was to see Robert and Margaret Corstorphine at Inchdowrie (sometimes recorded as 'Inchdownie').<sup>162</sup> This turreted house, beautifully situated near the head of Glen Clova, was rented as summer accommodation. It has a turret room, in which Marion loved to work. In 1932, Walter Scott's Centenary year, Marion wrote to Nan Shepherd from there for advice about writing a short play. The BBC had asked her for something for Children's Hour. She wondered about 'scenes from Scott',<sup>163</sup> but then wrote one about the child author Marjory Fleming (1803-1811), Scott's distant relative. It was accepted, but not for the centenary slot, which had already been filled. Marion asked for it to be returned and burned it in the furnace at Inchdowrie.<sup>164</sup>

Now almost seventy, Marion continued her interest in literary affairs. She opined to Nan Shepherd that William Power was 'an unsatisfactory writer'.<sup>165</sup> Commenting on his articles in the *Glasgow Evening News*, she wrote he 'seems simply to catalogue names with no discrimination as to excellence or attempt at comparative criticism.'

<sup>160</sup> NLS, MCI MS19328 fol.118 (16 February [1931]).

<sup>161</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.141 (6 June [1931]).

<sup>162</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.105 [May 1931] (spelling confirmed by headed notepaper).

<sup>163</sup> UAHC, MS3036/8 (5 July [1932]).

<sup>164</sup> C. Gibson, 'They Sang of Angus', *Arbroath Herald Album* (December 1984) [n/p].

<sup>165</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/2 (9 June [1935]).

However the fault was not only his: 'I imagine journalistic writing is a deadly enemy to disinterested opinion and society as a whole.' Surprisingly, she then described C.M. Grieve as 'the most delightful person to meet – sincere, charming and original,' but the opinion was qualified:

On hearing him speak I was disappointed. He becomes suddenly bitter. His thoughts are tho' brilliant, confused, and he somehow loses his power to converse. But I [...] admire his passion for a cause!' <sup>166</sup>

She praised Nan Shepherd's own poetry, particularly as it applied to places:

my eyes drink in the outer beauty and lo! [...] clear and softly the wonderful secret dawns, glows and is for a moment grasped. <sup>167</sup>  
It shows me what miracles can be attained by words. I am carried away by the beauty of the thing which your spirit and the spirit of the place between you have conceived. <sup>168</sup>

Her eclectic taste in reading included philosophy:

I am reading a book [...] a synopsis of all the phils [sic] from Plato to Kant. When I have finished perhaps I shall be a changed character and perhaps I shan't! <sup>169</sup>

She pushed herself to meet interesting thinkers:

I spent an exhausting day of heat with Prof. Patrick Geddes going through old Edinburgh. A Genius [sic] but most erratic.' <sup>170</sup>

In another letter she wrote of being:

engrossed by two other books at present. *An Experiment with Time* and *The New Immortality* by J.W. Dunne. I took a while to grasp the theory and even yet have only got it partially clear; yet it, I mean the idea, seems to have an almost uncanny grasp on my mind and along with this a queer instinctive feeling that half consciously I knew all this in a vague way before.' <sup>171</sup>

Marion might have been thinking of her poem 'At Candlemas' in which the speaker meets older and younger versions of herself across time.

Quo she, "Ye're sma-bookit,  
Yer broo's runkled sair,

<sup>166</sup> UAHC, MS3036/5 (22 June [1935]).

<sup>167</sup> UAHC, MS3036/8 (5 July [1932]).

<sup>168</sup> UAHC, MS3036/5 (22 June [1935]).

<sup>169</sup> UAHC, MS3036/2 (9 June [1935]).

<sup>170</sup> NLS, MCI, MS1938 fol.81 (28 August [1931]).

<sup>171</sup> UAHC, MS3036/4 [c1937-40].

Er ye the auld witch  
O the Braid Hill o Fare?<sup>172</sup>

Another poem, 'The Fox's Skin' also demonstrates her long-term interest in the circularity of time.

"The same auld wind at its weary cry:  
The blin'-faced moon in the misty sky;  
A thousand years o' clood and flame  
An' a' thing's the same an' aye the same —  
The lass is the same in the fox's skin  
Gaitherin the bloom o the floorin' whin."<sup>173</sup>

Marion's work and letters reveal knowledge of and familiarity with a broad range of poets, novelists and philosophers. Carlyle, Emerson, Macaulay, Quiller-Couch, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Shelley, Scott, Byron, Stevenson, Thoreau, Pater, Donne, Wordsworth, Montaigne, Dunne, Gibbon, Dickens, William Law, J.H. Shorthouse, Pascal, Conrad, Ibsen and others. Nan Shepherd reports one of Marion's favourite books was J.M. McPherson's *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*.<sup>174</sup> This mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century study draws on burghal and kirk records and finds that beliefs connected with fairies were common in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As the kirk at that time did not want to believe that 'superstitions' persisted, its findings can be assumed to be authentic. With regard to fairies then, it would seem Marion was not so unusual for her time.

Her friendship with Helen Cruickshank was maintained over her nomadic years. In 1934 she wrote to congratulate Helen on the publication of *Up the Noran Water*. Of the poems she said, 'I read them thrice over or four times under green trees with great delight. I felt the air of Angus and walked up Prosen.'<sup>175</sup> On another occasion when she visited Helen at home, she asked to see Helen's elderly mother, who was confined to her room. When Marion left, her mother was relieved. 'I'm glad that auld body's awa,' she told

<sup>172</sup> M. Angus, 'At Candlemas' (lines 29-32) in A. Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006) p. 139.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, 'The Foxes Skin' (lines 17-22), p.128.

<sup>174</sup> Shepherd, 'Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside', 15.

<sup>175</sup> UAHC, MS2737/5 (10 June 1934).

Helen. ‘There was a man wi’ a tray o’ lichtit candles standin’ ahint her a’ the time, and I was feart he’d set her on fire.’<sup>176</sup>

The responsibility of caring for two younger sisters, the loneliness and insecurity of homelessness, exhaustion from constant upheaval and travel weighed on Marion: ‘perpetual heartbreak is heavy carrying’.<sup>177</sup> This, and the frailty of age affected her judgement and her view of the world more than the memory of any earlier interrupted relationships. Hardly surprising. She was more than seventy when her last book was published. About the same time she had a stroke, and withdrew from public life. She wrote to Helen Cruickshank:

I do not feel fit yet for the excitement of PEN gatherings – too many people and too much to talk about in a crowd. Alas for human frailty and the loss of friends on account of it. But I hope you will not forget me.<sup>178</sup>

To Nan Shepherd she confided, quoting from a traditional Scottish ballad:

I have been housebound for so long that I have forgotten the feel of sun and wind and “werena ma hert licht I wad dee.”<sup>179</sup>

She wondered whether PEN was ‘much good’ as an organisation, but recognised ‘that may be sour grapes as I can’t go myself.’<sup>180</sup>

From her correspondence it is apparent that Marion was tired, jaded, disappointed and disillusioned. She complained to Nan Shepherd ‘my muse is not a bird with a broken wing but more like a domestic hen with a crippled leg.’<sup>181</sup> And, prompted by an article by William Power, she confided her fears about the publication of *Lost Country*:

I might as well have put it in ‘the back of the fire’ as given it to Gowans and Gray who he [William Power] says are mere book-binders and it will fall as flat from them as a half-baked scone.<sup>182</sup>

The niche she had briefly carved out for herself in the literary world, that she had

<sup>176</sup> HBC, *Octobiography*, p. 135.

<sup>177</sup> UAHC, MS3036/8 (5 July [1932]).

<sup>178</sup> UAHC, MS2737/6 [c.1939].

<sup>179</sup> UAHC, MS3036/4 [c. 1937- 40]: quote from Lady G. Baillie, ‘Werena ma hert licht I wad dee’ (lines 17-20), *Illustrated Book of Scottish Songs, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (London: Nathaniel Cooke, 1854), p.19.

<sup>180</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/ 6 (15 May [1930s]).

<sup>181</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/2 (9 June [1935]).

<sup>182</sup> UAHC, MS3036/2 (9 June [1935]).

clung on to through the difficult years of Ethel's illness, was no longer there. It may have been that the strengthening of Modernism in Scotland harmed her reputation, or it may just have been that infirmity and age isolated her from contacts. It must have seemed she had little to look forward to.

*A kindly competent maid*

In 1936, when Marion was seventy-one, Ethel died in hospital and was buried in the family grave. Marion was the executor and the beneficiary of the will.<sup>183</sup> Marion wrote to Nan Shepherd

I felt as tho a part of myself had died with her. And yet it is strange, that along with tragedy and grief came a curious uplift and the sense of finality and also a feeling of fulfilment.<sup>184</sup>

Her brother-in-law Richard, who was at that time Rector and Rural Dean at Glemsford in Suffolk, died in 1937.<sup>185</sup> He is remembered by an elderly parishioner, who reported that he was a great lover of cars and that his death was the result of a road accident. She had no memory of his wife.<sup>186</sup> Marion's brother Henry died in 1938.

Marion's involvement with the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse was severely disrupted by her lifestyle and the fact that correspondence was not always forwarded. In the records of the association her address is recorded differently each year, and in 1938-39 her name was scored from the list of members. 'Died' was written beside it.<sup>187</sup> She was not dead. Maurice Lindsay met her in accommodation in Helensburgh to discuss her inclusion in an anthology.<sup>188</sup> 'A companion or sister', possibly Annie, who would have had to leave the rectory when her husband died, was living with her. Marion,

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<sup>183</sup> Aberdeen Register of Wills: SC1/37/161 fol.5, recorded 2 July 1936: Ethel Mary Angus £4,403/19/2. (possibly her share of the sale of Zoar, the house in Springfield Road, Aberdeen).

<sup>184</sup> UAHC, MS 3036/3 (2 July [1936]).

<sup>185</sup> J.A.Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947) part II, vol. III, Richard Garrett Johnson, p.583.

<sup>186</sup> Marion Angus Papers, Eileen Lynch, (Glemsford, Sudbury, Suffolk) Recorded Conversation (23 September 2005), 1-3.

<sup>187</sup> NLS, Accessions 3435, Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse [1939].

<sup>188</sup> M. Lindsay (ed.), *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance 1920-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946).

‘a gracious lady’, spoke with a cultured Scots voice.<sup>189</sup> Describing her last meeting with Marion, in 1938, Helen Cruickshank reports she had recovered from a stroke, and was ‘mentally as alert as ever and eager to hear news of the literary scene’.<sup>190</sup>

About this time Marion seems to have gravitated back to Deeside, which must have restricted her opportunities to keep in touch with friends in Edinburgh. But she continued to correspond with Helen:

I often long for a talk with you in my circumscribed circumstances. It would be one of the most life-giving pleasures I can think of.<sup>191</sup>

Her isolation grew. Annie died in 1940. Robert Corstorphine died in 1942 and Amy in 1943. Less than a month later, while staying at Woodlands, a boarding house in Cults, Marion made a new will at the firm of Hunter and Gordon in Aberdeen.<sup>192</sup> Apart from small legacies to her second cousin Patrick Alexander (Sandy) Guthrie, who advised her on financial matters, and four women in the Cults area (one was housekeeper at Woodlands), a small annual payment was to be made to her brother-in-law, William Service. The remaining revenue from the estate was to go to her brother William, and on his death the estate was to be divided between her two nephews, William and Robert (Henry), and her niece Mary (Janie), the children of her brother Henry.

Most of Marion’s family and friends were now dead. The year before she became eighty, her oldest friend, Margaret Corstorphine died. She saw few of her literary friends. But she was still able to correspond. In the autumn of that year she wrote to William Jeffrey at the request of his sister, enclosing sketchy biographical information:<sup>193</sup>

My life seems to have been full of ‘alarums and excursions’ [vague hostilities or confused activity], joys and sorrows; to outsiders no doubt it is commonplace [...]. I read a great deal of useless fiction (which I liked) and much of Scott and Dickens but my supreme favourites have been and are still Conrad’s tales and *John Inglesant*. [*John Inglesant: A Romance*

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<sup>189</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, M. Lindsay, Recorded Conversation (12 March 2004), 1/5.

<sup>190</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p.xviii.

<sup>191</sup> SUSC, HBC Papers, MS1 (14 May [c.1940]).

<sup>192</sup> Aberdeen Sheriff Court, Register of Deeds: Marion Emily Angus (10 October 1946) (£9,600/16/3).

<sup>193</sup> EULSC, MS 2030/30/414 a-c ([autumn] 1944).

by J.H. Stonehouse 1834-1903]. The old religious writers Wm. Law and Pascal should by right have headed this list – as I never tired of either.

Always deprecating of her own work, she continued:

any small gift I possess must exist only in the subconscious and be of little account as they have neither meta-physical [n]or idealistic qualities  
– I would fain think them an echo of  
The speech of those immortal creatures  
Whose only life is boxed in ballad rhyme.

As in many of her poems, there is something unexpected, or wistful, in this final paragraph of the letter that startles for a moment. So it was to be in her life. She wrote to Helen Cruickshank in 1944:

I am now very frail and indeed there is little of the original ego left [...]. I hope to go to live in Arbroath soon with a kindly, competent maid.<sup>194</sup>

After a lifetime of self-denial, putting family duty and care for others before her own needs, someone was going to care for her.

Williamina Sturrock Matthew, the ‘kindly competent maid’ was born in Arbroath on 19 April 1902, the daughter of William Matthew, hand warper and Agnes Greig, jute mill worker, who was only five months older than Marion and so may well have been in the same class as her at school. Like Marion, Williamina was known as ‘Minnie’.<sup>195</sup> She was a member of the church, and an enthusiastic member of the Girl Guide movement.<sup>196</sup> Marion and Williamina had known one another for a long time, as Williamina had been housekeeper to Marion’s friends, Robert and Margaret Corstorphine. After the deaths of the Corstorphines, Williamina was engaged by a Mr and Mrs Macrae Wilson to be their housekeeper at Hayshead House in Arbroath. Williamina also undertook the care of Marion, at the home of her employer.

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<sup>194</sup> UAHC, MS2737/7 (23 February [1945]).

<sup>195</sup> UAHC, MS2737/39 [c.1948].

<sup>196</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Norman Atkinson, Recorded Conversation regarding interview with Williamina Sturrock Matthew (30 April 2005), 1/6.

A lover of poetry, she invited Violet Jacob, then living in Kirriemuir, to come to meet Marion. According to Williamina, the two women had long admired one another's work, but had never met. They were both frail:

Violet Jacob had a heart attack [sic] in the middle of the stair, and had to be given a restorative [...]. Marion [...] was a little deaf and Violet Jacob's voice was so faint that conversation was difficult, and I had quite a job sorting them out. Then Marion had a pukish [sic] sense of humour, and was given to making devastating remarks. However they were obviously pleased to meet.<sup>197</sup>

In 1945 Sandy Guthrie called to see Marion. She was very deaf, but proudly showed him a cheque for £60 that had been collected on her behalf by members of PEN.<sup>198</sup> 'You will understand I cannot do more than touch on the great honour ... shown me by PEN this week,' she wrote to thank Helen Cruickshank, 'so wholly undeserved.'<sup>199</sup> That same letter praised Helen's play that had just been published in the *Scots Magazine*.

The idea of weaving the old ballad into human life is exceptionally good [...] it must have been a most difficult literary venture thus to handle a subject of never failing interest (I speak here for myself) so delicately.

But there is a note of regret in her acknowledgement that Helen Cruickshank and Nan Shepherd are holidaying together. 'I wish I could profit by hearing snatches of your scintillating conversation,' she wrote. Helen, by her own admission, was 'too busy and harassed by troubles of my own' to answer that last letter from Marion.<sup>200</sup>

About half of the substantial amount in Marion's estate (£9,600 16s 3d) came to her at an advanced age, on the death of Ethel Mary. It is also possible that her other sister, Annie Katherine, who died a widow, and childless, had left money to her. In September Marion added a codicil to her will, making a legacy of £200 to Williamina Matthew, and in November increased that amount to £300. Unlike the other codicils this was hastily done, witnessed by Mrs Macrae Wilson and the local postman.

<sup>197</sup> Gibson, 'They Sang of Angus', [n/p].

<sup>198</sup> UAHC, MS2737/39 [c. 1948].

<sup>199</sup> UAHC, MS2737/8 (5 April [1945]).

<sup>200</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note', p.xxi.

Marion was asked to write a preface to the *Roll of Honour: Arbroath and District, 1935-1946*.<sup>201</sup> Her piece is unusual of its kind. She wonders what it was that made soldiers go forward 'with an almost reckless acceptance of whatever might befall them'. The answer, she thought, was 'faith, unconscious but none the less compelling, faith in their comrades, in their leaders, in their country, and in mankind'. She writes of

that Kingdom that is to be [...] when envy and hate and the lust for power shall have been overcome by wise counsel and love of our brother man.

She asks the reader to 'keep faith with those who have drunk of the cup of bitterness'.

Whether by design or omission, 'faith in God' and the 'Kingdom of God' are conspicuous by their absence.

One friend who visited Marion in June 1946 recalled that she was:

in failing health, but able to sit out in her garden. Always a great book-lover, her talk was still eagerly of new books and authors, and of old favourites.<sup>202</sup>

Florence Robertson Cameron, another friend, also visited that summer. In her obituary of Marion for *Life and Work, The Record of the Church of Scotland*, she wrote

She was a little, frail old lady, but one could not look long into those flashing dark eyes without at once coming into contact with an ageless spirit of vitality and youth.<sup>203</sup>

She remembered how Marion had 'harked back to this town of her childhood' in her old age, her 'eager desire' to return there, despite being 'worn out by much suffering,' and how the journey had been taken with 'utmost enthusiasm'.

