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Beyond *Outlander*: Annie S. Swan and the Scottish popular romance novel

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Abstract

Annie S. Swan has become recognised as one of the most significant Scottish women authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, her twentieth-century works remain largely under-studied and dismissed due to their critical perception as simply “slushy women’s romances” (Sutherland). Such a view overlooks the potential importance of Swan’s writing in this period for the development of the Scottish popular romance novel. A subgenre that has enjoyed increasing attention and success in recent years, the origins of the modern Scottish romance novel are generally traced to Gabaldon’s *Outlander* (1991) and imitators in the 1990s and 2000s by authors like Terri Brisbin, Julie Garwood, and Lyndsay Sands. However, as I will argue in this article, Swan’s twentieth-century works display several of the structures and motifs that are definitional for what we now term Scottish popular romance fiction. The article traces the shifting structures of Swan’s twentieth-century writings, as well as her representation of Scotland as primitive, magical, and romantic, showing similarities between 1990s and 2000s Scottish romance and selected works of Swan from the 1910s to 1940s. Ultimately, the article argues that Swan’s twentieth-century works can

be classified as part of a longer tradition of Scottish popular romance fiction and that, rather than dismissing her “slushy women’s romances”, we reposition her as an early writer of Scottish popular romance fiction.

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Introduction

Scotland sells: at least, for romance. In the 1990s and 2000s, fuelled by the release of Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* (1991), hundreds of often homogenous "kilt-ripping yarns", to borrow David Stenhouse's term, have offered up their static and repetitive Scottish locations, themes, and characters, interwoven with tropes of the romance novel (a central couple, a happy ending), for a voracious international market.¹ The few existing studies of Scottish romance fiction agree that this "first wave of successful Scottish historical romance novels of the early 1990s set conventions that came to define the genre".² Yet, Scottish romances were being read long before *Outlander*. Annie S. Swan (1859-1943), who also wrote as Mrs Burnett-Smith and David Lyall, is "one of the most commercially successful popular novelists of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries".³ She wrote over 250 novels and short story collections: at least 180 under her own name and more than 80 as David Lyall.⁴ She was heavily serialised in magazines; a mainstay of *Woman at Home*, she wrote advice columns and was appointed 'principal contributor' from 1893 to 1917 (the journal was titled *Women at Home: Annie S. Swan's Magazine* from 1893-1920).⁵ She also wrote for *The People's Friend* and later produced the *Annie S. Swan Penny Stories* (in the late 1890s) and *The Annie Swan Annual* from 1924.⁶ Swan's popularity was widely noted, both in Scotland and further afield; as early as the 1890s she was considered the best-selling female Scottish novelist.

Yet, Swan's critical reception has been less warm. She is absent from most anthologies and critical and companion works and her later twentieth-century works, in particular, have received scant appraisal.⁷ John Sutherland sneers that Swan's twentieth-century writing comprised "slushy women's romances" which catered "entirely to the romance appetites of her huge (largely female) readership."⁸ Charlotte Reid notes that Swan has been largely ignored by twentieth-century literary critics, but then proceeds to value her "literary merit" as "almost nil".⁹ In one of the most-cited scholarly works on Swan, Beth Dickson states "by the late nineteenth century, Swan had settled down to write the pious unremarkable fiction demanded by her large, newly literate and often religious readership."¹⁰ In contrast to this previous scholarship, rather

than dismissing Swan's later writing as merely 'slushy romance', I contend that Swan's twentieth-century writings can be read as early examples of the Scottish romance novel.

I am not the first to consider Swan as a writer of romance fiction. Shields argues that Swan's works share plot devices with romance and similarly focus on a central couple.¹¹ The formulaic, serialised writing to a pattern that Swan and others did in this period offers reliability and comfort to readers, in a way that is well-recognised by romance readers.¹² Shields aligns Swan's wish that her readers should find escapism in her works with Janice Radway's similar statements about popular romance fiction as 'self-care' in the 1980s.¹³ She argues that "between the middle of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century" Scottish women writers like Swan recognised the therapeutic value of literature and readers' desire for familiarity, repetition, and comfort: "the pleasures of the familiar".¹⁴ Swan is also seen as an author who forayed into branding, as Gillian Neale has persuasively explored – yet another connection with popular romance fiction.

