

Preface

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The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature is conceived and produced as a single entity. In consultation with the publishers, the editors have sought to present it in three volumes. This is done for practical reasons. Each volume is in itself of some substance. To publish all three in one volume might have produced an unwieldy and inaccessible tome, not so much weighty as burdensome.

The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature in three volumes then is, yet, a single work. Each editor has taken prime responsibility for an individual period: Thomas Owen Clancy for up to 1314, Murray Pittock for 1314–1707, Susan Manning for 1707–1918 and Ian Brown for 1918 onwards. Nonetheless, it is the essence of our editorial process that every chapter has been considered by all editors. In other words, the conception and shaping of this *History* aims to avoid false time divisions, and to promulgate the understanding that Scottish literature is a continuous and multi-channelled entity from its beginnings – presumably well before the first remnants that survive from the first millennium – till the present moment. Similarly, it has sought to include, and give adequate representation to, wide varieties of Scottish literature, including that in Gaelic, Latin, Norse, Welsh and French as well as the Scots and English most commonly in the past associated with the term ‘Scottish literature’. It also includes, as appropriate, oral and performance literature and diaspora literatures and writers. Scottish literature is best understood as an inclusive, not an exclusive, term. This is a theme, both of intellectual discourse and architectonic structure, of *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*.

In preparing this *History*, the editors have sought at all times to marry the most up-to-date and rigorous scholarship with the avoidance of a distracting reference apparatus unsuited to the needs of the general reader. Each of the following chapters is, the editors hope, marked by both a high degree of accessibility and straightforward readability, and also by reliability and the intellectual rigour that comes from commanding knowledge gracefully worn. It is in pursuit of this aim of a balance of deep scholarship and ease of access that the three-volume format has been adopted. Although of course it is entirely possible for an individual reader to choose to focus her or his study on the volume that most closely meets immediate needs or interests, each volume will be most rewarding when read in the context and light of the other two.

Readers of volumes two and three are therefore recommended to bear in mind the matters raised in the Introduction which opens volume one. This contains two chapters considering the nature and study of Scottish literature, one prepared by the editors, the other by Cairns Craig. Volume one continues with the first two periods of the *History*, up to 1314 and 1314–1707. Volume two contains the period 1707–1918. Volume three contains the period from 1918 onwards. Each volume has its own index and list of contributors and so can be read as a coherent whole. The editors, however, make no apology for the fact that each volume contains material that relates to years beyond its explicit period or for the many

cross-references between volumes that are required for a full understanding of the material under discussion. Many necessary cross-references between volumes demonstrate the power of the continuity of Scotland's literature. This is a strength of these volumes, and an essential premise of their underlying argument.

This volume, in common with the other two, has within its period section (i.e. 1707–1918) a standard structure. Each period has introductory chapters providing a historical, a geographic and a linguistic context to the period's literature. There is also a fourth introductory chapter in all but the first period concerned with the international reception and literary impact of Scottish literature. Such a chapter does not exist for the earliest period because during that period so much of the literature under discussion is shared between the developing Scottish literary tradition and others. From 1314 on, as more coherent and conscious traditions of Scottish literature develop, so it is more possible to discern and trace their international impact. The chapters in this *History* relating to this impact offer, for the first time, a coherent picture, based on objective measures of levels of translation, of the powerful impression made by Scottish literature on other cultures. This grew discernibly over the centuries, but began with some *éclat* with the enormously important writings of Duns Scotus and, later, the often-underrated impact of George Buchanan on wider European culture, particularly the dramaturgic development of writing for the modern European stage. In each period, following these introductory chapters, a variety of distinguished experts addresses aspects of Scottish literature in a series of chapters; some focus on the work of individual writers; more consider the varieties of interaction of writers with one another and with their cultural contexts.

Taken as a whole, these volumes offer the most extensive, the most various and the most inclusive history of Scottish literature available to date.