Marion Angus was of the "Nor' East" to her fingertips, betraying again and again those twin attributes of shrewd wisdom and dry humour [...] she had passed through the waters of deep sorrow, and had emerged with eyes made clear by the wash of tears. This it was that gave her that tender insight into the human heart which she so often reveals in her poetry.

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<sup>201</sup> M. Angus, 'Preface', *The Honour Roll of Angus 1939-1945* (Arbroath: Buncle, 1945).

<sup>202</sup> UAHC, MS2737/42 ([August]1946).

<sup>203</sup> F. Robertson Cameron, 'The Nor' East was in her Blood' in Rev J. W. Stevenson (ed.), *Life and Work: The Record of the Church of Scotland* vol.I, 11 (November 1946), 263.

Mrs Robertson Cameron quotes something Marion had written in one of her last letters ‘God may have other words for other worlds – but for this world His only word is Christ.’ It is of particular interest because of its source, a masonic text: ‘God may have other words for other worlds, but His supreme Word for this world, yesterday, today, forever, is Christ!’<sup>204</sup> Marion’s dislike of conservative, puritanical thinking within the kirk and her interest in mysticism is very much in keeping with Freemasonry, which, at that time, was known for its toleration of different religious beliefs and its radicalism. Her interest in Freemasonry can be traced back to ‘The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie’, where masonic events are frequently mentioned and the topic is discussed in one entry.

Marwood and I got discussing Freemasonry this afternoon, he attacking, I defending, the order. For myself, I never was really an active Mason, and only passed the first degree. After that came my serious illness in ‘77, and so the thing passed out of mind. But the institution has always had my warm approval. For even its opponents cannot deny that it has helped on the progress of mankind towards the good time when all men will be as brothers, despite all differences of race or birth or creed, when Freemasonry, having worthily played its part, will quit the stage, and be only remembered, like the Knights Templars and the Red Cross Knights of old, by its beneficial effects upon the human race.<sup>205</sup>

In the summer of 1946 Marion hoped to join Mrs Macrae Wilson at her house in Glen Ogil, but took ill and died of a cerebral haemorrhage in Arbroath Infirmary on 18<sup>th</sup> August. When Williamina Matthew registered the death of ‘Marion Angus, Poetess’ two days later, it was as an ‘intimate friend’, which is not a category normally accepted by the registrar.<sup>206</sup> The cremation at Aberdeen was private. Her nephew, William Stephenson Angus, represented the family.

Earlier that year, Marion had spoken to Williamina about her death:

‘I’d like my ashes scattered on the sands at Elliot,’ she’d said.  
‘Well, I’ve no car,’ Williamina told her. ‘You’ll have to go in the basket of my bicycle.’

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<sup>204</sup> J. F. Newton, *The Great Light in Masonry*, Little Masonic Library, vol. III, [Temple Press] p. 43.

<sup>205</sup> AO, October 14 1898, AG (20 October 1898), 2.

<sup>206</sup> GRO (Scotland) Register of Deaths, District of Arbroath and St Vigeans 1946, fol.72, no 216, Marion Emily Angus [age wrongly recorded as eighty].

‘Perfect,’ Marion laughed. ‘I’d like that.’<sup>207</sup>

But in the event Williamina took a taxi to the sands.

Marion had been in favour of cremation for a long time. In the persona of ‘Arthur Ogilvie’ she wrote: burning is only a quick way of accomplishing what is otherwise a slow and, to our minds, an unpleasant process.<sup>208</sup>

Williamina’s interest in Marion lasted. In 1968 she attended a Festival of Music, Drama and Art in Montrose, where she took the chance to talk to Helen Cruickshank about Marion. ‘My heart says more than my pen,’ she wrote to Helen later, ‘and that you will understand. [...] You may not remember me,’ she continued, ‘but I spoke to you at the Montrose Festival that enjoyable evening and cared for Marion Angus during the last two years of her life.’<sup>209</sup>

Before her own death in 1986 Williamina donated an annotated copy of *Marion Angus: Selected Poems* to Arbroath Library. On the flyleaf is written ‘Marion Angus and W.S. Matthew’, though it could never have belonged to Marion. Other hand-written notes indicate Williamina wished her role in Marion’s life to be recognised. Where there is mention of ‘a happy letter written from Glen Clova’, Williamina has written in block capitals, ‘with the Corstorphines and me!’ ‘Whom I met’ is written beside Nan Shepherd’s underlined name. The paragraph about Marion returning to Arbroath is marked by a line in the margin and the last sentence, ‘at her own request her ashes were scattered in the sea at Elliot’s Point’ has a very firmly penned addition: ‘By W.S.M.’<sup>210</sup>

It seems that the people who knew Marion best loved her best. Philip Lilley wrote of her:

She had a keen intellect, and many varied gifts, but she was much more than a merely talented woman. She was a great soul, and to know her was

<sup>207</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Norman Atkinson, Recorded Conversation (regarding interview with Williamina Sturrock Matthew) (30 April 2005), 1/6.

<sup>208</sup> AO, 13 May 1898, AG (21 May 1898), 2.

<sup>209</sup> S USC, HBC Papers, MS1 (6 February 1973).

<sup>210</sup> Arbroath Library; annotated copy of *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, donated by WSM.

to love her.<sup>211</sup>

Williamina Matthew did not just see herself as Marion's 'kindly competent maid.'

Like Philip Lilly, she must have loved her too.

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<sup>211</sup> PWL, 'Miss Marion Angus: An Appreciation', 7.

## The Work of Marion Emily Angus

### *Prose*

Marion Angus' facility for vivid description, and her acute awareness of the visual, aural, sensuous and emotive effect of her writing are as apparent in her bold prose as in much of her quietly stated poetry. 'The Diary of Angus Ogilvie' (1897-1898) and 'Christabel's Diary' (1899), were initially published anonymously in the newspaper the *Arbroath Guide*. It is not known if 'The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie' was ever published as a book, but one copy of *Christabel's Diary* resides in Arbroath Library. Both 'diaries' can still be accessed on fading newsprint and microfiche. It was Colin Gibson, recognising that her poems were 'masterly in their use and economy of words' and must have been 'written by one already skilled in the art of writing,' who brought the two 'diaries' to public attention again.<sup>1</sup>

They were probably modelled on J.M. Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*, but mocking parody, irony and realism distinguish them from the often parochial and nostalgic concerns of Barrie. Their elegant prose bursts with breadth of cultural references and social issues. Arthur is pretentious, pedestrian and pompous, in stark contrast to the independent, self aware, clever, and insightful Christabel who draws attention to Arthur's failings in a witty, yet sympathetic way:

Our guest has gone. I was merely thinking aloud this morning that his visit had been a pleasant little ripple on the placid bosom of our lives when Arthur remarked that, 'Ferrand always liked to make a splash.' This change of attitude surprised me. Arthur used rather to bore me with Ferrand's exploits; but in the calm of the afternoon I remembered that 'one is apt to look coldly on what some one else is making a fuss over.' And probably there is a good deal of human nature in a man after all!<sup>2</sup>

The name Christabel may have been chosen from the heroine of Coleridge's poem, 'Christabel', with 'her eyes so blue', victim of the enigmatic Geraldine.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Gibson, 'They Sang of Angus', *Arbroath Herald Annual* (December 1984), [n/p].

<sup>2</sup> Christabel Massingbird [Marion Angus], *Christabel's Diary* [CD], 4 May 1899, p.24.

In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell  
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
Thou knowest tonight, and wilt know tomorrow  
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow.<sup>3</sup>

Or it may have been chosen because of Christabel Pankhurst, the daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst (founder [1889] of the Women's Franchise League), and a well known campaigner in her own right for votes for women. The Christabel of the diary had a secret past:

and then there was some faint whispering of leaves in our one birch tree — a silence as when a great actor steps upon a stage — a little breeze and — enter ghost! — only the strange scent of a foreign flower. I had my hands full of it once — that night — how long is it ago? I have never seen it since.<sup>4</sup>

To late Victorian Arbroath, the teasing revelations in the diaries, the gossip, the questioning of the status quo, might have seemed shocking:

A woman does not of necessity enjoy all that she endures with patience,  
nor welcome every ill she tolerates.<sup>5</sup>

Christabel hinted men were boring and unimaginative, women might be forthright and self-aware, and constantly made fun of conventional politeness and respectability:

And to-day I had to listen with one ear and half my brain to some one else, while the other ear and the other half heard Dr — — and Miss — — conversing with extreme civility to one another. Through the murmur of other voices I could discern that one was talking of 'The Christian' and one of 'Helbeck of Bannisdale,' but so excessive was their politeness and so guarded the expressions of opinion, that to the end they never discovered they were not discussing the self-same book.<sup>6</sup>

The content of all Angus's prose work written in her early thirties is descriptive and insightful. The fluent style of her two diaries is energetic, impulsive, confident. She uses vocabulary poetically:

I went over things in my mind — the walk, the morning white and beautiful, with mist turned frost in the night, hedges all point lace and pearls, and the 'Three Mile Wood' decked for a wedding. The wedding

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Christabel' (lines 262-5).

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/stc/Coleridge/poems/Christabel.html> (consulted 10 August 2009).

<sup>4</sup> *CD*, 29 May 1899, p.32.

<sup>5</sup> *CD*, 22 May 1899, p.29.

<sup>6</sup> *CD*, 23 May 1899, p.30.

in the very next field—a solemn gathering of grave and reverend crows grouped round the bridal party, sea gulls all in white, very silent — the whole, except for one crow in the middle, the parson, performing the ceremony — rather throaty after last night’s frost. Then all at once stir and commotion and flapping of wings, and every delicate tree-top tipped with a wedding guest in black, gossiping to his nearest neighbour over the event.<sup>7</sup>

She plays with words:

went out “biking” today against the keen north-east wind; and then like Hannibal or somebody going to Carthage or somewhere, “vento secundo” (with my second wind, as the stupid boy translated it), I came home like an arrow.’<sup>8</sup>

Her witty allusions and the natural rhythm of her language enhance an irreverent effect:

Put snowdrops and pink anemones in the flower-glasses. Tried to make friends with old Willie. He talked dolefully of ‘cheenges’ — sympathised till it dawned on me that I was the most outstanding and unwelcome ‘cheenge.’ Have made up my mind that yellow is really my colour, though Arthur says that blue matches — But he seemed to like yellow too.

Told him this evening that I had spent an idle, good-for-nothing day. He opened a shabby brown book with ‘Montaigne’ on its covers, and read — ‘You have done nothing to-day? What! Have you not lived? It is not only the fundamental, but the most illustrious of every occupation.’

Very nice and soothing: it must have comforted Arthur often enough.<sup>9</sup>

Her ability to paint vividly descriptive pictures is particularly apparent in ‘Round About Geneva’. The following impressions of Switzerland, written in a manner similar to R.L.Stevenson’s *Travels with a Donkey*, were originally the text of a ‘lecturette delivered by Miss Angus in the Milne Memorial Hall’ on 28 January 1897.<sup>10</sup> The text was then printed as a column in the *Arbroath Guide* before being published in book form.<sup>11</sup>

Suppose we go down to the quai at Ouchy, a pretty suburb of Lausanne, and take a steamer up the lake towards the vineyards and the mountains. On the way to the landing stage we can pass the house where Gibbon the historian lived – one used to see the tree in the little garden under which

<sup>7</sup> *CD*, 27 February 1899, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Ogilvie [Marion Angus], *The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie [AO]*, 20 May 1898, *AG* (28 May 1898), 2.

<sup>9</sup> *CD*, 28 February 1899, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Advertisement, *AG* (23<sup>rd</sup> January 1897), 3.

<sup>11</sup> M. Angus, ‘Round About Geneva’ *AG* (11 February 1899), 3.

he wrote a great part of his stupendous work. If we take the early boat, that will take us in time for the early market at Vevey.

[...]

There is no blue I have ever seen quite like the blue of this Geneva Lake – not the vivid sapphire of the Mediterranean, nor the pale azure of our northern seas in summer; it is the lustrous and piercing blue of untold depths of water warmed by no genial current, icy cold as the great peaks that glitter above it in the radiance of the southern sun [...].

But her account does not confine itself to description of the countryside. Her stay in Switzerland had been long enough to see the seasons through. She took the trouble to dispel myths.

When people think of Switzerland they have a vision in their minds of majestic peaks, and it is quite true one can't go to Switzerland without seeing them in reality, but sometimes only a background in the distance. It is rather annoying when one comes home to have people asking, 'Did you climb Mont Blanc?' Did you ever see the sunrise from the Jungfrau? 'What about glaciers and the awful ice chasms on the Matterhorn?' To have to answer that that you weren't in the neighbourhood, and have no hairbreadth escapes to relate – no swinging in mid-air over precipices, no cutting of your way up Monte Rosa with ice hatchets, and that you never were buried in a snowdrift.

The initial impression of Lausanne which the Reverend Professor Edie of the Secession Church of Scotland had in the early nineteenth century – 'Maggie, this is an awfy bad place' – is mentioned in *The Scots Kirk: Lausanne*.<sup>12</sup> Despite his view, the area became very popular with English-speaking people. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was a large ex-patriot community, as it was possible to live there much more cheaply than in the United Kingdom. There was a thriving Scots Kirk, designed by the famous French architect Viollet-le-Duc. A strong feature was its work with young people. Marion's writing suggests she may well have been one of the stream of visitors who called at the manse. She records a conversation with 'an amiable Swiss Pastor':

'The Swiss are very like the Scotch.' I only half agreed because we Scotch never like to think any nation *very* [Angus's italics] like ourselves. He was surprised. He commenced to argue, 'Why, you are thrifty, serious, reserved, like us.' These being qualities I didn't seem to rate very high, he got a little irritated – not much; the Swiss are not easily moved. 'Of course,' he remarked sarcastically, 'we aren't quite so pious;

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<sup>12</sup> The Rev. H. F. Kerr, 'Introduction', in *The Scots Kirk: Lausanne* (Vevey: D. Friedli, 1984), [n/p].

we don't pull all our blinds down on Sunday.' He said he had been in Edinburgh once, and it was like that. He was an old man.

She also mentions attending services in the Cathedral at Lausanne:

[Lausanne has a] great red-roofed Gothic building with a tower and spire visible many miles away perched on its great wide terrace. You can hear its bells on still days pealing from far up the lake [...]. Many storms of war and persecution have beat against this old church's gray [sic] walls, but now all is bare and plain inside – no image of the blessed virgin, no crucifix behind the alter, no candles glimmering, nor black-robed priests looming about every day of the week, but quiet, gentle faced ministers preach sermons in it on Sundays – rather long dry sermons, and they sing psalms with old Covenanter-like tunes, like any good Scotch Presbyterians, but in French, of course.

In the manner of a modern travel writer, she comments on American tourists on a steamer on Lake Geneva:

being hurried through Europe by their wives and daughters. They are very tired, while their wives and daughters are just the opposite. They follow them obediently about with arms full of campstools and alpenstocks and wraps and guide books. The women retain only their field-glasses, hanging from their shoulders by a long strap. They look at everything through them. The men never seem to be allowed to look at anything but the baggage.

And on a 'group of German students on a walking tour', who 'look very red and brown and blistered and scarred, as if they had been seeing a good many sunrises'. She sympathises with

the usual boarding school of young English ladies making an educational tour up the lake, their pleasure sadly spoiled by their being compelled even to exclaim in French.

The sight of Swiss peasant women distresses her:

They stoop under their heavy loads, with little children clinging to their skirts – they all stoop these tired Swiss women. They have dug and watered that tiny patch of poor soil round the little chalet away up in the village near the pines – not an inch left unsown. [...] They carry written on their faces the stress of the never-ending struggle for bread. For them there is little hope, little joy; black bread, rude roof, dark night, laborious day, weary arm at sunset, and so life ebbs away; no books, no rest except sometimes a little sitting in the sun under the church wall, as the bells ring thin and faint in the mountain air.

John MacRitchie thought Marion Angus had produced ‘a handful of stories’ for *Pearsons Magazine*. ‘Green Beads – the Story of a Lost Love’ is the only one that has been found. It is a naive, sentimental tale of love thwarted by parental disapproval which lacks the humour of Marion’s earlier diaries and travel writing.<sup>13</sup> Stylistically, it reveals her ear for the music of a language and in terms of the content, shows her understanding that things which seem mystical may be rooted in real events. The theme of ‘tinkers’ which re-appears in her poetry, is introduced here.<sup>14</sup>

A chance meeting occurs between an old minister and Mairi, a young girl whom the minister recognises as the daughter of his lost love. She confides in him that she has ‘nothing but the bonnie green beads that were my mother’s, and not near enough of them to go round my neck.’

Mairi Macleod sat alone in a dip of the moorland.

[...]

In the hollow of one brown hand she held a few beads of green glass. ‘One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,’ she counted, and stopped perforce – there were no more; and a vexed pathos grew in her clear eyes.

She drew a long strand of feathery grass from among the heather and strung them upon it, holding the string round about her throat, only to let it fall again sighing – the beads went only half round; the nape of her soft neck was bare of naught but the strand of grass.

She thought how beautiful they were, green as the water-weeds under the lip of Loch Malveen or as the larches in May on this side of Ben Ruasach.

No emerald could have been lovelier, and yet ‘for sure, where was the use of them at all and them so few?’

The minister invites Mairi to the manse for some of ‘old Annie Gilchrist’s cakes’, and when she leaves he places something in her hand. On the road home, she found

<sup>13</sup> M. Angus, ‘Green Beads, The Story of a Lost Love’, *Pearson’s Magazine* (May 1906), 558-562.