Swan's connection to popular romance as a genre is further contextualised against the backdrop of the development of the modern romance novel in the first decades of the twentieth century. Romance as a literary genre can be traced to antiquity.¹⁵ However, the western heterosexual romance novel was shaped significantly by literary and publishing developments in the early twentieth century. Between the 1910s and 1940s, the literary categories of 'romance' and 'romantic' "became more narrowly specialised ... coming to signify only those love-stories, aimed ostensibly at a wholly female readership, which deal primarily with the trials and tribulations of heterosexual desire, and end happily in marriage."¹⁶ Individual romances published in this period are credited with providing a model for subsequent texts; E. M. Hull's *The Sheik*, published in 1919, is seen by some as "the ur-romance novel of the twentieth century".¹⁷ At the same time that the narrative structure of romance was becoming more fixed, diverse subgenres were beginning to emerge, such as romances with New Woman heroines, more sexually explicit romances, domestic romances, and romances with foreign heroes.¹⁸ Clearly aligned with domestic romances, the publications in this period of authors like Swan follow a reliable pattern that corresponds to what we would

now understand romance, in genre terms: “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more protagonists”.¹⁹

Others have argued for the importance of the first decades of the twentieth century in Scottish literary history, particularly for women authors. Juliet Shields finds that “[b]etween [Walter] Scott’s death in 1832 and the beginning of World War II ... Scotswomen produced literally hundreds of novels” that represent “a distinct and coherent chapter in the development of the British novel that demands scholarly attention for both its literary value and its historical significance.”²⁰ She argues that these women writers, including Annie S. Swan, represent an important step in literary development post-Scott, as they adapted his ‘masculinist’ Romanticism “to reveal the romance in everyday life”.²¹ While Shields is concerned with Scottish literary history rather than the history of the romance genre (as I am), her assertion of the importance of these authors and their works is pertinent. Annie Swan has been widely recognised as an author of Scottish *romantic* fiction. Yet, to my knowledge, no scholarship has yet considered her relationship to the more specific genre of Scottish *romance* fiction, with its narrower requirements of a focus on a central romantic couple, and a positive or uplifting ending, along with Scottish characters or setting. While some of these elements are present in Swan’s earlier works, a move towards the structures and motifs of the popular romance genre in Swan’s later works makes this period of her writing distinct. Swan’s writing in this period, therefore, is key to an understanding of the development of the modern Scottish popular romance novel.

This article focuses on six of Swan’s twentieth-century novels set at least partly in Scotland: *A Maid of the Isles: A Romance of Skye* (1924); *An American Wife* (1937); *A Breaker of Hearts* (1938); *The Secret of Skye* (1940); *The Third Generation* (1940); *The Family Name* (1942). While these novels are largely representative of the later corpus of Swan’s writing, I focus here on individual novels as case studies in order to illustrate specific aspects of plot structure and motif. I compare these later works with two of Swan’s early publications (*Wrongs Righted* (1881) and *Aldersyde* (1883)), to illustrate differences from her nineteenth-century works. I further consider Swan’s works alongside two modern Scottish romance novels: Karen Marie Moning’s *The Highlander’s Touch* (2000), book 3 in the medieval paranormal Highlander series and Lynsay Sands’ *An English Bride in Scotland* (2013), the first of her Highland Brides series. Both are

bestselling authors of Scottish romance fiction who published their first Scottish romances in the 1990s (Lynsay Sands' first Scottish romance was *The Key* (1999) and Karen Marie Moning's *Beyond the Highland Mist*, the first in her Highland series, was published in 1999). Their works are thus representative of Scottish popular romance.

