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EPPIE ELRICK, A DORIC TOUR-DE-FORCE

William P. Milne's 1955 novel *Eppie Elrick* is one of the most extensive and most uncompromising texts in the North-East dialect of Scots (for general accounts of the dialect see Dieth 1932, McClure 2002, Millar 2007). The modern history of this dialect as a literary medium begins with John Skinner, Alexander Ross and Robert Forbes in the eighteenth century, what time it was still fully developed as the everyday speech of the region (on their language see McClure 2013 and 2017). After something of a decline during the nineteenth century it was vigorously revived for both prose and poetry towards the end of the century, with William Alexander, Charles Murray and Mary Symon as the leading exponents; by this time compulsory education and other factors had led to some decline in its use and status as a spoken form, but its enduring vitality is amply reflected in the literature (on the literary background see Milton 1983 and 1995). Both its literary productivity and its decline as a spoken tongue have continued unchecked to the present day. The discussion of *Eppie Elrick*, a novel with a historical setting in which extensive passages are in an attempted reconstruction of the dialect in its pristine form, will examine the dialect writing itself, with its wealth of local idioms and vocabulary items and careful orthographic representation of its phonological features. Particular attention will be paid to precisely localised features rarely attested in literature (e.g. I'se jist dyae (= "go", usually written gae)) and unhistorical eye-dialect forms (e.g. ur for "or"), and reference made to Milne's apparent use of his listed sources of information (e.g. Dieth, Alexander, David Murison (editor of the Scottish National Dictionary)). Its status as a putative memorial to a socio-linguistically defined community long vanished by the time of writing will also be discussed.

References

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