<sup>14</sup> M. Angus, various poems in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006). ‘The Tinker’s Road’ (lines 3-5), ‘What gars ye gang/Auld Tinker’s Road/Whaur there’s naither fook nor kye’ (p.133); from ‘Winter-time’ (lines 1-4), ‘Monday, at the gloamin,/I saw a reid reid lowe,/ Whaur tinker fook wull ne’er set fit,/Far ben in the ghaistly howe.’ (p.162); from ‘This Woman’ (lines 9-12), ‘On some droosy nicht in simmer/ Comes a tinker caird/ Creepin like a thief/Thro the lang green yaird.’ (p. 166); from ‘Of Sorrowful Things’ (lines 5-8), ‘Empty nest of the wren/Flung to the frosty briar;/Drip and spit of the rain/On the ash of a tinker’s fire.’ (p.170); from ‘The Broken Brig’ (lines 15-20), ‘Oh wha is this that lands me hame/This ae nicht o a’?/A tinker wife wi a dreepin plaid/The candle stalks atween,/A whey-faced wife wi a dreepin plaid/And *twa sichtless een*.’ (p.173).

She was alone with the wind and the soft crying of the birds and the falling night; but in her hand *there were twice as many [beads] as there were before, and every one alike.*

Meanwhile the minister is remembering his father's dying words:

I could not bear for folks to be saying you would wed with a poor lass,  
and her with the gipsy blood in her.

The image of broken beads traditionally represent a broken relationship, as in the poem 'Treasure Trove':

Do you mind traivellin, traivellin  
Ower and ower the braes,  
Reistlin the heather, and keekin 'naith the weeds,  
Seekin and greetin in the cauld weet days  
For yer tint green beads? <sup>15</sup>

The style of Marion's first full length book, *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen: The Story of his life and his work for the Young* is a biography of her grandfather, drawn from his diaries.<sup>16</sup> It includes information about political and church upheavals (Corn Laws, The Disruption), social reform (establishment of industrial schools), famous contacts (Thomas Carlyle, William Thackeray, Elizabeth Fry), as well as comment. Her grandfather wrote of Eenooloopik, an 'Esquimeau' present at Queen Victoria's wedding day ball in Aberdeen:

His broad, good-humoured face wore a perpetual smile, yet there was no extravagance of admiration. He moved about comparing (I have no doubt) his own snow house and little, squat inmates with the lofty hall and brilliant assemblage, and probably giving the preference to the former; for though all the people spoke to him, yet it was in an unknown tongue, and I have no doubt the delight felt was in a great degree prospective, and consisted in the fancied wonder and astonishment with which his description would be received by those he loved at home.

Marion's comment shows her awareness of historical injustice:

Aberdeen has showered lavish hospitalities and honours on celebrities from many distant lands, but the cultured Esquimeau has not shared them in our day. 'We live in a wonderful age,' is a common phrase, and in view of modern development, scientific, social, and inventive, are inclined to look with a complacent pity on the world of even so short a

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 'Treasure Trove' (lines 6-10), p.130.

<sup>16</sup> M. Angus, *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen: The story of his life, and his work for the young* (Aberdeen: Wylie, 1913).

time ago as seventy years; but grandfathers and great-grandfathers did the same, and those who come after us will view this generation from their own standpoint of advance (p. 35).

Most of her surviving letters are to literary figures such as Alexander Keith, Neil Gunn, Marion Lochhead, Winifred Duke, Helen Cruickshank, Nan Shepherd, and Mairi Campbell Ireland. Given her lack of self-importance and sense of modesty, she would never have expected them to be collected and read by future generations, and so gave little thought to their presentation. Usually written without full address or date, in a slap-dash style, the letters are full of self-deprecating remarks. Her 'queer crooked handwriting' shares many characteristics of her father's style.<sup>17</sup> Whether he taught her to write is not known.

At the start of Marion's correspondence with Mairi Campbell Ireland (November 1929-June 1931) Marion seemed pleased to be seen as someone with status and influence in the literary world, but after Ethel's illness, she was overwhelmed by Mrs Ireland's kindly response: "I wonder in truth why I should be singled out for your gracious sympathy and kindness. It is far far more than I deserve".<sup>18</sup> More than anything these surviving letters reveal Marion's intense interest in and love of poetry, novels and philosophies; her emotional intensity and the extent of her personal crisis over the illness of her sister; her sense of isolation, vulnerability and insecurity and her longing for understanding, sympathy and love.

### *Poetry*

Marion told William Jeffrey in a letter: 'I wrote verse as a child and coming on a stray copy of one of these these the other day I wondered at the queer young creature and felt pity for her.'<sup>19</sup> She also admitted to Winifred Duke that 'from a very early age' she had

<sup>17</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note', in M. Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Serif, 1950), p.xviii.

<sup>18</sup> NLS, MS19328 fol.64 [1930].

<sup>19</sup> EULSC, Papers of Maurice Lindsay, MS 2030/30/414 a-c ([autumn] 1944).

written poetry, but claimed that family responsibilities had taken priority.<sup>20</sup> Regarding how she composed her poems, she wrote to Marion Lochhead: ‘I am absolutely irregular, and just find a stray thought in my head when dusting or cooking. I never write a poem out until it is complete in my head.’<sup>21</sup> Her first known poetic composition, a piece of humorous rhyming prose is hidden within *The Diary of Arthur Ogilvie*. The rhythm is indicative of the motion of a journey.

I can’t make up my mind where to go for a holiday. Shall I sail away to Norway, or visit the Yellowstone Park, or be content at Edzell and a walk to Invermark? Tyndrum is awfully bracing, so at least I’m led to believe, but at Lunan Bay I could bathe all day from morn till dewy eve. Yet I mayn’t forget I’ve promised to go to Burke Creek Bend, away in Southern Queensland (I could only spare a weekend). Of Carnoustie I am rather wearied; the same with the Engadine, I’d really prefer Monikie or some place I’ve seldom seen. There’s a spot in the Orinoco, the choicest place I know, but though everything there grows very fast, the life would be very slow. The more I think of the question and revolve it up and down, the more I resolve as usual, just to run up to London town. So I shall set off one fine day by the 9.3 [sic] taking Mr Muir’s advice to go by the North British.<sup>22</sup>

A few months later Arthur’s sister-in-law, prompted by Carmyllie Flower Show, writes a poem. Arthur thinks ‘The Wild Beasts of Scotland’, ‘very good [...] for a maiden effort’ and agrees to print it within his diary.

He who grows pansies, peaches, peas,  
Or tends in rows the blooming roses –  
Three enemies disturb his ease,  
And each, in turn, the worst of foes is.  
They are the green fly, rat and rabbit,  
They kill, they pull the fruit, and grab it.

Following verses detail the havoc caused by the ‘orgies’ of the rabbits, rat and greenfly and with heavy irony, make the point: ‘their evil deeds endurance teaches’.

For know, dear gardener, loss of peas,  
Well borne, will lead to where true peace is,  
And peaches blighted, munched heartsease,  
Endured, make strong; so trouble ceases.  
Fix only faith in things on high –

<sup>20</sup> W. Duke, ‘Women Poets of Today’, *Glasgow Herald* (15 January 1936), 8.

<sup>21</sup> HBC, ‘A Personal Note’, p.xvii.

<sup>22</sup> AO, 27 June 1898, AG (2 July 1898), 2.

So teach the rabbit, rat and fly.<sup>23</sup>

Marion's verse was not seen in public again for more than twenty years, when she was in her fifties, living with Ethel in Aberdeen. Between July 1921 and 1924 two of her poems were published by C.M. Grieve in *Northern Numbers*, five in *The Scots Pictorial*, and three in Grieve's *Scottish Chapbook*. Wyllie of Aberdeen, who had published *Sheriff Watson of Aberdeen*, published *The Lilt and Other Verses* (1922). Gowans and Gray of Glasgow published a small vellum bound volume, *The Tinker's Road and Other Verses* in 1924. By this time the rough, tumbling stream of consciousness of her youth has been obstructed, and the powerful creative current that emerged was deeply challenging:

There's a still day dawnin,  
When I'll no care,  
Gin ye come like lord or loon  
Or gin ye come nae mair.<sup>24</sup>

An eloquent way to say what might, in today's world, be expressed bluntly, in a colloquial phrase of two words.

In January 1925 Marion Angus wrote to Roderick Watson Kerr renewing her subscription to The Porpoise Press and praising the Violet Jacob broadsheet they had just published:

If I have anything suitable shortly I shall forward it to your own address [...]. The broadsheet is beautifully got up in every way and Violet Jacob's work, it goes without saying, is also too high a standard for me to have much hope of writing anything good enough to be published in the same periodical along with hers.<sup>25</sup>

The Porpoise Press was started in Edinburgh by Roderick Watson Kerr and George Malcolm Thomson on a subscription basis, to support the flourishing Scottish literary culture of the 1920s. After producing a series of poetry pamphlets they left, and Charles Graves assumed responsibility for the firm. It was then taken over by Faber and Faber and run by George Blake and Malcolm Thomson. The company published Marion Angus's

<sup>23</sup> AO, 11 August 1898, AG (20 August 1898), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Angus, 'A Woman Sings' (lines 9-12), in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p.182.

<sup>25</sup> NLS, Accession 57785: Letters of R.W. Kerr (1922-24).

*Sun and Candlelight* (1927) and *The Singin Lass* (1929), ‘with vivid green-papered boards which matched in vividness its crimson spine and end-papers. The colours were deliberately chosen to typify the faery quality of the verse.’<sup>26</sup> The format was so attractive that the attention of C.M. Grieve was caught. He wrote to the company

Would you care to consider for early publication a volume of poems by me [...]. I should like them produced if possible in a very similar format to Miss Angus’ volume’.<sup>27</sup>

*The Turn of the Day*, published in 1931, included many poems from *The Tinker’s Road And Other Verses*. Limited editions of signed copies were also produced with *The Singin Lass* and *The Turn of the Day*. According to Nan Shepherd, Gowans and Gray then wished to produce a collected edition of her work, but copyright problems prevented this from happening.<sup>28</sup> Instead they produced *Lost Country* (1937), which contained many poems previously published in the Glasgow Herald.

Angus’s poems are, in Carole Anderson’s words, ‘spare and elliptic: while sometimes described as “fey”, at their best they are powerful and disturbing’.<sup>29</sup> Often short and apparently simple, they are in fact unpredictable, powerfully condensed in the style of a traditional ballad. Alexander Keith described her mind as ‘mediaeval, in the best sense of the adjective – strong, sympathetic, percipient, and imaginative’, and described his tendency to ‘quote too much’ from her poems: ‘fondness for her work is an acquired taste’.<sup>30</sup> He looked on her poem ‘The Seaward Toon’ as a ‘challenge’ which:

called upon those who would follow to leave the easy way of reading and to imagine a new world, rather an unbelievable world perhaps, often with an unreal atmosphere in it, but amazingly attractive once one got accustomed to it.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> C. Graves, ‘The Poetry of Marion Angus’, *Chapbook* 6 (1945), 97.

<sup>27</sup> NLS, Accession 57785: Letters of R.W. Kerr (1922-24).

<sup>28</sup> N. Shepherd, ‘Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside’, *The Deeside Field*, Jubilee Issue, 2nd Series, 6 (1970), 10.

<sup>29</sup> C. Anderson, ‘Marion Angus, Poet’ in A. Reid and B. D. Osborne (eds.), *Discovering Scottish Writers*, [n/p].

<sup>30</sup> A. Keith, ‘Miss Marion Angus: A Modern Balladist’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (29 October 1927), 5.

<sup>31</sup> A. Keith, ‘The Lykewake Glamourie of Marion Angus’s Poems’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (24 August 1946), 2.

Nan Shepherd also noted that some of Angus's insights 'are expressed in terms that take one to the verges of known experience' and described her work as 'on the very borders of the uncanny'.<sup>32</sup> Winifred Duke wrote:

There is something eerie about her poetry, recalling the haar on a winter night, the sea moaning outside [,] the long sands of the East coast, the rain-blackened gravestones in forgotten country kirkyards.<sup>33</sup>

The language Marion Angus uses in her poetry is terse, colourful and flexible. It has natural rhythm, yet there are frequent subtle variations and breaks in the rhyme and metre which create energy. The patterns of sound created by repetition, assonance, internal rhymes, and pauses are put to work as much as the words. This may explain why the poems seem to be as much about the invisible as the visible, the eerie rather than the known and why they exude strong emotions not easily expressed: regret, wistfulness, jealousy, and guilt.

There is something ephemeral about her poetry. A passionate lover of nature, she paints strong images of natural phenomena: hills, tumbling burns, twisted trees, flowers. Yet these images fade quickly, leaving only a mood. Janet Caird notes her descriptions of nature 'are used more like pigment, to express, to enhance a mood, an atmosphere'.<sup>34</sup> John MacRitchie agrees: 'if she writes of anemones, or cotton-grasses, or burns clattering down a glen, it is because of what they can be associated with.'<sup>35</sup>

A few sentences Marion Angus wrote to Helen Cruickshank reveal something of what was important to her in a poem:

You have the tang of bitterness in all poignant things [...] but the poem I would extol before I think every other is "The Ponnage". In there with swiftness and directness you attain to pure mysticism and it is so lovely.<sup>36</sup>

In her own poetry, as in 'Martha's House' she blends natural and supernatural with religious imagery to produce the same effect.

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<sup>32</sup> Shepherd, 'Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside', 15.

<sup>33</sup> Duke, 'Women Poets of To-day', 8.

<sup>34</sup> J. Caird, 'The Poetry of Marion Angus', *Cencrastus*, 25 (Spring 1987), 45.

<sup>35</sup> J. MacRitchie, 'Arbroath's Singin Lass', *AHA* (December 1996), [n/p].

<sup>36</sup> AUMAS, Papers of Marion Angus, MS 2737/4 (9 June 1934).

No sound no stir save dove's soft whirr  
 Till, from a chamber high,  
 One clear quick cry  
 One name, one word,  
 "Mary" – yet nothing stirred,  
 Only small winds that blew,  
 Inward, the scent  
 Of mint and myrrh and rue.<sup>37</sup>

This resulted in some critics referring to the obscurity of her work, which she resented, according to a letter she wrote to Neil Gunn:

it was most acceptable and encouraging to find a reviewer who is not puzzled by something "obscure" in my efforts. Strangely enough, although only too certain of my own limitations and of the very thin thread of poetry which is mine yet, I always think whatever my efforts are, they are not obscure.<sup>38</sup>

Her use of Christian symbolism led Colin Milton to suspect that she may have been 'aware of current trends in theology which attempted to link up religious experience with the idea of an unconscious life.'<sup>38</sup>

John MacRitchie notes that despite her focus on 'a woman looking back on lost happiness or love gone wrong: spinsterly obsessions perhaps', there is no 'sourness' in her work and, 'in fact, the poems are about trying to replay the past and put right old wrongs.'<sup>40</sup>

She was self-effacing, as documented by Winifred Duke. 'No poet could be more modest about her achievements than Marion Angus. She calls her poems "all mediocre," and can only with difficulty be brought to name her own favourites.'<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, one letter reveals her modesty was relatively superficial. She made defiant defence of her poetry when accused of being 'amateur':

<sup>37</sup> M. Angus, 'Martha's House' (lines 9-16), in K. H. Gordon (ed.) *Voices From Their Ain Countrie: The Poems of Marion Angus and Violet Jacob*, Glasgow: ASLS, 2006, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> NLS, Deposit 209, Box 17/1. Neil Gunn Papers.

<sup>38</sup> C. Milton, 'Modern Poetry in Scots before MacDiarmid' in C. Craig (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature: Twentieth Century*, 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p.34.

<sup>40</sup> MacRitchie, 'Arbroath's Singin Lass', [n/p].

<sup>41</sup> Duke, 'Women Poets of Today', 8.

Why should she think me anything but an amateur? Amateur means lover and I love poetry. And what does she mean by local? Everyone is local, even Milton, Tennyson, Wordsworth.<sup>42</sup>

Opinions about the value of her poetry have generally been positive, apart from Alan Bold in *Modern Scottish Literature* who called her 'home made Marion' and wrote she made 'nostalgic raids on romantic Scottish history and came back with the usual antithetical images'.<sup>43</sup> Another obituarist claimed:

She was [...] an entirely traditionalist poetess and her work nowhere shows any trace of modernism or any awareness of contemporary problems. It has no inkling of the general conflict between knowledge and the emotions, between the mind and the body which lies at the core of all significant modern poetry [...]. Miss Angus [...] carried on with distinction an old tradition of Scots song, when male singers were few and far between'.<sup>44</sup>

But, as the unnamed person betrays his ignorance of the poet by giving her age at death as seventy rather than eighty one, the real purpose of the obituary is revealed to be the trumpeting of male ego: 'but the masculine principle has re-asserted itself strongly in Scots verse in recent years, and there has been a corresponding diminution of the feminist element.'

There were other opinions: 'hers was one of the most distinctive voices of the modern Scots revival'.<sup>45</sup> Marion Lochhead reported Marion had a 'genius for telling a story in a few verses, of almost unbearable poignancy'.<sup>46</sup> Janet Caird calls her 'a true poet, who merits and requires careful reading'.<sup>47</sup> Kurt Wittig asserts her to be 'worthy of a place in the history of Scottish Literature in her own right'.<sup>48</sup> And although Maurice Lindsay had reservations about some of her work dealing with the supernatural, he thought the best of her work 'passionate' and 'technically perfect'.<sup>49</sup> Another early critic

<sup>42</sup> NLS, MS 19328 fol. 132 (17 April [1931]).

<sup>43</sup> A. Bold (ed.), *Modern Scottish Literature*, (London: Longman, 1983) pp. 24-5.