Genre: Scottish Popular Romance Fiction

The flurry of Scottish-themed romances of the 1990s and 2000s – Euan Hague identified 141 “Scotland-themed romance novels published between 1995 and 2005 – established a cohort of North American authors prominently associated with the genre, including Karen Marie Moning, Julie Garwood, Diana Gabaldon, Susan King and, into the 2000s, Lynsay Sands, Jennifer Ashley, Margaret Mallory, Terri Brisbin, and Paula Quinn.²² These authors attracted and retained a sizeable and predominantly North American readership, and their works refined a set of genre conventions and motifs which have come to define the Scottish romance novel in its current form as “one of the most prominent sub-genres within romance fiction”.²³

Authors of Scottish romance are associated with a range of imprints, most notably Avon Books, “widely credited with launching the historical romance genre” (owned by Harlequin Mills & Boon since 2010),²⁴ Dell Publishing (now owned by Penguin Random House), Zebra Books (an imprint of Kensington), and Harlequin Mills & Boon, the world's biggest romance publisher (a division of HarperCollins since 2014). Reminiscent of Swan's serial fiction, 1990s and 2000s Scottish romances frequently return to the same families, locations, and characters. Take, for example, Jennifer Ashley's twelve-book Mackenzies & McBrides series spanning 1745 to 1908. In Julie Garwood's thirteenth-century set Highlands' Lairds trilogy (1992-2007), published by Pocket Books/Ballantine, the central couple from the first book, *The Secret*, reappear in subsequent volumes, each taking minor characters from previous books as their protagonists. Some series span generations of the same family; Paula Quinn has written over eleven years about three generations of the same family. Her two-book MacGregor's series (2007-8) was followed by the five-book Children of the Mist series (2010-2012), about the children of the couples from the first series. This was followed by her eight-book The MacGregors: Highland Heirs series (2014-2018), which told stories of the children of the Children of the Mist series.

1990s and 2000s Scottish romances are almost always historical in setting, favouring particular moments in Scottish history: the late medieval Anglo-Scottish wars – for example Monica McCarty’s twelve-part Highland Guard series (2010-2016), set in the early fourteenth century, each work featuring a member of Robert the Bruce’s ‘Highland Guard’), and the eighteenth-century Jacobite rebellions (Gabaldon’s *Outlander* is a key example). Landscape is central, with the majority of Scottish romances set in the Highlands, although some also take place in the Borders (e.g. Amanda Scott’s Border and Galloway trilogies (2008-2010; 2009)), or Edinburgh (e.g. Caroline Linden’s *A Scot to the Heart* (2021)).²⁵ Time travel is a common device, thank to Gabaldon’s influence, pitching modern protagonists into historical settings to present a vision of Scotland that is desirable yet premodern.²⁶ The historical focus of 1990s and 2000s Scottish romance is different to Swan’s twentieth-century works, most of which are contemporary to her time. However, as I will argue, there are several features common to both 1990s and 2000s Scottish romance and to Swan’s works, that indicate the connections between them: the strict adherence to a romance plot structure; the construction of Scotland as the ‘past’; and the inclusion of ‘outsider’ characters to demonstrate external views of Scotland. I now consider each of these in turn.

Approaching romance

While diverse in their setting, characterisation, and tone, romance novels have some generally agreed-upon features. Most important is the ‘happily ever after’ or, as the Romance Writers of America (the genre’s largest professional organisation) put it, “An Emotionally Satisfying and Optimistic Ending”.²⁷ This is sometimes presented as a ‘happy for now’ ending, but the central premise of a “satisfactory ending” remains key.²⁸ A second major feature is that the developing relationship must be the focus of the story and “allow the reader to participate in it” – in other words, “the relationship itself is the main character of a romance”.²⁹ Building on her definition of popular romance as “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines [later revised to ‘protagonists’]”, Regis argues that

[a]ll romance novels contain eight narrative elements: *a definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the *meeting* between the heroine and hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; the *barrier* between them; the *point of ritual death* [“the moment ... when the union between heroine and hero ... seems absolutely impossible”]; the *recognition* that fells the barrier; the *declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*.³⁰

Regis’ structure is widely used by scholars to identify texts as romance novels, and to observe deviations from the structure and the genre.

Swan’s earlier works – those published in the nineteenth-century – while containing some of these elements, do not generally follow this structure sufficiently closely to be classified as romance novels. Take, for example, Swan’s most famous work, *Aldersyde*, which features multiple romances of the Nesbitt sisters, Janet and Tibbie, and their friends.³¹ While the society is outlined early on (the death of the sisters’ father means their estate, Aldersyde, passes to their male cousin, Hugh), all of the story’s romantic entanglements end tragically, in death. Only the children of Hugh and Tibbie are permitted a happy ending, but this relationship is introduced at the very end of the book and is not a focus of the plot. Swan’s *Wrongs Righted*, her first serialised work, is closer to this structural definition of romance but it too does not contain all eight.³² The story begins *in media res* with John Maxwell, heir to Castle Bervie, declaring that he wishes to marry “the daughter of a common fisherman”, Agnes Bonner – we are not privy to their first meeting.³³ John’s father refuses to approve of the union and disinherits his son – but this does not prove a barrier to their romance. While John acknowledges what he stands to lose – “the only home he had ever known ... perfect severance from kith and kin, ... a sudden change from affluence to poverty, from pleasant indolence to necessary work” – “no misgiving mingled with his natural regret, because the loss of these things meant the possession of the woman he loved.”³⁴ The married pair experience several difficulties (including his false imprisonment for the death of his stepbrother) but the details of their relationship – their marriage, declarations of love, and moments of recognition) – are omitted or fleeting. The tension of the text comes not from the barriers to their relationship, but from the subplot around his brother’s death and John’s reinstated inheritance. While these texts is

certainly romantic, then, in that they are concerned with love, marriage, and their associated dramas, they are not strictly speaking *romance* in a genre sense.

By contrast, Swan's later works follow the romance genre structure far more consistently. *The Family Name*, set in St Andrews, focuses on the romance between Lesley Ward, who has travelled to St Andrews to help her unwell mother recuperate, and Norman Wingate, a wealthy local landowner. The society is quickly defined, with Norman's position and status in the city emphasised in contrast to Lesley's lower status. The couple meet in the first chapter; chapter 2 is titled 'Chance Meeting' and features a second encounter, when the couple discover each other's identity. The barriers to romance are established relatively early: Lesley's father defrauded his customers and has been imprisoned; Norman's mother has specific plans for his marriage that do not involve Lesley; and Lesley's own mother had a historic broken engagement with Raef, Norman's father. Nevertheless, there are multiple moments of attraction between Lesley and Norman. After their second meeting, Norman "was amazed at himself, for already everything connected with this girl, of whose existence he had not known twenty-four hours ago, was of the deepest concern."³⁵ Similarly, Lesley "was aware of a strange sense of newness of life" after they meet.³⁶ The declaration is made, and the point of ritual death quickly follows— Lesley immediately refutes Norman's declaration saying, "I'm afraid there's something in my life preventing what you – what you speak of", and Norman discovers her father's conviction.³⁷ At this point, the romance seems doomed. Yet, Norman proposes that he can overcome the barriers, responding to his sister's query "how will the county take it?" with "I don't care a hang for the county – never have."³⁸ He makes peace with Lesley's mother and the couple are betrothed. Near the end of the novel, Lesley's father dies, removing the final barrier to their union – this is the point of recognition. Swan's later novels thus hew far more closely to the structures of what we understand as the popular romance novel.