<sup>44</sup> 'The Late Marion Angus' in H. MacDiarmid (ed.), *The Voice of Scotland: A Quarterly magazine of Scottish Arts and Affairs*, vol.III, 1, September 1946, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Unattributed obituary: 'Death of Marion Angus Scots Vernacular Poet', *AG* (24 August 1946), 6.

<sup>46</sup> M. Lochhead, 'Feminine Quartet', *Chapman 27-28 Woven by Women*, vol.VI, 3-4, Summer 1980, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Caird, 'The Poetry of Marion Angus', 47.

<sup>48</sup> K. Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1978), p.279.

<sup>49</sup> Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, p.xiii.

wrote ‘within her limits she is perhaps the most poetical of living Scottish Poets’.<sup>50</sup>

Roderick Watson noted ‘within her chosen range Marion Angus is technically the most accomplished of her generation’.<sup>51</sup>

A more recent evaluation of Marion Angus’s work, in Robert Crawford’s *Scotland’s Books*, perpetuates the idea that hers was a ‘singular, feminine talent’, though Crawford concedes she wrote ‘some extremely beautiful and subtle poems, rich in implication.’<sup>52</sup>

Charles Graves wrote of Marion Angus’s belief in the supernatural:

Her ‘faery’ is not a realm; it is an attitude of mind; it is a light suffusing her poetry and giving it individuality. Yet just because it is a suffusion it is difficult to speak of it. The men and women who people Miss Angus’s poems and are touched by it [sic] are in love with the wild beauty which at times makes this world a different place from the work-a-day world so full of briars, which most of us consistently know [...] And they are intuitively aware of their own kinship with one another.<sup>53</sup>

It may, indeed, be ‘difficult’ to analyse the strange poem ‘Waater o Dye’.<sup>54</sup> Yet anyone who has ‘lauched and lo’ed and sinned’ (line 3) may experience a deep-seated response on reading it:

[...]  
Waater o Dye, whaur ye rin still  
On me she warks her auncient will;  
What I hae niver kent, I ken –  
The feel o babes, the luve o men.

The sea-gaun bird forebodes me grief,  
I moorn at sicht o fa’in leaf;  
Intil the clood I luik, bricht-eed,  
For wings o Deith abune ma heid.

An aye she hauds me for her ain,  
Flesh o her flesh, bane o her bane –  
Some lang-deid wumman o my kin –  
*Waater o Dye, hoo still ye rin.*

<sup>50</sup> Unattributed criticism: *TLS* (10 October 1929), 798-9.

<sup>51</sup> R. Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.347.

<sup>52</sup> R. Crawford, *Scotland’s Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin, 2007), p.570.

<sup>53</sup> Graves, ‘The Poetry of Marion Angus’, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Angus, ‘Waater o Dye’ (lines 15-26), in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p. 149.

One critic in the *Times Educational Supplement* sensed the latent power in her poems.

Far beyond time's treason and the weakness and pathos of men she has a vision of the abiding hills of the north, and it is their staunchness and mystery which sound as an undertone even in her lightest and gayest verses, which speak through the old wives and the bonnie maids of her poignant lyrics and ballads.<sup>55</sup>

Marion Angus's poetry illuminates her struggle rather than defines her character. Those who seek to explain it may be challenged, those who approach it intuitively understand what she wished to convey. And perhaps the final word should be left to J.B. Salmond. When preparing 'An Appreciation' for Marion Angus after her death, he began to read her poetry and became:

so absorbed in reading her work that I forgot what my purpose was to write about it. That perhaps is the last word in criticism, that a poem is so authentic it is no matter for a critic, it is a matter for a reader.<sup>56</sup>

### *Land and Language*

Robert Crawford, in *Identifying Poets*, notes the importance of place and home to modern poets.<sup>57</sup> Although Marion Angus's love for Scotland may be assumed from her work, in a letter to William Jeffrey, she reveals directly what Scotland means to her. She praised Jeffrey's writing, which she thought was 'full of the music, the beauty and sorrow of our country and awakens a thrill of satisfaction and completeness'.<sup>58</sup> Despite her English birth, she clearly identified with Scotland as her home, and much of her poetry celebrates its natural features. She identified particularly with the northeast. When Alexander Keith wrote in 1940 for permission to use some poems in an anthology, *Songs of the North-East*, she replied she 'considered it an honour to be asked to contribute to so engaging and interesting a project' and was 'proud too if I may hope to see my rhymes in print

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<sup>55</sup> Unattributed criticism: *TLS* (8 Aug 1931), 635.

<sup>56</sup> J. B. Salmond, 'An Appreciation', *AG* (24 August 1946), 6.

<sup>57</sup> R. Crawford, *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

<sup>58</sup> EULSC, MS 2030/30/414 a-c ([autumn] 1944).

alongside of the well beloved Charles Murray[...] I only wish they were better'.<sup>59</sup> On its publication she wrote: "I would rather have a humble place among the Poets of the North-East than a seat with the mighty."<sup>60</sup> Nan Shepherd, claiming Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside, noted the number of poems set in that area ('Morven Glen', 'Culblean', 'Tarland Toun', 'The Brig o Feugh' to name just a few). In an article she commented on Marion's apparent affinity with landscapes – 'her landscape is recognisably our own, but is suffused with her presence' – and her ability to depict the essence of a place:

it is a quality of the place to which the poet was attuned, as much a part of it as its solid houses and sober fields.<sup>61</sup>

In her opinion the poet offered powerful new perspectives to the reader.

We know that this is our country and these are our people but we did not know they were quite like this. She has altered our eyes.

J.B. Salmond also wrote of the close relationship of Marion's poetry with the land:

which land is definitely the county of Angus; for although the poetess spent part of her life in Aberdeenshire and had a great affection for, and wrote much about, that beautiful county, it is in Angus, where she passed her childhood and young womanhood, and to which she chose to return in her old age and take farewell of the world, that she found her colour, her language, and her people.<sup>62</sup>

He claims anywhere un-named or unknown to him as 'Angus glens and Angus woods and Angus roads'. These are her inspiration: the 'wild haunted places', 'lovely ancient moorland', the 'wee waukenin, waukenin burn', the 'whinny crookit road'. Unfortunately he includes quotations from 'Penchrise' and 'Once Long Ago' (about Cades-Muir), both of which concern places in the Borders. But he is correct that Arbroath ('The Seaward Toon', 'The Lane Kirkyaird', 'Winter') and the hills, glens and coast of Angus are recognisable. Angus was where she was most settled.

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<sup>59</sup> UAHC, MS3017/8/1/1-3 (22 February 1940).

<sup>60</sup> UAHC, MS3017/8/1/1-3 (2 May 1940).

<sup>61</sup> Shepherd, Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside, 12-13.

<sup>62</sup> Salmond, 'An Appreciation', 6.

She did not have the same feeling for cities. The “magic” that falls upon Edinburgh ‘on still November eves’ lacks conviction.<sup>63</sup> Even her portrayal of ‘The Silver City’ as a staid matron lacks the engagement of her poems in Scots:

[...]  
 She never taught her children fairy lore,  
 Yet they must go a-seeking crocks of gold  
 Afar throughout the earth;  
 And when their treasure in her lap they pour,  
 Her hands upon her knee do primly fold  
 She smiles complacent that she gave them [Aberdonians] birth.<sup>64</sup>

She did not like the west of Scotland, ‘this humid land’.<sup>65</sup> She wrote to Mairi Campbell Ireland that ‘neither its climate nor its mentality’ suited her.<sup>66</sup> The only time the west is mentioned in her poetry is in ‘Foxgloves and Snow’, which expresses her lack of identification with the west and her longing for her exile from the east to be over.

[...]  
 Sweet secret – I shall never know,  
 Though seas run dry, and suns turn cold,  
 How many purple foxgloves grow  
 This summer by the ruined fold.

And – sorry wrong – though roses red  
 By western waters bloom and fall,  
 No more I watch the last snows fade  
 On a dark hill above Glen Doll.<sup>67</sup>

To cement his claim that Marion Angus belongs to Angus, J.B. Salmond states ‘The Scots in which she expresses herself is Angus Scots’, and indeed, her spelling of such words as “fur”(for), “fint”(found), “sall” (shall), and “buss” (bush) does represent the Angus pronunciation.<sup>68</sup> Yet she was accustomed to hearing literary and cultured Anglo-Scots at home, and must have struggled to understand the accent when, aged 10, she came to Arbroath in 1876. The *New Statistical Account of Scotland* reports that

<sup>63</sup> M. Angus, ‘November in Edinburgh’ (lines 1-4), in K. H. Gordon (ed.), *Voices From Their Ain Country* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2006), p.174.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, ‘The Silver City’ (lines 9-14), p.103.

<sup>65</sup> UAH, MS3036/3 (2 July[1936]).

<sup>66</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.27 (9 February [1931]).

<sup>67</sup> Angus, ‘Foxgloves and Snow’ (lines 5-12) in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p.185.

<sup>68</sup> Salmond, ‘An Appreciation’, 6.

The language generally spoken [in Arbroath] is the Forfarshire dialect [...] with a peculiarity of accent distinct from that which is observable in the neighbouring towns of Dundee and Montrose' [...]. The shibboleth by which a native of Arbroath may be detected most readily, is his pronunciation of any word in which the letters *o* and *i* are found in conjunction, as in the words *oil*, *spoil*, *anoint*, *point*, &c. It is impossible to exhibit on paper the sound which a native of Arbroath gives to these words; but a stranger who has once heard it, will never forget it.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps it was this very challenge, of communicating as a child with local children and being polite to parishioners that alerted her to intricacies of sound and rhythm. As Colin Milton points out, she was one of those who belonged to

the first generation of Scots to be affected by the major educational reforms of the time and so were more conscious of language variety and [...] probably experienced conflicting dialect claims which provided part of the stimulus to literary activity'.<sup>70</sup>

At any rate she succeeded in becoming a fluent bilingual speaker. Her use of Scots was firmly grounded in the spoken language and connected to its vibrancy, colour, economy and power: she had the 'authentic ring of the right idiom', and 'no straining after the archaic phrase'.<sup>71</sup> In later life she spoke in 'cultured Scots', as confirmed by Maurice Lindsay.<sup>72</sup> J. Derrick McClure writes that she has 'one of the most distinct voices in modern Scots poetry', and claims that:

in all features of its phonology and grammar, her Scots is consistent, and used with the easy and natural grace of one born and bred to speak it.<sup>73</sup>

However, learning to write in a language is much more difficult than understanding it or even using it appropriately, especially when there are no written grammatical rules. Marion would not have been encouraged to write in Scots at school. Like other writers she would have been self-taught, learning written Scots from Scottish literature. In the 'diaries' it is possible to trace the early development of her Scots writing. Initially 'Arthur

<sup>69</sup> 'Parish of Arbroath', in *The New Statistical Account of Scotland 1845*, vol. XI, Forfar-Kincardine (Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1845), p.7.

<sup>70</sup> Milton, 'Modern Poetry in Scots before MacDiarmid', *The History of Scottish Literature*, p.29.

<sup>71</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note', p.xx.

<sup>72</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, M. Lindsay, Recorded Conversation, 12 March 2004, 1/5.

<sup>73</sup> J. D. McClure *Language, Poetry and Nationhood: Scots as a Poetic Language from 1878 to the present* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press 2000) pp.67-8.

Ogilvie' equates Scots with simplistic ideas, quoting a speaker in a mocking, patronising manner:

I dinnae think surely they'll elec that auldest lad o hers. They tell me he was gey halliket when he was younger [...] they'll better tak the Juke o Argyll, or that man Ba'four that's at the heid o the Parliament for a keeng an let the Prince o Wales bide on as he is.'<sup>74</sup>

The following year, 'Christabel', an Englishwoman, initially describes the local accent as 'very quaint'.<sup>75</sup> Yet within a month of starting her diary she is showing affection for the language:

Tussled with a rowdy sou'wester as far as 'the wreck' on the beach near Elliot this morning [...]. No-one on all the long sands but an old man picking up bits of driftwood. 'It's a cauld day for ye, cratur,' he sung out, and I answered, 'Ay, it is a cauld day.' I find that terms that are almost contemptuous in England can sound quite endearing in kindly Scotch.'<sup>76</sup>

A few weeks later she is defending her use of Scots: 'my brother ... barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple [...] "detects a provincial note in my correspondence," also lately a few Scotticisms. I'm afraid he'll have to get used to it.'<sup>77</sup>

By the time Marion Angus was writing poetry, twenty years after the diaries, her use of the vernacular was accomplished. Many of her finest poems are in Scots, not only Scots vocabulary but also its rhythms, cadences and idioms. One critic wrote 'the vernacular best suits her genius for the eerie'<sup>78</sup>. Alexander Keith reports that Charles Murray:

himself the most consummate and painstaking of artists in the use of words, and the shrewdest judge of Doric verse that I ever knew, used to speak with a kind of special admiration of Marion Angus. Her mind did not follow the roads his followed; her technical facility with the vernacular was less; she aimed at and got quite other effects by methods utterly alien to him. But he recognised in her the true poet and envied her a gift that, precious as it was, would be unchancy were it common.'<sup>79</sup>

There are few clues as to Marion's intentions in writing in Scots, but J. Derrick

<sup>74</sup> AO, 14 May 1898, AG (21 May 1898), 2.

<sup>75</sup> CD, undated first entry, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> CD, 6 March 1899, p.8.

<sup>77</sup> CD, 8 April 1899, p.18.

<sup>78</sup> Unattributed criticism: *TLS* (10 October 1929), 798-9.

<sup>79</sup> Keith, 'The Lykewake Glamourie of Marion Angus's Poems', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 2.

McClure is wrong to believe she ‘left no recorded remarks from which a personal credo regarding her use of Scots could be deduced’.<sup>80</sup> J.L. Hodson wrote of ‘her great love for Scotland and belief in Scottish nationalism’ as being the reason for Marion:

writing in the most part in the Scottish vernacular, although she is careful to choose words that are not too difficult for unaccustomed ears and eyes.’<sup>81</sup>

In a letter to an editor she claimed the language as ‘my Scots tongue’.<sup>82</sup> Her lecture to the English Association in Aberdeen revealed her understanding of ‘the obstacles which vernacular poetry has had to overcome’ and her ‘apprehension lest the vernacular die out.’<sup>83</sup> Expressing her poetic thoughts in Scots, the language of the ballads she loved, was a deliberate choice. However, she stressed to Hodson that ‘poetic thought’ should come before ‘the vernacular’. ‘I feel with regard to some poems that if you take away the dialect there is nothing left,’ she said in a veiled reference to the Lallans movement.<sup>84</sup> Her friend Mrs Robertson Cameron confirmed ‘she [Marion Angus] had nothing but scorn for the so-called “Synthetic Scots”’.<sup>85</sup>

McClure points out that, although her work, along with that of others ‘may have received a galvanic new lease of life from the innovative practices of Grieve and his successors, it did not *need* [McClure’s italics] those to maintain it in being’. She was ‘already writing excellent poetry in Scots before the publication of Grieve’s first collection, and continued to do so in a language and style effectively uninfluenced by him.’<sup>86</sup>

Her poems in English can be just as effective as those in Scots, and she is completely at ease with both languages, oscillating between the two, exploiting the

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<sup>80</sup> McClure, *Language, Poetry and Nationhood*, p.68.

<sup>81</sup> J.L. Hodson, ‘New Scottish Poet: Woman’s Fanciful Verse: Reaction from Housekeeping’, *Daily Mail* (Northern Edition) (16 November 1928), 5.

<sup>82</sup> NLS, Letters of Charles Graves, MS27476 fol.55 (10 April [1929]).

<sup>83</sup> Unattributed article: ‘Will Braid Scots Die Out? Timorous Use of Old Speech: Miss Marion Angus’s Forecast’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (9 December 1930), 6.

<sup>84</sup> Hodson, ‘New Scottish Poet’, *Daily Mail*, 5.

<sup>85</sup> F. Robertson Cameron, ‘The Nor’East was in her Blood’ in Rev J. W. Stevenson (ed.), *Life and Work: The Record of the Church of Scotland*, vol.I, 11 (Nov.1946), 263.

<sup>86</sup> McClure, *Language, Poetry and Nationhood*, p.83.

strengths of each. A comparison of the language of two powerful poems may illustrate this. The English words of ‘A Small Thing’, deceptive in their simplicity, hint at restrained depth of feeling:

‘A hurt so small’  
 Say you,  
 ‘A thread of grey  
 On blue’  
 So slight a thing  
 Less than a wild rose sting  
 Nothing at all’  
 And yet,  
 When thrushes call  
 Or winds awake  
 And sigh – and sink  
 And fall –  
 Into the evening’s grey  
 I think –  
 And think  
 This small heartbreak  
 Will wear my life away.<sup>87</sup>

The robust Scots vocabulary of ‘The Can’el’ brings to mind more visceral conflict.

[...]  
 She’s pluckt ma hert frae oot ma breist  
 Wi hands as white as faem,  
 She’s pluckt ma hert frae oot ma breist  
 An warmed it at the flame.<sup>88</sup>

Using two languages enriches her capacity to make puns, ‘sundry respectable people have been playing a war game [...]. I would gather that [...] Red played a “waur” game than his enemy’.<sup>89</sup> She quotes Scots from a traditional ballad (‘The Drowned Lovers’) in the English language poem ‘Alas Poor Queen’

[...]  
 She rode through Liddesdale with a song;  
 “Ye streams sae wondrous strang,  
 Oh mak me a wrack as I come back  
 But spare me as I gang.”  
 While a hill-bird cried and cried  
 Like a spirit lost  
 By the grey storm-wind tost.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Angus, ‘A Small Thing’, in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p. 172.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, ‘The Can’el’ (lines 5-8), p. 165.