Primitive Scotland

As already stated, 1990s and 2000s Scottish romances are almost always historical, presenting Scotland as "the breeding-ground of a homely and primitive virtue".³⁹ In *An English Bride in Scotland* it is assumed that the heroine will "look down

her nose at us ‘heathen Scots’”.⁴⁰ Swan’s twentieth-century romances are, by contrast, almost always contemporary. Yet, they are similarly characterised by a persistent nostalgia which represents Scotland as resistant to modern urbanisation and industrialisation: being in Swan’s Scotland is like going back in time figuratively, if not literally.⁴¹ Swan’s Scotland is often primitive, or is expected to be so. In *The Third Generation*, the Aberdeenshire heroine apologises that “the postal arrangements ... are still primitive.”⁴² Norah, the Irish-raised heroine of *A Breaker of Hearts* considers Scottish “country life” “immutable”: “[things] have to go on simply because they’ve always gone on. They don’t progress”.⁴³ Such views are ingrained; in a four-page span of *The Secret of Skye* (1940), the English heroine’s family refer to the “wilds of Scotland” four times.⁴⁴ The labelling of Scotland as in some way ‘backwards’ or less ‘sophisticated’ is usually by non-Scottish characters. Evelyn, the mother of the heroine in Swan’s *A Maid of the Isles*, sees Scotland as depriving her of necessary comforts. Evelyn hates Skye, where her husband is from and where her daughter, Margaret, was born. Evelyn labels their house on Skye, Corryvreck, “an abomination of desolation” and “the cause of all our misery. If there had been no Corryvreck, but some decent, saleable, lettable place in a civilised country, we would never have come to where we are to-day.”⁴⁵ Elements of Skye identified as unpalatable include the lack of “central heating in the house”, although Margaret points out “[i]t is never as cold in Skye as here in a London winter”.⁴⁶ The implication is that Skye and, by extension Scotland, are uncivilised, unmodern, and un-English.

In other cases, Scotland is represented as a retreat where tired, unwell urbanites can recover and enjoy the soothing airs. In Moning’s *The Highlander’s Touch*, the “miles of untouched, open country” is particularly praiseworthy – the heroine “would have ridden all night to savor the untamed vista.”⁴⁷ Medieval Scotland is presented as a space of leisure for the time-travelling twenty-first century heroine of this romance, where she can temporarily escape the cares of her modern life: “[s]he’d never had a time in her life that was so peaceful, so filled with idle time, so safe.”⁴⁸ That the ‘time’ is the fourteenth-century nods to primitivity, but it is also a specific place – “fourteenth-century *Scotland*” – offering such relaxation.⁴⁹ Swan’s twentieth-century romances present a similar outlook. In *A Maid of the Isles* the narrative notes that the thrice weekly postal service and the fact that “every newspaper was two days old” “was

restful, and gave one a singular feeling of detachment from all the turmoil of life in the big world.”⁵⁰ The heroine’s American father in *An American Wife*, declares that the “spaciousness” and “majesty” of the Highlands “satisfies something in one’s soul.”⁵¹ It is the poor health of the heroine’s mother in *The Family Name* that “brings [them] to Scotland”, in the hope that “her native air might do more for her than anything else”.⁵² Later, when asked if “she is improving in the air of St Andrews?”, the heroine replies: “It’s grand. It puts new life into one.”⁵³ In *The Secret of Skye*, it is hoped the English heroine will “bloom in the free and happy air”.⁵⁴ Hague and Stenhouse remark that ‘Scottishness’ in current Scottish romances often encourages the protagonist to (re)discover their ‘humanity’ – thus recuperating something which has been lost.⁵⁵ Swan’s texts provide an early example of representing Scotland as a recuperative space.