<sup>89</sup> AO, 12 March 1898, *AG* (19 March 1898), 2.

<sup>90</sup> Angus, ‘Alas Poor Queen’ (lines 23-29), in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p.143.

Which language is being used is not always immediately obvious, as she uses no obscure vocabulary and the rhythm always sounds natural. McClure quotes 'Mary's Song' as 'an outstanding example of a writer's skill in exploiting the inherent evocative power of simple, direct statement and images with automatic emotional connotations' and writes that she is

one of the clearest exemplars [...] that it is possible to write in a language which is [...] unequivocally Scots without making any effort whatever to exploit the distinctive Scots vocabulary.<sup>91</sup>

Charles Graves contended that her work had a 'delicacy which had been lacking in the spirit and the technique of Scots verse for many years'.<sup>92</sup> And, 'though her genius was for Scots,' he wrote, 'it would sometimes be hard to say in which language she excelled.' He wrote that an analysis of Marion Angus's Scots poetry showed few 'intrinsically native' words 'which could possibly call for the use of a glossary by the English reader'. He also quotes 'Mary's Sang' as 'an admirable example' of her linguistic skill.

I wad hae gien him my lips tae kiss  
Had I been his, had I been his;  
Barley breid and elder wine,  
Had I been his as he is mine.

The wanderin bee it seeks the rose;  
Tae the lochan's bosom the burnie goes;  
The grey bird cries at evenin's fa,  
"My luvie, my fair one, come awa."

My beloved sall hae this hert tae break,  
Reid, reid wine and the barley cake,  
A hert tae break, and a mou tae kiss,  
Tho he be nae mine, as I am his.<sup>93</sup>

As for her choosing to write most of her poetry in Scots, it is apparent that different aspects of Marion Angus's life experience are expressed in different mediums: prose, which is mainly in English; and poetry, mainly written in Scots. This may exemplify something Hugh MacDiarmid wrote about, as quoted by Douglas Dunn:

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<sup>91</sup> McClure, *Language, Poetry and Nationhood*, p.69.

<sup>92</sup> Graves, 'The Poetry of Marion Angus', 97.

<sup>93</sup> Angus, 'Mary's Sang', in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p.135.

the Scottish consciousness is divided [...] this linguistic division means that Scotsmen feel in one language and think in another, that their emotions turn to the Scottish tongue.<sup>94</sup>

In relation to Angus's use of Scots, Christopher Whyte takes the view that:

the suggestion that [her] adoption of vernacular modes was a mask allowing the expression of otherwise unacceptable contents is ambivalent. Any poetic speech is speech using a mask. Poetry is always written in a series of code.<sup>95</sup>

It was not her use of Scots, but recurring images in Angus's work: 'the tumbling burn, waves licking the land, thorn trees, moors, the hidden glen, candles, rain, lily-flowers', that Janet Caird suggested operated as a secret code. 'The gentle rain is happiness, the burn is joy, and cleansing, the wind a destroyer, the thorn-tree menace and pain.'<sup>96</sup>

Whether done intentionally by the poet or not, there must at least be a possibility that a double code operates in a poem like 'Mary's Sang'. The use of images facilitates the expression of turbulent feelings and the use of Scots enables her to distance herself from what might be deemed inappropriate revelations about family experience. Kathleen Jamie has referred to poets plundering family 'secret histories'.<sup>97</sup>

Each new development in our writing begins when we seek permission to approach it; to approach a new area of experience. We ask permission [...] to assume ownership, and appropriate to ourselves whatever it is our writing is moving forward.

In these terms, Marion Angus may not have believed she had 'permission to assume ownership'.

H. J. C. Grierson and J.C. Smith wrote that, of poets who used traditional literary Scots, 'at the head of this class stands Miss Marion Angus. She is the sweetest singer of them all'.<sup>98</sup> Christopher Whyte argued that this accolade placed her amongst 'a cohort of

<sup>94</sup> H. MacDiarmid (1936), quoted in D. Dunn (ed.), *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.xxxiii.

<sup>95</sup> Whyte, 'Marion Angus and the boundaries of Self', p.387.

<sup>96</sup> Caird, 'The Poetry of Marion Angus', 47.

<sup>97</sup> K. Jamie, 'Holding Fast – Truth and Change in Poetry', in W.N. Herbert and M. Hollis (eds.), *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2000), p.277.

<sup>98</sup> H.J.C. Grierson and J.C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), p.515.

minor figures'.<sup>99</sup> It is not a company she need be confined to. Catherine Kerrigan considers Violet Jacob, Marion Angus and Helen Cruickshank to have been 'pioneers in the use of the vernacular as a modern medium' and asserts that 'their contribution needs to be seen as central, not peripheral'.<sup>100</sup>

### *Literary Context*

As well as having the influence of written Scots from her father's library, Marion's appreciation of Scots as a spoken language of literature probably came from her mother. The Scottish Ballads, mediaeval in origin, have been transmitted orally over the centuries, mainly by women. Telling a story without moralising and with fatalistic objectivity they fundamentally appeal to the senses, and arouse powerful passions. They tell of seduction, rape, murder, passion, revenge and aspects of the supernatural, so are not, at first glance, obvious reading for children of the manse. Yet Helen Cruickshank wrote of Marion:

She was steeped in the knowledge and love of the Ballads, until they seemed part of her life. Lost love, unquiet spirits, barley-breid and elder-wine.<sup>101</sup>

Cruickshank went on to recall Marion reading 'The Lyke Wake Dirge', an anonymous seventeenth-century ballad about about the journey of the soul through purgatory.<sup>102</sup>

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,  
Every nighte and alle  
Fire and fleet and candlelight,  
and Christe receive thy saule.

She recalled that it 'seemed to haunt' Marion and described the 'sense of terrifying urgency' when Marion read it at The Scottish Women's Club in Edinburgh. The first lines of each verse of 'George Gordon, Lord Byron'

<sup>99</sup> Whyte, 'Marion Angus and the Boundaries of Self', p.386.

<sup>100</sup> C. Kerrigan (ed.), *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note', p.xviii-ix.

<sup>102</sup> Robokopp, hosted by Musica International, The Lykewake Dirge from Borders Minstrelsy, <http://www.musicnet.org/robokopp/scottish/lykewake.htm> (consulted on 19 July 2009)

This ae nicht, this ae nicht,  
The mirk an' the dawn atween

echo the 'Lyke Wake Dirge'.<sup>103</sup> Nan Shepherd also wrote of Marion's reading of the ballads aloud as being, 'astonishing, an incantation of power'.<sup>104</sup>

In *Christabel's Diary*, Marion had 'Christabel' write: 'I had always felt that had I a muse it would disport itself in old ballad form.'<sup>105</sup> Twenty years later, Marion's dreamlike, supernatural images of thorn trees and whins on secret places on the moors did catch the impersonal tone of the ballads. As in the ballads, impermanence, the inevitability of decay and loss, and the tragedy of existence are taken as read. But a critic in the *Times Literary Supplement* noted that hers was not

the naïve supernaturalism of the Scottish Ballads [...] her imagination moves most freely among unknown modes of being, in a region where the partitions between seen and unseen, present and past, melt away, where the living lover is more ghostly than the dead, and the blind old crone is at one with the blythe girl who hastes to join the young lads casting at the peat.<sup>106</sup>

Another, in the same newspaper, recognised that:

the folk inspiration of her verses is a reality as well as a tradition. This is particularly true of her poems in Scots, in which she proves her kinship with the old ballad makers and yet makes of old romance, with its dour passions and second sight and 'promised trysts unkept' something which is new and her own.<sup>107</sup>

Alexander Keith was another who drew attention to her ability to move beyond the ballad form: 'She is never content to leave a subject as she found it. There is bound to be a message in it, and she discovers that message', he writes in an article for the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*: 'Miss Marion Angus, A Modern Balladist'.<sup>108</sup> His praise is high:

one of the achievements of Miss Angus's poetry is its blending of modern sentiments in venerable ideas. The music has a wail in it, the plaintive melody of the fiddle [...]. Even in her English poems Miss Angus

<sup>103</sup> Angus, 'George Gordon, Lord Byron' in Gordon (ed.), *Voices from their ain Country*. (Glasgow: ASLS, 2006) p.72.

<sup>104</sup> Shepherd 'Marion Angus as a poet of Deeside', 16.

<sup>105</sup> *CD*, 8 May 1899, p.25.

<sup>106</sup> Unattributed criticism: *TLS*, 10 October 1929, 798.

<sup>107</sup> Unattributed criticism: *TLS*, 3 November 1927, 795.

<sup>108</sup> Keith, 'A Modern Balladist', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 5.

achieves her effects, and that is a gift not usual in practitioners in the Doric. Probably the reason is that the thought, while Scots enough to satisfy the most perfervid Caledonian, is less restricted in its application than that of most vernacular poetry. It goes back, as it were, to first causes, where there is more scope for universal humanism [...].

Miss Angus is to modern Scottish poetry most like to Walter de la Mare in English, but she is more practical than he. She is the only modern Scots poet who has gone back with absolute sympathy to the makars and minstrels, and who has with the least violence to art brought their tradition up-to-date, and proved how ageless it is. By this I do not mean that Miss Angus is a copyist, for she is spontaneous and original, and above all, scrupulously careful in her reading of life.

Twenty years later he had not changed his opinion.

No one in our time, in our own Scottish literature, has been able so truly to combine the ancient minstrel setting with the modern sophistication. The old ballad was as simple as a still evening; Marion Angus's poetry was as intricate in pattern and device as a Moray Firth sunset.<sup>109</sup>

Marion Angus had many other influences working on her creativity besides the ballads. Her father and both grandfathers were known to be lovers of literature (whether Marion's mother and grandmothers were similarly interested is not known). It must be assumed that her love of all the arts was encouraged, as was quite usual in an educated middle-class family towards the end of the Victorian era. Philip Lilley recognised that even if she had written nothing:

[She] would have impressed those who met her casually as a remarkable woman. She could talk arrestingly on books, and had a width of culture which was extraordinary.<sup>110</sup>

Mrs Robertson Cameron wrote Marion was 'highly cultured both in life and thought'.<sup>111</sup>

In her early work other poets are frequently quoted or parodied. Contrast

Shelley's 'Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples':

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,  
The waves are dancing fast and bright,  
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear  
The purple moon's transparent light.'<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Keith, 'The Lykewake Glamourie of Marion Angus's Poems', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 2.

<sup>110</sup> PWL, 'Miss Marion Angus: An Appreciation', *Arbroath Herald* (23 August 1946), 7.

<sup>111</sup> Cameron, 'The Nor'East was in her Blood', *Life and Work*, 263.

<sup>112</sup> P. B. Shelley, 'Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples' (lines 1-4), *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, 6<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.227-8.

with her 'Stanzas written in dejection near Fairport' (Arbroath).

Neath leaden clouds, a sullen, moaning sea  
Extends, a heaving waste, towards the gloom  
Where, luring fearful shipmen to their doom,  
The mists, in curtains thick, fall silently.<sup>113</sup>

Christopher Whyte suggests a broad context for reading her work:

the Celtic twilight in its Scottish manifestation, the chaste pastoralism of the English Georgians and its Scottish transmutation in the work of William Soutar and the renewed interest in English poetry of the early seventeenth century with its cerebral elaboration, the cultivation of shorter forms and a strong attraction to the baroque.<sup>114</sup>

He also suggests her 'enthusiasm' for the metaphysical English poetry of the early seventeenth century (Donne and Crashaw) shows her to be 'abreast of a change in literary taste that did not become general until she was well past her fiftieth year'. 'Beside them,' she had written to Mairi Campbell Ireland, 'most moderns seem like tinkling cymbals when they touch on things of the soul.'<sup>115</sup>

One aspect of Marion's writing, already mentioned, was her interest in fairy lore. This was out of fashion in the 1920s but was not unusual in the era of the Celtic Twilight at the end of the nineteenth century, even in church circles. In a talk to the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse, she said:

I should like to write of fairies, not the identical fairies of the old days, but the elusive glamour of the universe; and above all, I would fain give voice to Scotland's great adventure of the soul.<sup>116</sup>

She admired the work of Neil Gunn and William Soutar and welcomed what Patrick Geddes was doing to reinvigorate Scottish literature. She admitted in a letter to Mrs Ireland to finding comfort in the work of Fiona MacLeod.<sup>117</sup> But she wrote that she found 'a vagueness and lack of depth [...] little to touch the mind and soul' in poetry of the

<sup>113</sup> AO, 6 November 1897, AG (13 November 1897), 2.

<sup>114</sup> Whyte, 'Marion Angus and the Boundaries of Self', p.375.

<sup>115</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.28 (9 February [1930]).

<sup>116</sup> M. Angus, 'Scottish Poetry Old and New', *The Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse: Its Work for the Year 1927-1928* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1928), pp.18-29.

<sup>117</sup> Fiona MacLeod was the pen-name of William Sharp (1855-1905). Books written in her name include *Pharais*, *From the Hills of Dream*, *The Laughter of Paterkin*, *The Silence of Amor*, *The Sin-Eater*.

Celtic revival.<sup>118</sup> To Winifred Duke she denied possessing any ‘Celtic or emotional strain’.<sup>119</sup>

J.K. Annand writes that in relation to ‘the flowering of the so-called Scottish Renaissance Movement’, Marion Angus ‘really belongs to an earlier era’ and her verse ‘might be held to mark the swansong of an age.’<sup>120</sup> But Colin Milton regards her as possibly the only modern Scots poet before MacDiarmid ‘whose poetry conveys [in the words of Lytton Strachey] “by means of words, mysteries and infinitudes.”’<sup>121</sup> MacDiarmid himself credits her with ‘re-establishing our contact with the old Makars for whom the Doric could encompass “the full circle of poetic material”’.<sup>122</sup> Douglas Gifford notes she was one of those writers whose work fulfilled

the very requirements MacDiarmid insisted on [...] the best of international thinking and literary innovation, symbolic and psychological representation and expression’.<sup>123</sup>

He argues she belongs to ‘what we [...] recognise as the first wave of the Scottish Renaissance’, and states ‘the full extent’ of influence of Marion Angus, Charles Murray and Violet Jacob on the early poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid has yet to be acknowledged:

The originality of their treatment of their traditional subjects [...] and their ability to manipulate the effects of time and age, so that their poems become a complex fusion of the traditional and the innovatory make them the inspiration and model on which so many of MacDiarmid’s superb early lyrics are based.

Joy Hendry notes:

if we could rid ourselves of our modern smug rationalism and pseudo-scientific prejudice, we might be able to appreciate the fey, supernatural quality in Angus’s work’.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>118</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fols.30-31 (9 March [1930]).

<sup>119</sup> Duke, ‘Women Poets of Today’, 8.

<sup>120</sup> J. K. Annand, ‘Scottish Poetry in the Forties’, *AKROS*, vol.X, 28 (August 1975), p.26.

<sup>121</sup> Milton, ‘Modern Poetry in Scots before MacDiarmid, *The History of Scottish Literature*, p.34.

<sup>122</sup> H. McDiarmid, ‘The New Movement in Vernacular Poetry: Lewis Spence: Marion Angus’, *Contemporary Scottish Studies: The Scottish Educational Journal* (November 1925), 62.

<sup>123</sup> D. Gifford, ‘Widening the Range’ in D. Gilford, S. Dunnigan and A. MacGillivray (eds.), *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp.703-18.

<sup>124</sup> J. Hendry, ‘Twentieth Century Women’s Writing: The Nest of Singing Birds’, in C. Craig (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature: Twentieth Century*, 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p.295.

She thinks William Soutar may have been inspired by her, noting similarities between Angus's poem 'The Mourners' and Soutar's 'Babylon', her poem 'The Can'el' and his 'The Tryst.'

Marion Angus reported to J. L. Hodson she avoided reading too much modern poetry, 'for fear she would be unduly influenced'.<sup>125</sup> A few years later, on one of her winter stays in a rented flat in Helensburgh, she was asked by Helen Cruickshank to meet W.H. Auden, who was teaching in Helensburgh at the time. He read 'yards and yards' of his poems to her 'not one line of which I could understand. I thought to myself, "Is this the new poetry? It sounds like a voice from another planet."' <sup>126</sup> Despite this, her use of imagism and symbolism in her poetry reveals her interest in and knowledge of the literary modernist movement. A friend wrote:

Her mind was open to all that was best and purest in modern poetry, and she was one of the first to hail T. Stearns Eliot as a new star on the horizon.<sup>127</sup>

Critics have also recognised her openness to Modernism: Kurt Wittig describes her portrayal of Mary Stewart in 'Alas Poor Queen' as having 'a modern sharpness not unlike that of T.S. Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" and sees 'the most important development in her poetry is that the individual becomes still more fully emancipated, and is seen not as a member of society but as an individual'.<sup>128</sup> Roderick Watson in *The Literature of Scotland* considers that 'Alas Poor Queen' might have been constructed by a young Ezra Pound'.<sup>129</sup> One obituarist wrote that as well as finding the 'favour of the more conservative poetry-lover' her poems 'have won the admiration of the new school who, I must say, do not grant their approval lightly to writers of that generation.'<sup>130</sup> In Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray's *Scottish Literature* Douglas Gifford describes her poetry as

<sup>125</sup> Hodson, 'New Scottish Poet' in *Daily Mail*, 5.

<sup>126</sup> HBC, 'A Personal Note', p.xvi.

<sup>127</sup> Cameron, 'The Nor'East was in her Blood', *Life and Work*, 263.

<sup>128</sup> Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, pp.277-8.

<sup>129</sup> Watson, *The Literature of Scotland*, p.348.

<sup>130</sup> R. Kemp, 'Two Angus Poets Passed On', *Arbroath Herald Annual* (December 1946), [n/p].

offering ‘a compelling portrait of the proto-modernist self: cryptic, questioning, ambiguous and constructed from fragments of folk belief and Modernist uncertainty.’<sup>131</sup>

### *Gender*

Joy Hendry has written of ‘the degree to which the contribution of women in twentieth-century Scottish writing has been minimised and marginalized, particularly in poetry’, and noted that the ‘widely held assumption’ of ‘poetry as queen of the literary arts ... clutched more lovingly to the male bosom’, was not a true one.

Like the role of priest or mage, the role of poet or bard was reserved for men, and women were kept at arms length, their poetic efforts, if any emerged, dismissed as either “song” or “verse”.<sup>132</sup>

MacDiarmid was often less than fulsome in his praise of women’s writing: ‘few of our “songstresses” have risen above the merest mediocrity,’ he wrote.<sup>133</sup> Hendry has produced an image of ‘A double knot on the peeny’ to symbolise that, in Scotland, since the Union, men were marginalised, at one remove from real power, and women were doubly so.<sup>134</sup> Dorothy Porter [McMillan] also recognises the effect of marginalisation:

To have been Scottish and a woman and a poet in the first third of this [twentieth] century was to have been marginal in three ways [...] it makes the achievement of an assured voice difficult.<sup>135</sup>

In another text she refers to ‘a male-dominated poetic movement’.<sup>136</sup> Others have also drawn attention to the phenomenon. Douglas Dunn writes ‘women might have been discouraged by a conspicuously male-centred poetic country’.<sup>137</sup> In her introduction to *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, Catherine Kerrigan noted that the ‘role of women writers has been consistently underplayed and undervalued’ and, specifically in relation to

<sup>131</sup> Gifford, *Scottish Literature*, p.710.

<sup>132</sup> Hendry, ‘The Nest of Singing Birds’, p.291.

<sup>133</sup> H. MacDiarmid, Letters, *Contemporary Scottish Studies: The Scottish Educational Journal* 1976, 48.

<sup>134</sup> J. Hendry, ‘A double knot on the peeny’, in G. Chester and S. Nielson (eds.), *In Other Words, Writing as a Feminist* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.36.

<sup>135</sup> D. Porter [McMillan], ‘Scotland’s Songstresses’, *Cenrastus* 25 (Spring 1987), 48.

<sup>136</sup> D. McMillan, ‘Twentieth-century Poetry II: The Last Twenty five Years’, in D. Gifford and D. McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1997), p.566.

<sup>137</sup> D. Dunn (ed.), *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.xliv.

Violet Jacob, Marion Angus and Helen Cruickshank, believes their work has been devalued and seen as ‘deficient’ in comparison to MacDiarmid:

The themes and ideas of their poems seem much more of a piece with what has gone before than does MacDiarmid’s poetry.’<sup>138</sup>

However Kerrigan describes the work of these three poets as ‘traditional within female, not male, writing,’ and attributes the ‘remarkable confidence’ of their voices and their ‘directness and assuredness’ to their knowledge and understanding of the ballads and that what ‘[they] were rediscovering (however unconsciously) was the female voice of the ballad tradition.’

Although Maurice Lindsay noted in his ‘Introduction’ to *Selected Poems of Marion Angus* that ‘too large a share of the world’s love poetry sees the love between man and woman from the male angle’, it was nevertheless the male dominated culture of the time which set the tone of his introduction.<sup>139</sup> In it he questions what the stimulus had been ‘which suddenly turned her [Marion Angus] from a desultory versifier into a gentle lyric poet when she was over fifty years of age.’ What was his evidence she had been a ‘desultory versifier’, if she published no poetry before the age of fifty? It was unfortunate that his categorisation of her within very narrow limits was one which stuck. In his *History of Scottish Literature*, he refers again to her ‘note of unsentimental regret for the what-might-have-been that must trouble many women who never marry’.<sup>140</sup> Robert Kemp continued the theme in ‘The Wershness of Love’: ‘I suppose Marion Angus is more a woman’s poet than a man’s.’<sup>141</sup>

Dorothy McMillan, considering the male voice in love poetry, concludes:

so dominant is the male tradition that the female voice may inevitably be felt as reacting, dependent rather than autonomous. Thus a woman poet who tangles with the special authority is at risk, but the only alternative is

<sup>138</sup> Kerrigan (ed), *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, p.9.

<sup>139</sup> Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, pp.xi-xii.

<sup>140</sup> M. Lindsay (ed.), *History of Scottish Literature* (London: Hale,1977), p.307.

<sup>141</sup> R. Kemp, ‘The Wershness of Love’, *The New Alliance and Scots Review*, vol. II, 2 (May 1950), 31.

to ignore the strength of the native tradition. Women poets are forced to choose between a life of risk and a life of loss.<sup>142</sup>

She notes Marion Angus has ‘a distinctive voice which engages with and remakes available traditions. It is a voice she finds by refusing male authority’. In relation to the ‘male parting poem’ she remarks that ‘Marion Angus subverts the characteristic authority,’ and quotes ‘At Parting’ as an example of a poem in which the male speaker loses control of the situation.

Her hand sae tender and sae young  
As oot o mine it slips;  
I weel maun bear – but hoo to thole  
The tremblin o her lips!<sup>143</sup>

However, this poem may not be about male parting at all. It is possible it draws on the experience of leaving Ethel in Hospital.

Janet Caird, as well as numerous other critics, draws attention to images such as the ‘secret place in the hills’, ‘false and fleeting’ lovers, the lover from ‘outside the ordinary framework of society’, the lover sent away, the ‘outcast’.<sup>144</sup> Her assumption is that the poems in which these are found describe heterosexual relationships. But not all commentators think this is the case. Some poems, such as ‘Mary’s Sang’ are about emotional ties between women and men. ‘The Turn of the Day’ refers to a ‘bride’:

Your sna was white for a bride,  
Your winds were merriage wine.<sup>145</sup>

‘The Wild Lass’, a wedding ring:

Nae ring upon yer han’,  
Nae kiss upon yer mou —  
Quaiet noo.<sup>146</sup>

But emotional ties between women are more commonly recognised,

The tears upon her cheeks like rain,  
Wi a word o comfort the hert to fill,

<sup>142</sup> [Porter] McMillan, ‘Scotland’s Songstresses’, 50.

<sup>143</sup> Angus, ‘At Parting’ (lines 5-8), in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p. 189.

<sup>144</sup> Caird, ‘The Poetry of Marion Angus’, 45.

<sup>145</sup> Angus, ‘The Turn of the Day’ (lines 5-6), in Chalmers, (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p. 131.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, ‘The Wild Lass’ (lines 5-6), p.154.

“It’s yersel, Naomi, and bonnie still.”<sup>147</sup>

These ties may even persist across centuries.

[...]  
 An aye she hauds me for her ain,  
 Flesh o her flesh, bane o her bane –  
 Some lang-deid wumman o my kin –  
 Waater o Dye, hoo still ye rin .<sup>148</sup>

In some poems the relationships seem straightforward, but the reader is left in confusion at the end. In the final lines of ‘The Faithful Heart’, for example, doubt is suddenly cast on an assumption of a female speaker and a heterosexual ‘auld love’.

But I sought nae news o my auld love  
 Nor named her bonnie name.<sup>149</sup>

Such ambiguity alerts the reader to the fact that many poems fail to disclose the gender of the speaker at all.

Pale flowers too faint for winds so chill  
 And with too fair a name —  
 That day I lingered on a hill  
 For one who never came.<sup>150</sup>

Dorothy McMillan points out that ‘The Blue Jacket’, is an example of a poem which ‘excludes the male world’.<sup>151</sup>

Oh to win near you, little sister!  
 To hear your soft lips say –  
 ‘I’ll never tak up wi lads or lovers,  
 But a baby I maun hae.

A baby in a cradle rocking,  
 Like a nut, in a hazel shell,  
 And a new blue jacket, like this o Annie’s,  
 It sets me aye sae well.’<sup>152</sup>

Christopher Whyte writes that Angus’s world is:

socially rather than ontologically feminine. Rather than offering verbal texts where both genders are present, so that the difference between them

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, ‘Naomi’ (lines 12-15), p.179.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, ‘Waater o Dye’ (lines 23-6), p.149.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, ‘The Faithful Heart’ (lines 15-16), p.187.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, ‘Anemones’ (lines 9-12), p.171.

<sup>151</sup> Porter [McMillan], ‘Scotland’s Songstresses’, 50.

<sup>152</sup> Angus, ‘The Blue Jacket’ (lines 9-12), in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p. 175.

requires foundation and explanation, it repeatedly excises the male presence from social reality.’<sup>153</sup>

He goes on to note that in the poetry of Marion Angus, ‘the boundaries of self fluctuate’, suggests that she ‘privileges in her poetry a relationship which is intragender rather than intergender’, and points out that ‘the other in her poetry is primarily another woman’ or ‘a temporarily lost or separated aspect of the self’. Douglas Gifford writes that her work ‘conceals gender, age or sexuality’ and ‘reveals the complex fusion of desire and violence underlying erotic relationships’.<sup>154</sup> These ideas are explored in depth in three works by Katherine Gordon.<sup>155</sup> In her thesis, ‘Voices of the Cauld East Countra: Representations of Self in the poetry of Violet Jacob and Marion Angus’, one chapter draws attention to images associated with lesbian desire which recur in the poems of Marion Angus. But, writing in her book of ‘the fact that some of her [Marion Angus’s] poems may chronicle a women’s love for another woman’, she notes it is not necessary ‘to read these relationships vis-a-vis the speaker’s sexual orientation’ (p.21).

As Marion’s two brothers boarded at school, she grew up the oldest girl in a household of four sisters and took her responsibility as the oldest sister seriously. She cared for her mother for ten years, her sister for approximately thirty years, and maintained a close relationship with at least one of her other sisters. These circumstances and responsibilities must have influenced the way she saw the world. Therefore, though it is obvious she found an outlet for intense emotions through her poetry and her letters it would be erroneous to draw any conclusions about her lifestyle from what she wrote.

‘Poetic texts,’ as Christopher Whyte has written, ‘are incorrigibly promiscuous, whatever

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<sup>153</sup> Whyte, ‘Marion Angus and the Boundaries of Self’, p.379.

<sup>154</sup> Gifford, *Scottish Literature*, p.709-710.

<sup>155</sup> K. H. Gordon, ‘Voices from the “Cauld East Countra”’: Representations of Self in the Poetry of Violet Jacob and Marion Angus’ (doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000); K.H. Gordon, ‘Women “Wha Lauched and Lo’ed and Sinne’d”: Women’s voices in the Work of Violet Jacob and Marion Angus’, *Etudes Ecossaises*, 9, 2003-4, pp. 73-89; K.H. Gordon (ed.), *Voices from their ain Country: The Poems of Marion Angus and Violet Jacob* (Glasgow: ASLS, 2006).

the intentions of their authors. Their sole desire is that we should read them and their determination to seduce us is indifferent to gender, race or age.<sup>156</sup>

What is missing from all critiques so far is the nature of Angus's early prose writing, which clearly displays feminist views through her portrayal of Arthur's character:

The most valuable rule of my life has been this: When in doubt as to any action to be pursued, always defer deciding about it until next Monday.<sup>157</sup>

He notes at the opening of the Chrysanthemum Show:

Quite an inspiration of Lady Northesk to ask why the flower shows can't take a leaf from the flowers themselves, and open without ceremony. On the platform – sign of the times – the ladies are in front, the men – Provost, and ex-provost and would be provosts – behind. For the gentlemen this is a new place, at least in public; they have long been used to take a back seat at home. Then neat and flowery speeches, with dainty metaphor. How hard it must be to talk through a veil.<sup>158</sup>

In relation to attendance at church he surmises that:

The female sex preponderates in church for two reasons. First, they are less troubled with scepticism than we; and second, they require spiritual guidance so much more than the male sex. [...] I give it, as bachelor philosophy, for what it is worth.<sup>159</sup>

Christabel, on the other hand is insightful and witty and obviously concerned about the allotted role of women in society:

Afternoon tea at Mrs — 's. Women only — men all far too busy. The eager haste, the press of the affairs in Fleet Street or the Strand is nothing to that writ large on the faces of the younger men, professional and otherwise, one meets occasionally darting from the Post Office to the railway station or getting in or out of their traps in Cairnie Street. I like to see men in earnest and how much so ours are! And with all this 'making haste to be rich' (I suppose), one hears of them reading papers on scientific subjects at literary societies, drilling volunteers, lecturing on the Far East, and exploring in it too, cultivating their musical faculties at Philharmonics, golfing, cycling — anything but going to afternoon teas.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Whyte, 'Marion Angus and the Boundaries of Self', p. 387.

<sup>157</sup> AO, 31 May 1898, *AG* (4 June 1898), 2.

<sup>158</sup> AO, 4 December 1897, *AG* (11 December 1897), 2.

<sup>159</sup> AO, 24 April 1898, *AG* (30 April 1898), 2.

<sup>160</sup> *CD*, 14 March 1899, p.10.

Elsewhere, speaking of the Arbroath fishwives, she notes with understated admiration the versatility and strength of the Arbroath fishwives:

Down at the harbour — a grey trystful day, with just a faint sunwash in the water — the gulls at the river mouth keeping up a ceaseless clang of wrangle and riot and altercation that circumstances did not seem to warrant. The fishwives brave in their short skirts and petticoats (seven I am sure), absorbed as ever in their work. Here is the place for advanced woman, — her happy hunting ground—for the wife is accountant, treasurer, chancellor of the exchequer, house manager, all in one. The husband, I suppose, catches the fish, but that is a trivial detail.<sup>161</sup>

### *Legacy*

A dearth of Marion Angus' letters and personal papers should not be taken to mean, as Robert Kemp suggests, that she was 'skilful enough to cover her tracks'.<sup>162</sup> Late in life she had to travel lightly:

I am moving about at present [...]. I shall not be able to get that letter [...] I was forced to close up my papers and letters before I left and unfortunately destroyed it among others.<sup>163</sup>

In the early diaries her characters exhibit a practical, unemotional attitude in relation to letters: 'my letters have all been burnt', Arthur writes.<sup>164</sup> But regarding an old letter found down the side of a chair, Christabel considers the issue of privacy:

Conscience forgets us for a moment sometimes, and, then to make up, reminds us with a sharper prick than usual. I was only at the second line, and then — oh stern voice of honour! — 'You are an intruder on another's domain; you have no right to anybody's even most trivial past.' And that is why I think people ought to burn old letters; but then I have no sentimental temptations; and our good old vicar thought differently. 'Why don't you have a bonfire of all these?' I asked him once, looking over his shoulder at an open drawer in his writing bureau, wherein lay piles of neatly tied bundles. 'Because, my dear' — and I wished I hadn't asked him then — 'some of the friends are dead, and more of the friendships.'<sup>165</sup>

She was aware that her writing in the public domain might be available for future scrutiny. Christabel anticipates the difficulty of bridging gaps in understanding between

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<sup>161</sup> *CD*, 28 March 1899, p.12.

<sup>162</sup> Kemp, 'The Wershness of Love', 31.

<sup>163</sup> NLS, MCI, MS 19328 fol. 105 [May 1931].

<sup>164</sup> AO, 25 March 1898, *AG* (2 April 1898), 2.

<sup>165</sup> *CD*, 30 March 1899, p. 14.

generations and between writers and insensitive readers who miss the essence of the work:

if some curious researcher after things forgotten lights on this old Diary of mine, and smiles at the thoughts and doings and mistakes of a dead woman, will they write in pencil on the margin – as I found today alongside ‘The Burial of Sir John Moore’ at ‘and the moonbeam’s fitful gleaming’ – ‘Calculated there could have been no moonlight on the date of these events’.<sup>166</sup>

Contrast this with Arthur’s ironic reference to biography:

I [...] full of common sense [...] generally upright [...] who am, in politics, conservative, and in most things reasonable (I must mark this for the benefit of my biographer; what a pity that great men are not more considerate in this respect!).<sup>167</sup>

After her death, there was lengthy correspondence in the national newspapers about Angus’s poetry. Dr W.H. Hamilton wrote:

her personality and ways, like her songs, were so young and bonny[...]. She has slipped away too little thanked and too little rewarded.<sup>168</sup>

Maurice Lindsay undertook to prepare a collection, and with Helen Cruickshank’s help, completed a manuscript for a ‘Selected Work’. However, he was unable to secure a publisher, other than on a subscription basis. In *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, Lindsay described how, after an appeal in the press, the Glasgow novelist Dot Allan phoned him and asked how much money was still required:

‘A hundred pounds,’ said I, expecting to hear the receiver go clattering up. ‘You can have the cheque tomorrow, provided I may remain anonymous.’<sup>169</sup>

However, later he recorded that he had taken his courage in both hands and asked Dot Allan if she would finance the book.<sup>170</sup> He was not aware of any friendship between the two women, but Allan had been grateful to him for a good review of her book. The

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<sup>166</sup> CD, 3 March 1899, p. 7.

<sup>167</sup> AO, 22 October 1898, AG (29 October 1898), 2.

<sup>168</sup> W.H. Hamilton, letter to *The Scotsman*, 21 August 1946, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Lindsay (ed.), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, p.xi.