A particular motif of 1990s and 2000s Scottish romance is the representation of Scotland as “richly laced with fey supernatural gifts”: a “magical place”.⁵⁶ The historical setting of many 1990s and 2000s Scottish romances permits the inclusion of magical characters who cast spells –fairy magic powers the time travel device which sends the heroine of Monig’s *The Highlander’s Touch* back to fourteenth-century Scotland: “wily little folk, musing about with time and whatnot better left alone”.⁵⁷ In this novel, “[m]agic pervaded Scotland’s air as thick and frequent as the mist”.⁵⁸ A fairy queen summoned by the twenty-first-century heroine, Lisa, aligns fairies with the nation, commenting “[w]e are Scotland ... The land once wept when we wept, and spring came when we danced. Now the seasons roll consistently, and aside from the fool’s pranks, this soil is mostly tame.”⁵⁹ Swan’s twentieth-century works echo the fairy queen’s comment that Scotland’s fairy folk exist in memories, stories, and echoes tied to the landscape. As the hero of Monig’s text remarks, “this land is full of ... [o]ld, tall tales.”⁶⁰ In Swan’s *The Secret of Skye*, Careen remarks of Skye, “[t]his is the land of fairy tales.”⁶¹ For Norah in *A Breaker of Hearts*, “Scotland is ... like a poem or a story”.⁶² In *A Maid of the Isles*, the hero Angus “remembered, with a queer pang, the story of the water-kelpie who used to run off with young maidens”.⁶³ Presenting Scotland as story-like is consistent with its representation as mythical and Swan’s works draw on the same mythology as 1990s and 2000s Scottish romance.

Becoming Scottish

1990s and 2000s Scottish romances frequently show how outsider characters – non-Scots, or atemporal characters – can become insiders through assimilating to Scottish culture as the romance plot progresses. In *An English Bride in Scotland*, the English heroine Annabel attempts to pronounce unfamiliar names correctly: “‘Seonag,’ Annabel murmured, pronouncing it *Shaw-nack*, as [the Scottish character] had.”⁶⁴ She fashions her Scottish husband’s plaid into “a makeshift skirt”, attiring herself in a key textile identifier of her new Scottish identity. She wears modified gowns originally belonging to the hero’s Scottish mother. Later, Annabel is compared to the hero’s family as he remarks “I’ve married a lass just like me sister”, and another character adds “Or yer mother”.⁶⁵ The comparison further separates the English heroine from her own “horrid parents” and aligns her with her husband’s Scottish heritage.⁶⁶ She begins to use contractions in her speech – “mayhap”, “ye”, “nay”⁶⁷ – and is considered as Scottish rather than English. While Annabel insists “I am English”, a kinsman of her husband replies “Nay, yer a MacKay” to which she says “Aye, but I am also English”.⁶⁸ But he responds “Nay... Ye were *raised* English, but ye married a MacKay, so now yer a Scot.”⁶⁹ Annabel’s Englishness and Scottishness cannot coexist.

Such assimilation is visible in Swan’s works too. In *A Breaker of Hearts*, Norah undergoes a similar transformation to Annabel in *An English Bride in Scotland*. Norah is initially dismissive of Scotland, and struggles to fit in with her aunt and uncle’s family. Norah is described as “different ... from the girls we have about here”, yet nonetheless a strong connection is drawn between Norah and her mother’s country through a landscape metataphor.⁷⁰ When Norah’s Scottish cousin, Adam, first sees Norah he compares her smile to “the sun parting the mists on the Whannock Hill behind the house.”⁷¹ Later in the novel, when visiting the kirkyard, Norah is frustrated by her inability to interpret the meaning of the inscription on her grandmother’s grave, noting “that strange essence from the past” that “she found ... hard to understand”.⁷² At this moment, Norah “seemed to hear her father say, ‘All’s well, Look up, the sun is on the hill’”, allaying her worries with a metaphor reminiscent of Adam’s earlier words.⁷³ Later still, when talking to her future husband, Mark Ruthven, about Norah, her uncle looked

to “the summit of the Whannock Hill, which stood out sharply against the crystal blue of the June sky.”⁷⁴ Once again, Norah is associated with the landscape of her Scottish family’s home.