<sup>170</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Lindsay, Recorded Conversation, 12 March 2004, 1/5

volume of selected poems was eventually published in 1950. Lindsay believed there was a wide gap between Angus's best work and her poorest and decided to omit poems concerning 'elfin strands' and 'fairy voices'.<sup>171</sup> Marion's nephew William later complained to Helen Cruickshank that he had not been consulted about the choice of poems, and regretted that 'The Blue Boat' had been missed from the selection.<sup>172</sup> A previously uncollected poem 'As I Lay Down to Sleep', written in 1937 for a child and submitted for consideration (by Patrick Guthrie) was also rejected.<sup>173</sup>

I found a little happy tune  
 As I lay down to sleep.  
 It wandered far and far away  
 When night comes dark and deep  
 It floated like a butterfly  
 Above a quiet stream,  
 It was the dancing of a star,  
 The music of a dream.

[...]

But now it wanders far away  
 A lonely little cloud,  
 And I am seeking everywhere  
 To find the tune I lost.

As well as being published in volumes during her lifetime, the poetry of Marion Angus has been anthologised regularly, before and since her death; in general anthologies of Scottish verse, in collections of writings from the north-east, vernacular Scots, Scottish love poems, poems in Scots, historical verse, twentieth century verse, women poets, Scottish women poets, modern Scottish women poets. But despite her valuable contribution to the canon of Scottish women's poetry, her work is not now widely known by the general public, though it is recognised by scholars of Scottish literature and appreciated by some famous contemporary Scottish women poets. Writing of Liz Lochhead as 'the first fully professional Scottish woman poet of the modern period' Dorothy McMillan notes 'before her, Marion Angus is alone among twentieth-century

<sup>171</sup> Lindsay (ed), *Selected Poems of Marion Angus*, p.xii.

<sup>172</sup> UAHC, MS 2737/35 (15 September 1950).

<sup>173</sup> UAHC, MS 2737/39 [c1937-38]. Transcript of poem written for the daughter of Patrick Guthrie.

women poets in being remarkable for the quality, quantity and priority of her verse.’<sup>174</sup>

McMillan reports that Liz Lochhead, at a conference in 1983, recognised ‘an emotional affinity’ between ‘The Blue Jacket’ and her own ‘Poem for my Sister’, and noted ‘a lyrical purity in some of Marion Angus’ poems’.<sup>175</sup> She describes Marion Angus’s voice as ‘haunting’ and admires the:

oblique narratives which demand imaginative input of the reader (and repay it) and occasional unflinching and quite unpawky humour’.<sup>176</sup>

Kathleen Jamie considers Marion Angus’ work to be:

important and valuable in a Scottish context. She has an authentic voice, straight out of the ballad tradition, an eerie shimmer to her best poems<sup>177</sup>

Comparing the way that modern writers like Sheena Blackhall, Ellie McDonald and Alison Kermack use Scots with Violet Jacob and Marion Angus’s use of the language, Dorothy McMillan writes: ‘in the early part of the twentieth century Jacob and Angus delivered potentially subversive female experience through a deceptively unaggressive use of the vernacular’.<sup>178</sup> Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden also note that some of Sheena Blackhall’s poems are ‘evocative of Marion Angus’s reworking of the ballads’.<sup>179</sup>

Marion Angus herself once wrote: ‘I may be too fastidious as regards the lilt and croon of a poem’.<sup>180</sup> But that lyricism is perhaps its most enduring quality. Seventy years after the first recorded musical accompaniment to her work, musicians continue to be inspired by it.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> D. McMillan, ‘Twentieth Century Poetry 1: Rachel Annand Taylor to Veronica Forrest-Thomson’ in D. Gifford and D. McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.428.

<sup>175</sup> D. McMillan and M. Bryne, *Modern Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003) p.xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>176</sup> L. Lochhead, ‘Marion Angus, A Woman who sustained the Lyrical Tradition in Scots’, *Radical Scotland*, 24 (December/January 1986/7), 39.

<sup>177</sup> AA, Marion Angus Papers, Kathleen Jamie Correspondence (23 May 2005), 1/9.

<sup>178</sup> McMillan, *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, p. 566.

<sup>179</sup> A. Christianson and A. Lumsden (eds.), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> NLS, MCI, MS19328 fol.32 (March [1930]).

<sup>181</sup> A few examples: NLS, Accession 9121 fol.11, ‘The Lissome Leddy’ by I. Duncan (December 1938); ‘The Turn of the Day’, ‘The Seaward Toon’, ‘The Sang’ on CD ‘Songs from Home’, by S. Byrne; ‘The Wee Sma Glen’ by F. Cockburn on CD ‘Bottled at Source’ by Rudsabee Singers (Canasg Music); ‘Alas Poor Queen’ on CD ‘Sharp and Sweet’ by Sangsters. ‘At the Court of the Poisoned Rose’ Op. 20, by I. Venables; ‘Drift o Rain on Moorland Stane’ by R. Ingham, performed by the Heisenberg Ensemble, poems read by A. Chalmers, at StAnza Poetry Festival, St Andrews (17 March 2007).

## Conclusion to Part 1

### The End of the Tinker's Road

And fain am I to turn again,  
 Before this journey's ended,  
 For a long, long look at the road I came,  
 So rough and dark and splendid!<sup>1</sup>

Twice, in the writing of this thesis, I let myself be side-tracked, but looking back, it was worth going the extra distance. I saw things from a different angle. My focus on primary sources and detailed archival research produced the material for the first major diversion, my book, *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus* (Polygon, 2006). This included a biography and a selection of Marion Angus's previously uncollected prose. It publicised a wider selection of the poet's work to modern audience – one of my original aims – not only through the book itself but through subsequent published articles and talks in which I challenged the patronising attitudes of the contemporary literary elite to Marion Angus.<sup>2</sup> Yes, she was a daughter of the manse. Yes, she wrote poems of loss and longing, mainly in the vernacular. Yes, she was elderly when her work began to be published. But she was not born an elderly 'spinster'. She may not have sought a high profile literary career: that did not make her a 'recluse'. Perhaps she believed, as many other Scots people did (still do): 'self praise is nae recommendation'. Or perhaps there was more to Marion Angus than her literary career. She had caring responsibilities for a vulnerable sister, no permanent home and poor health after the age of sixty-five. In Joy Hendry's terms, these add up to much more than a 'double knot in the peeny'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Angus, 'On a Birthday' (lines 9-12), in A. Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.189.

<sup>2</sup> A. Chalmers, 'The Plaintive Melody of the Fiddle: Marion Angus an her Scots Tung', *Lallans*, 69 (Winter 2006), 41-57; 'An Angus Poet', *The Leopard*, 341 (December 2007/January 2008), 41-2; 'A Leaf before the Wind', *Markings*, 24 (2008), 126-8.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hendry, 'A double knot on the peeny', in G. Chester and S. Nielson (eds.), *In Other Words, Writing as a Feminist* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp.36-45.

From my research I constructed a credible picture of what Marion Angus was like as a young woman, and would defend my work against the claim by Robert Kemp that ‘every artist today runs the risk of having his life construed, most likely misconstrued, by some glib little psychologist’.<sup>4</sup> Writing of Marion Angus in 1950, he wondered ‘what flame was burning within that recluse and spinster’ that had caused the ‘ache of regret’ in her poetry. He decided ‘it is not long before one feels that one is prying and withdraws’. The purpose of the critical part of this thesis has not been to identify any ‘flame’, nor to judge her behaviour or her character. On the contrary, my primary aim in Part I was to set the record straight, by dispelling those ‘various factual inaccuracies which have been created and perpetuated in standard works of references’ by critics over many years.<sup>5</sup> In it we glimpse a fully rounded individual from a lively and cultured family background: a Victorian ‘New Woman’: intelligent, vivacious, spirited, witty, feisty, strong-willed and forward thinking who felt passionately about and is knowledgeable about literature, the theatre, music: all the arts. Marion Angus embraced philosophical ideas, challenged, through her writing, prevalent social mores of the time. She loved the beauty and the solitude of the hills, travelled abroad alone, enjoyed lasting friendships. She mixed with people from different classes, had friends, was liked by people in the town, enjoyed social standing in her community. And yes – what surprise! – she was young once. And probably had loved, and lost, as most young people do.

The second major diversion was precipitated by a chance encounter with a man in the café at the Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. Richard Ingham had never heard of Marion Angus before that day, but, after I talked to him about the lyricism of her poetry and told him how I hoped to interest a musician in setting some of her work to music, he admitted to being a saxophonist and composer. At his invitation I recited ‘Mary’s Sang’. He immediately expressed interest and ultimately wrote a suite of musical episodes

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kemp, ‘The Wershness of Love’, *The New Alliance and Scots Review*, vol. II, 2 (May 1950), 31.

<sup>5</sup> J. MacRitchie, ‘Arbroath’s Singin Lass’, *Arbroath Herald Annual* (December 1996), [n/p].

interweaving sixteen Marion Angus poems. ‘Drift o Rain on Moorland Stane’ is a highly atmospheric composition which reaches beyond the words of the poems to draw out their complex essence. From my point of view, rehearsing with the Heisenberg Ensemble and reading the poems at the premiere of the work at StAnza Poetry Festival in 2007 were uplifting and encouraging experiences, particularly given the reception by the audience.

When I set out on the Tinker’s Road, my intention was that the main part of my doctoral submission would be a novel which incorporated grand themes. The accompanying research paper, I thought, might look at factors which facilitated or hindered the development of Marion Angus’s creativity. Like the Tinker’s Road, the novel took its own course. Perhaps its way was more logical.

Through the practice of detailed archival research, in published primary and secondary sources, that was necessary for *The Singin Lass: Selected Work of Marion Angus*, I gained valuable insights into the life of Marion Angus. I began to appreciate her concerns and interests and learned about the society she lived in. Although only a fraction of that material found its way into the novel, the process of research, evaluation and sifting was itself valuable in shaping my novel. It gave me time to draw closer to my subject emotionally, and the confidence to fictionalise her life.

Participating in the atmospheric performance of ‘Drift o Rain on Moorland Stane’ confirmed my assessment of the character of Marion Angus. Despite the music being suffused with sadness, the mood was feisty and defiant. Like me, Richard Ingham took the ‘loss’ and ‘longing’ in Marion’s poetry as evidence of having loved, not as evidence of sexual inexperience.

The range and scope of my fiction shrank over the years. In the interests of emotional credibility, I sacrificed historical parameters. And inevitably, in exposing another woman’s vulnerability – the very thing I had not wanted to do – I was forced to delve into my own emotions, question my motivation and my wisdom, and challenge

aspects of my own character. I did, for a time, question what gave me the right to imagine – invent – tell lies? Why would this woman with her cultured talk of literature and music and art and philosophy welcome my intervention? What could I ever know, apart from my own experience? That my ‘voice’ wasn’t good enough, my vocabulary too limited, the breadth of my cultural experience too narrow?

Yet the process of creative writing fascinated me and I experienced so many examples of synchronicity, I thought I must be on the right track. A few examples may illustrate. I picked ‘Elliot Sands’, for my first ‘location piece’, only to discover Marion’s ashes were scattered there at her request. I wrote of her dreaming of being shut in the attic at home, feeling stifled, ‘as in a coffin’. Later I heard the present owner of the house describe the attic as ‘coffin-shaped’. The same man showed me the imprint of a child’s fingers on a window, which cannot be removed. Afterwards I read: ‘To read her verse is like sitting in an empty room where fingers tap on the window pane, and outside the house something passes on noiseless feet.’<sup>6</sup> ‘Marion would have loved to work in this room’, I said, at Inchdowrie. Subsequently I came across a quote: ‘Once, in the turret room, where she always worked...’<sup>7</sup> I wrote of Marion and her sister falling in love with the same man. I had the wrong sisters: it was her two younger sisters who fell in love with Rev. Service. There are other examples, in parallels with my own life.

I have mentioned elsewhere articles and books about creative writing which I studied in an attempt to improve my own work. These made me aware of my shortcomings and so increased my anxiety. I found comfort in fiction: Scottish literature, popular fiction, newly published works, novels long out of fashion – and fictional biographies. I read them all, in no particular order, absorbing information.

The vast range even within the fictional biography genre became apparent. A few I held as models, even though I could not expect to emulate them. Janice Galloway’s novel

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<sup>6</sup> W. Duke, ‘Women Poets of Today’, *Glasgow Herald* (15 January 1936), 8.

<sup>7</sup> C. Gibson, ‘They Sang of Angus’, *Arbroath Herald Annual* (December 1984), [n/p].

*Clara* (Cape, 2002), a perceptive account of the life of Clara Schumann, seemed to me to be a pinnacle of achievement. Meaghan Delahunt's ability to say much in few words in *In the Blue House* (Bloomsbury, 2001) was remarkable. Colm Toibin's *The Master* (Picador, 2004) relates the events of a relatively short period of time in the life of Henry James, with previous events seen through flashbacks. *Arthur and George* by Julian Barnes (Cape, 2005) concerns Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's involvement in a real-life miscarriage of justice. The weight of comprehensive biographical and historical detail in this novel creates a vivid image of Victorian society. This was the style I had been trying to emulate, though in my hands, the resulting prose was heavy and dull. *Will*, by Christopher Rush (Beautiful Books, 2007) was an example of a fictional biography in which the author successfully changes his subject – William Shakespeare – from an icon into a man.

As I tried to capture what Marion was like, I immersed myself in the books she read. J.M. McPherson's *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1929) was a fascinating account of folk belief which includes documented encounters with 'the little folk', examples of ancient festivals, divination rites, tales of witches and demons. I attempted to understand the work of philosophers such as William Law, J. W. Dunne, Pascal, Montaigne to see how their work had influenced her thinking – for example in relation to the concept of a fourth dimension.

I have previously written of my interest in 'voice'. Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Scots Quair*, in which the prose matches the rhythm and texture of my early years, was the first novel in Scots I ever read. My interest in Scots writing re-kindled by my own creative writing, I decided to re-read it and other books by Scottish authors that Marion Angus had, or might have, known. I suspected it might have been Neil Gunn's use of language that she enjoyed in *The Lost Valley* (Richard Drew, 1989).

Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson's *Scottish Women's Fiction: 1920s to 1960s: Journey's into Being* (Tuckwell, 2000) set the context in relation to women authors. In *The Quarry Wood* and *The Weatherhouse*, novels by Nan Shepherd, in *A White Bird Passes* by Jessie Kesson, *The Gowk Storm* by Nancy Brysson Morrison, *The Bull Calves* by Naomi Mitchison and *Imagined Corners* by Willa Muir, the 'uncanny' was a relatively common theme, yet as well as that, these women all showed feminist awareness in their exploration of female experience. In Willa Muir's life I found unexpected parallels with Marion Angus's. They had both been known as 'Minnie' when children. They were both fluent in Scots and English, lived in and were impatient with small east coast town society, sacrificed their own careers for another, experienced poverty and fell foul of the literary elite of the day.

Other than *A Scots Quair*, I had previously thought little about what constituted a 'Scottish' book. The nationality of the author, where a novel was set, or whether it was in Scots were never criteria I applied in making a judgement about quality. I was aware that 'Scots' novels fall into many different genres, and Scottish novelists are just as diverse. Some live in Scotland but hold a different nationality, some think of themselves as Scottish but live outwith Scotland, some set their novels anywhere, some in Scotland. Some write wholly in English, some use Scots for historical dialogue, some to illustrate the speech of the urban working class. Few authors write only in Scots, though there is one Scots imprint that has been producing Scots language books for children since 2002.<sup>11</sup> Matthew Fitt, one of the collaborators on this project has experimented ambitiously with language, using Scots as the medium for an adult science fiction novel, *But n Ben A-Go-Go* (Luath, 2000). I am aware that Scots language in itself does not necessarily make a novel 'good', though dialect is often used to good effect to indicate

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<sup>11</sup> Itchy Coo- Scots Language Books for Children, A Black and White Publishing and Dub Busters Partnership <http://www.itchy-coo.com>. My poem 'Last Nicht' is in Matthew Fitt and James Robertson (eds.), *King o the Midden: Manky Mingin Rhymes for Kids* 1<sup>st</sup> edn, (Edinburgh: Itchy Coo, 2003), p.5.

character, as in John Aberdein's *Amande's Bed* (Thirsty Books, 2005), which uses Doric to inject the zest and humour of the Aberdonian into his text, and Anne Donovan's *Buddha Da* (Canongate, 2003) which does the same with the Glaswegian accent.

Many of the modern novels I picked at random as I was writing *Blackthorn* revealed insights through plot or structure that had bearing on my own writing. I mention only a few here. In relation to style, the spare, taut writing in Cormac Macarthy's *The Road* (Picador, 2006) struck me as being particularly powerful. Sebastian Faulks' *Engleby* (Hutchinson, 2007) explores mental health issues. Susan Fletcher's *Oystercatchers* (Fourth Estate, 2007), Maggie o'Farrell's *The Disappearing Act of Esme Lennox* (Headline, 2007) and Susan Sellers' *Vanessa and Virginia* (Two Ravens Press, 2008) do the same, but have something else in common with *Blackthorn*. They all concern a difficult relationship between sisters.

Most interesting to me were two novels I happened upon in which the emotional aspects of different language aspirations within families are explored. Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People* (Fourth Estate, 2003) and Mark Sloruka's *The Visible World* (Portobello, 2007) both deal with children alienated from their parents by linguistic demands of their peers. I was prompted to re-read Alistair Macleod's novel *No Great Mischief* (Vintage, 2001). The young Alexander, more used to being called *gille beag ruadh*, fails to recognise his English name on his first day at school. 'Thankfully,' he reflects, 'we were of the generation who were no longer beaten because we uttered Gaelic.'<sup>9</sup>

Through a synthesis of comments from supervisors, reading about creative writing, and editing my own work, I have become a more discerning and appreciative reader, with a better understanding of the writer's techniques. However I judge the novels of other authors, I now read them with more purpose. How has this novel been constructed? What

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<sup>9</sup> A. MacLeod, *No Great Mischief* (London: Vintage, 2001), p.16.

makes that historical figure appear so real? I've learned the effectiveness of seeing through the eyes of the character, notice how characters give themselves away in dialogue. I'm still learning how to apply these insights.