Norah herself acknowledges her increasing sympathy to Scotland – she remarks that her father “said Scotland would get me, and it has.”⁷⁵ Towards the end of the novel, while visiting her father’s home region in Ireland (that she had previously considered to be the “home of my heart”), Norah resolves “that she had to go home. [...] *right home* to Balwhirran in the grey, sweet Galloway country.”⁷⁶ Not long after this, she is described by an Englishman as “the little Scotch one” – just as Annabel in *An English Bride in Scotland* is described as Scottish by another character.⁷⁷ After Norah’s aunt Allison returns from her convalescence in Glasgow the family gather for tea at the house, where Norah has inherited her aunt’s role as housekeeper. Allison remarks: “how clean and bright everything is!”, to which Norah replies, “‘Everything I know you’ve taught me, Aunt Ailie.’ ... [...] poising the teapot in one hand [as] her aunt [...] reached out for her cup.”⁷⁸ This is an exact reversal of Norah’s first visit to the house, where she was an unwelcome guest served tea by Allison – Norah has now assumed the role of woman of the Scottish house, where she was once considered “different”.

The assimilation of heroines to a newfound Scottish identity also shows how the geography and landscape of Scotland are bound together with the developing romance. In *The Highlander’s Touch*, Lisa remarks that “Scotland was subtly invading her veins, and ... she knew she was falling in love. With a country. ... *more than a country*”.⁷⁹ There is a sense, here, that the landscape of Scotland itself is connected to the romance plot. In Swan’s twentieth-century writings, where the ‘essential elements’ of romance are more visible, Swan too connects the developing romantic relationship to the Scottish landscape. In several novels, the meeting of hero and heroine occurs in nature. In *The Third Generation*, the hero and heroine first meet on a heather moor, among “the encircling hills”, and their declaration of love is also made while walking on the “Bynie road”.⁸⁰ The novel ends with the couple embracing “in the safe shelter of the little hillock”.⁸¹ The ending of *A Maid of the Isles* offers a similar connection to nature as “Old Blaaven and all the other pinnacles nodded and smiled in acquiescence, and arm-in-arm they turned away with their faces to the east”.⁸² Key moments of the romance plot are thus explicitly connected to the Scottish natural world.

Even when a character is not themselves Scottish, this does not prevent their romance being connected to the landscape. In *The American Wife*, the hero's attraction for the heroine is manifested when he drives past her sitting on a stone bridge over a burn near his estate in Dalwhinnie, "the sun turning her bronze hair into pure gold".⁸³ The Scottish environment burnishes the potential romantic partner, increasing her value – bronze to gold – and her romantic appeal. Several key moments in their romance are explicitly connected with local geography: "There was the bathhouse from which, on two occasions, they had launched the old coble and rowed up to the little lodge. There was the bridge over the burn – at the moment a roaring torrent with melted snow – where he had told his story and got her promise to be his wife."⁸⁴ The 'old coble' is connected to previous generations' romances too, as "the Cameron brides were always brought by the boat to Dalnaglas."⁸⁵ Such outdoor trysting is practical, offering a chance for lovers to meet away from parental surveillance, but the extent to which key moments of the romantic plot – the meeting, the declaration, the betrothal – are connected with the Scottish landscape indicates how Swan's work interlinks the 'romance' of the Scottish landscape with the 'essential elements' of the romance plot.

Conclusion

In their introduction to the *Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, Jayashree Kamblé, Hsu-Ming Teo and Eric Selinger write:

it is only in the twentieth century that the romance novel emerges as a distinct category of publishing and readership, marked both by textual features (the necessity of a "happy ending" of successful relationship formation) and by the array of paratextual features (cover art, gendered marketing practices, distinctive networks of distribution and reception) that distinguish it both in the public eye and in the eyes of potential readers.⁸⁶