Over the period of writing this doctoral thesis I also tried to follow up the poets mentioned or quoted in Marion Angus's work. This gave me appreciation of the breadth and depth of her immersion in poetry and encouraged me to extend my own exposure to modern poets. In relation to Scots poetry, I was encouraged by the 'Introduction' to *The Edinburgh Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry* in which Maurice Lindsay and Lesley Duncan identify two trends emerging in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

The old agonising over the actual nature of the language used by Scots poets has ceased. Poets – whether employing standard English, classical Scots, Lallans, regional dialects, city patois, or any permutation or combination of these – are linguistically relaxed [...]. Complexity of language is seen as an enrichment rather than a drawback [...]. The successors of Helen Adam, Marion Angus and Violet Jacob are a feisty lot [...] writing with candour and wit about all aspects of the human experience – including female sexuality.<sup>10</sup>

I welcome the relaxation of attitudes towards writing in Scots. In relation to 'feisty' women, I can only hope that by portraying Marion Angus as a feisty woman in my novel, those readers who have read her poems may see her in a new light and those who do not know her work may be encouraged to search it out. Of course, only some of the events in my novel happened, only some characters existed: *Blackthorn* is essentially a fictional biography, within the parameters of popular imaginative fiction. This, I believe, and not a biography, is the appropriate place to reflect on the 'flame' that helped Marion Angus endure.

Her struggle in life was to pursue commitment to her career. Her success was against all the odds. Despite having gone where she was led ('or driven') and feeling 'like a leaf before the wind – only a leaf has no business worries, nor sleepless nights,

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<sup>10</sup> M.Lindsay and L.Duncan (eds.), *The Edinburgh Book of Twentieth- Century Scottish Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p.xxxvi.

nor human feelings of anxiety or grief ,’ – with steely determination she kept her bonnie ‘sang’ of romance, passion, and mystical idealism, alive.<sup>11</sup>

Sae lang twill last as mither’s croon  
An sweethearts seek the simmer’s moon;  
Oh, I hae gaen wha wadna gie,  
For it s’ all live when I maun dee.<sup>12</sup>

Her success was the result of neither luck, nor happenstance. It came from her determination to succeed, her strong, resilient personality, cultured upbringing, extensive reading, broad interest in the arts, rigorous study of poetry and literature, love of language, and above all, her immersion for many years in private practice of her craft. These were what enabled her to transform her life experiences into lyrical poetry. She deserves respect for no less. Her legacy should be appreciated for what it is, rather than discounted for what it is not.

The proposed themes for my novel were the nature of love, the spectrum of behaviour encompassed by the idea of love, and the legacies of love which are often not what we might expect. The three extracts referred to on page 16-17 (which follow as Part II) present ‘snapshots’ of people who loved or were loved by Marion Angus at critical turning points in her life. The intention is that these extracts will be expanded by reference to Marion’s interaction with contemporary literary figures, to her struggle to maintain commitment to her poetic craft and to memories of her youth. Given the nature of creativity, the novel may yet develop differently.

Extract 1 is set in the county of Angus. Marion is in her early thirties. Wandering alone and lost in hill mist, she is saved by Wull Greig, an itinerant fiddler, the brother of an old school friend. In two chapters to be inserted (July/August 1899) the friendship between Marion and Wull develops, thereby revealing Marion’s knowledge of and admiration for Traveller culture and her desire to shake off the

<sup>11</sup> NLS, MCI, MS 19328 fol. 48 (9 May 1930).

<sup>12</sup> Angus, ‘The Sang’ (lines 17-20), in Chalmers (ed.), *The Singin Lass*, p.151.

burden of responsibility and duty laid on her as the oldest daughter. Marion's father ultimately intervenes in the proposed elopement of Marion and Wull. The subsequent breakdown of communication leaves both Wull and Marion feeling betrayed.

Marion is in her fifties in Extract 2, set in Aberdeen and Glasgow (May 1930). In a new introductory chapter to this extract, she is a poet, enjoying a spirited conversation about poetry with Hugh MacDiarmid, and a welcome guest in a friend's house. However, following chapters reveal she never did escape family responsibilities. She is trapped in the role of principal long-term carer for her sister Ethel Mary, who has mental health problems. As such, she continually struggles not only to maintain a literary presence and old friendships, but also to carve out the time and space she needs to be creative. Finally she comes to realise that because of the conflicting claims she cannot succeed as she wants to, either as carer, friend, or poet.

Most of Extract 3 is set in Arbroath in the final year of Marion's life. Marion, a shadow of her former self, has nevertheless found a kind of happiness and contentment under the loving care of Williamina (Minnie) Matthew. As she reflects on her life we learn, in two new chapters, about her tangled early relationships with Cissy, Robert and Margaret and of the role of the Tinker woman, Nellie, in her life. In a meeting with Violet Jacob, arranged by Minnie, the fate of Wull is revealed, as is the information that Minnie is the daughter of Wull Greig and not of Cissy, as she previously thought.

Chapters 1-4 (Extract 1) are written wholly in Scots, from Wull Greig's point of view, in the past tense. Except for the final chapter, subsequent chapters (in Extracts 2 and 3) are written in English, with dialogue in Scots where appropriate. They take Marion's point of view and use the present tense.

Walking the Tinker's Road, reading, writing, reflecting on my experience, has brought me closer to Marion Angus. Sometimes I hear my voice when she speaks, and I recognise a quality we both have: a stubborn streak, a determination to see things through. We 'haud on' and 'hing in', the pair of us, just like Marion Angus's 'Tinker's Road' itself.<sup>13</sup>

It was worth it. This, the end, is a good place to be.

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 'The Tinker's Road', lines 8, 17.

## Appendix

Places where Marion Angus is known to have stayed after the age of sixty-five. The list is compiled mainly from letter headings, but as her letters are usually undated it is impossible to build an accurate picture of her movements. It includes the homes of friends and family, rented accommodation and boarding houses.

Inchdowie, Glen Clova

Stocksfield, Northumberland

The Rowans, Culter

The Lea, Corstorphine

Castle-neuk, Craigmillar

Crawford, Lasswade

Ashton House, Gourock

60 Eldon Street, Greenock

34 Eldon Street, Greenock

Woodlands, Cults

Private Hotel, Pitfodells

Banchory

Arden Lea, Rhu

Helensburgh

Beech Hill, Milltimber

Strands Hotel, Wasdale, Cumberland

Norton, Midlothian

Hayshead House, Arbroath.

## Glossary of Scots words

<b>A</b> , all	<b>bairn(ie)(s)</b> , child(ren)
<b>a'thing</b> , everything	<b>baith</b> , both
<b>about</b> , about	<b>bane</b> , bone
<b>abune</b> , above	<b>ben</b> , inside
<b>ae</b> , one	<b>bide(s)</b> , live(s)
<b>affa</b> , awful	<b>bien</b> , well-to-do, comfortable
<b>aft</b> , often	<b>bit</b> , <sup>1</sup> but, <sup>2</sup> (as in <i>a bit lassie</i> ) small
<b>ahint</b> , behind	<b>blaws</b> , blows
<b>ain</b> , own	<b>blin'</b> , blind
<b>alang</b> , along	<b>bocht</b> , bought
<b>altho</b> , although	<b>bonn(y)(ie)</b> , pretty
<b>amang</b> , among	<b>boord</b> , table
<b>an'</b> , and	<b>braes</b> , an upland district
<b>anaith</b> , beneath	<b>braid</b> , broad
<b>ane</b> , one	<b>brave</b> , splendid
<b>atween</b> , between	<b>breeks</b> , trousers
<b>auld</b> , old	<b>breid</b> , bread
<b>auld body</b> , old person	<b>breist</b> , breast
<b>auncient</b> , ancient	<b>bricht</b> , bright ( <b>bricht-eed</b> , bright-eyed)
<b>ava</b> , at all	<b>brig</b> , bridge
<b>awa</b> , away	<b>broo</b> , brow
<b>awfy</b> , awful	<b>burn</b> , stream ( <b>burnie</b> , small stream)
<b>ay, aye</b> , always, still	<b>buss</b> , bush
<b>ayont</b> , beyond	<b>bye</b> , past

<b>caa'd</b> , called	<b>dei(d) (th)</b> , dead, death
<b>cam(s)</b> , come(s)	<b>dinnae</b> don't
<b>can'el</b> , candle	<b>doesna</b> , doesn't
<b>Candlemas</b> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> February, a Scottish 'quarter day'	<b>doon</b> , down
<b>canna</b> , cannot	<b>dour</b> , sullen
<b>cauld(rife)</b> , cold, (cold in manner)	<b>dowie</b> , sad
<b>causey</b> , pavement	<b>dreep(in)</b> , drip(ping)
<b>cheenge(s)(d)</b> , change(s)(d)	<b>dune</b> , done
<b>chittered</b> , chattered	<b>een</b> , eyes
<b>clachan</b> , small village	<b>eence</b> , once
<b>clatter(ing)</b> , noise	<b>eneuch</b> , enough
<b>cloud</b> , cloud	<b>ere</b> , before
<b>corbie</b> , crow	<b>evenin</b> , evening
<b>countra</b> , country	<b>fa(in)(s)</b> , fall(ing)(s)
<b>crag</b> , projecting spur of rock	<b>fae (frae)</b> , from
<b>cratur</b> , creature	<b>faem</b> , foam
<b>crookit</b> , crooked	<b>fair</b> , beautiful
<b>croon(in)</b> , sing(ing)	<b>far ben</b> , far away
<b>crookit</b> , crooked	<b>feart</b> , frightened
<b>croon</b> , to sing	<b>fell (as in <i>fell in wi</i>)</b> , met
<b>cry(ie)(s)(d)(in)</b> , call(s)(ed)(ing)	<b>fey</b> , <sup>1</sup> excited <sup>2</sup> other-worldly
<b>cuddlin</b> , cuddling	<b>fit</b> , foot
<b>daurna</b> , dare not	<b>fleet</b> , nimble, fast
<b>dawnin</b> , dawn	<b>floer</b> , flower
<b>dee(in)</b> , dieing	<b>fouk</b> , people
	<b>froon</b> , frown

<b>fu</b> , <sup>1</sup> full, <sup>2</sup> very	<b>hankey</b> , handkerchief
<b>fur</b> , for	<b>happed (hapt)</b> , wrapped round
<b>gae(d)(n)(s)</b> , go, went, gone, goes	<b>hastin</b> , hurrying
<b>gaiter(in)</b> , gather(ing)	<b>haud</b> , hold
<b>gang(s)</b> , go(es)	<b>hauff</b> , rough shelter
<b>gars</b> , causes, makes	<b>heid</b> , head
<b>gey</b> , considerably	<b>hert</b> , heart
<b>ghaist(ly)</b> ghost(ly)	<b>hid</b> , had
<b>gie(s)(n)</b> , give(s)(n)	<b>hie(lands)</b> , high(lands)
<b>gin</b> , <sup>1</sup> if, <sup>2</sup> if only, <sup>3</sup> before	<b>hoo</b> , how
<b>girn(ed)</b> , complain(ed)	<b>hoose</b> , house
<b>gloamin</b> , dusk, twilight	<b>ill</b> , wicked, evil
<b>goon</b> , gown	<b>intil</b> , into
<b>gowden</b> , golden	<b>keekin</b> , peeping
<b>gowk</b> , idiot	<b>keeng</b> , king
<b>greetin</b> , weep(ing)	<b>ken(s)(t)</b> , know(s), knew
<b>groat</b> , farthing( <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> of a penny)	<b>kerchief</b> , headscarf
<b>growin</b> , growing	<b>kin</b> , family
<b>guid</b> , good	<b>kirk(yaird)</b> , church(yard)
<b>haar</b> , sea mist	<b>kye</b> , cattle
<b>ha'thorn</b> , hawthorn	<b>lad(die)</b> , a youth, (little boy)
<b>hae</b> , have	<b>laigh</b> , low
<b>halliket</b> , uncouth	<b>Lammas Fair</b> , 1 <sup>st</sup> August, (Scottish Quarter day)
<b>hame</b> , home	<b>lane (my lane)</b> , alone
<b>hame-gaun(hameward)</b> , going home	<b>lang</b> , long ( <b>lang syne</b> , a long time ago)
<b>han'</b> , hand	

<b>lass(ie)</b> , a girl	<b>moorn(in)</b> , mourn(ing)
<b>lat</b> , let	<b>morn</b> , morning
<b>lauch(ed)(in)</b> , laugh(ed)(ing)	<b>mou</b> , mouth
<b>lave</b> , what is left	<b>muckle</b> , great deal of
<b>lassie</b> , girl, young woman	<b>muir</b> , moor
<b>leddy</b> , lady	<b>mune</b> , moon
<b>licht</b> , light, lightsome	<b>mysel</b> , myself
<b>lichtit</b> (candles), burning	<b>na(e)</b> , not
<b>lilt(in)</b> , lively song, singing sweetly	<b>nae mair</b> , no more
<b>limber(-licht)</b> , nimble, spry	<b>'naith</b> , ('neath), beneath
<b>links</b> , land between sea and arable land	<b>naiter (nayther)</b> , neither
<b>linn</b> , a deep, narrow gorge	<b>ne'er</b> , never
<b>lissom(e)</b> , lithesome, nimble	<b>ness</b> , a headland
<b>lochan</b> , small loch	<b>nicht</b> , night
<b>luik</b> , look	<b>niver</b> , never
<b>luve</b> , ( <b>lo'ed</b> ), love(d)	<b>noo</b> , now
<b>ma</b> , my	<b>nor' east</b> , north-east
<b>mair</b> , more	<b>o</b> , of
<b>mairket (fair)</b> , market (annual holiday)	<b>oan</b> , on
<b>mak</b> , make	<b>o'er (ower)</b> , over
<b>mannie(s)</b> , man (men)	<b>onie</b> , any
<b>maun</b> , must	<b>oot</b> , out
<b>merriage</b> , marriage	<b>ower</b> , over, too,
<b>nicht</b> , might	<b>peat</b> , dried fuel
<b>mirk</b> , gloom(y)	<b>Pictish men</b> , ancient people who
<b>mither</b> , mother	inhabited Scotland north of the Forth

<b>plaid</b> , length of woollen cloth	<b>singin</b> , singing
<b>plaised</b> , pleased	<b>sma</b> , small ( <b>sma-bookit</b> , shrunken)
<b>pluckt</b> , plucked	<b>smitten</b> , badly affected by
<b>prickly thistle</b> , difficult person	<b>sna</b> , snow
<b>qualet</b> , quiet	<b>soondin</b> , sounds, noises
<b>reistlin</b> , rustling	<b>soople</b> , supple
<b>reid</b> , red	<b>sorrowfu</b> , sorrowful)
<b>richt</b> , right	<b>soughin</b> , sighing of the wind
<b>rin(nin)</b> , run(ning)	<b>speak(spikk)in</b> , speak(ing)
<b>roond</b> , round	<b>standin</b> , standing
<b>runkled</b> , wrinkled	<b>stane</b> , stone
<b>s'all</b> , shall	<b>steer</b> , bustle
<b>Sabbath</b> , Sunday	<b>steppit</b> , stepped
<b>sae</b> , so	<b>strang</b> , strong
<b>saft</b> , soft	<b>sweetherts</b> , sweethearts
<b>sair</b> , <sup>1</sup> sore <sup>2</sup> badly (as in <i>runkled sair</i> )	<b>swoopin</b> , swooping
<b>sang</b> , song	<b>syne</b> , <sup>1</sup> in that case, <sup>2</sup> ago, <sup>3</sup> then
<b>sea-gaun</b> , sea-going	<b>tae</b> , to
<b>seekin</b> , looking for	<b>tak</b> , take ( <b>taen</b> , taken)
<b>sets (me)</b> , suits me	<b>tho</b> , though
<b>shairp</b> , sharp	<b>thole</b> , put up with, bear
<b>sheda'less</b> , shadowless	<b>thoosand</b> , thousand
<b>sheelin</b> , shelling	<b>thornie</b> , full of thorns
<b>sicht(less)</b> , sight(less)	<b>thro</b> , through
<b>siller</b> , silver	<b>tint</b> , <sup>1</sup> lost, <sup>2</sup> get rid of
<b>simmer</b> , summer	<b>till</b> , until

<b>toon, toun,</b> town	<b>wee,</b> small
<b>traivellin,</b> walking	<b>weel,</b> well
<b>tremblin,</b> trembling	<b>weet,</b> wet
<b>tryst,</b> an agreed meeting	<b>werena,</b> if it were not that
<b>trystful,</b> sad	<b>wha,</b> who
<b>twa,</b> two	<b>whaur,</b> where
<b>tyin,</b> tying	<b>whey-faced,</b> white faced
<b>waater,</b> water	<b>whinny,</b> covered with gorse bushes
<b>wad,</b> would ( <b>wadna,</b> would not)	<b>wi,</b> with
<b>wailin,</b> wailing, crying	<b>wife,</b> woman
<b>wan,</b> pale	<b>wis,</b> was
<b>wanderin,</b> meandering	<b>wrack,</b> wreck
<b>wandert,</b> missing	<b>wraith,</b> ghost
<b>wark(s),</b> work(s)	<b>wull,</b> will
<b>wasnae,</b> was not	<b>wuss,</b> wish
<b>waukenin,</b> wakening	<b>ye,</b> you
<b>waur,</b> worse	<b>yer,</b> your
<b>wed,</b> marry	<b>yon,</b> that over there
<b>wee folk,</b> fairies	

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