While others have noted the similarities between Swan's readership, publishing and distribution models and that of popular romance (see Norquay, Shields), this study is the first, as far as I am aware, to focus on the 'textual features' of Swan's twentieth-

century writings and their relationship to the popular romance genre. Reading a selection of Swan's twentieth-century works alongside 2000s Scottish popular romance novels, it is clear that Swan's writing can be seen as an early example of Scottish popular romance at a time when popular romance was taking shape as a modern genre. The 'essential' plot structures of the popular romance novel are increasingly present in Swan's later works. The focus on rural locations in Swan's works anticipates the pre-urban, rural emphasis in 1990s and 2000s historical Scottish romances; even in Swan's contemporary-set novels, Scotland is persistently represented as rural and 'un-modern'. And the temporal nostalgia of Swan's Scotland positions the country as either a retreat from the bustle of modernity aiding mental and physical recuperation, or a deprivation of day-to-day comforts and sophistication. Swan's twentieth-century writing thus stands as a body of work which cleaves to the structures of popular romance fiction and which showcases motifs that persist in 2000s Scottish popular romance fiction.

In drawing attention to the connections between Swan's twentieth-century works and 2000s Scottish romance, I am not suggesting that these later novelists are explicitly drawing on Swan's writing. Indeed, authors of 2000s popular romance do not cite Swan as a specific influence; the American authors of Scottish romance interviewed by Euan Hague name Walter Scott and Diana Gabaldon as significant for their own writing.⁸⁷ Yet, recognising Swan's later works as examples of twentieth-century Scottish popular romance offers, I would argue, three new perspectives on Swan and her literary record. First, when considering the way Swan uses the conventions and structures of the popular romance genre, what was previously seen as formulism and a lack of "literary merit" by critics can be viewed instead as skilled genre authorship. Swan manipulates and reworks motifs, plots, and settings to produce fictional works that fit reader and editorial expectations – this perspective positions her as a professional and knowledgeable author, rather than an unimaginative hack. Instead of being seen as outmoded, Swan's works, when compared with other examples of Scottish popular romance, are newly contextualised as products in an increasingly sophisticated, distinctive romance market. If the Scottish Renaissance was marked by "writers ... revising histories and literary traditions with a view to modernising and regenerating them", Swan could rightfully claim to be similarly regenerating her own writing in the early twentieth century by combining themes from her nineteenth-century works –

mythical Scotland, a rural focus –with romance plot structures.⁸⁸ While Gabaldon's *Outlander* and other 1990s and 2000s Scottish romances have a role to play in the development of the genre, it is clear that the existing narrative of Scottish popular romance development is more complex than previously claimed.

Second, Swan's huge readership provides a further point of connection with 1990s and 2000s Scottish romance and indicates that there was a substantial audience for Scottish popular romance long before *Outlander*. Like 1990s and 2000s Scottish historical romance, Swan had a large North American readership – in the late nineteenth century, she was the number 7 boys favourite author and number 11 girls' favourite in the public library in Osage, Iowa.⁸⁹ A letter from a Canadian fan to the editor of *People's Journal* in July 1938 noted that "[t]here are many Scots in this part of the world and the P. J. and Friend are to be found in most homes."⁹⁰ Viewing Swan as an early author of Scottish popular romance thus recalibrates previous understandings of readership, indicating a persistent twentieth-century interest from North American readers in Scottish popular romance. Finally, positioning Swan as a popular romance author increases her visibility to a critical and popular audience. Swan's writings, particularly her twentieth-century works, have been largely forgotten. There has been more interest in her social and political life in this period than in her literary output. Reclaiming Swan as a prolific and experienced popular romance author might open the possibility for new critical perspectives on Swan to emerge for scholars of Scottish literature.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

¹ David Stenhouse, 'America Is Turned on by Kilt Ripping Yarns', *The Sunday Times*, 27 March 2005 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/america-is-turned-on-by-kilt-ripping-yarns-5n5c9dxggpg>> [accessed 22 September 2021].

² Euan Hague, 'Mass Market Romance Fiction and the Representation of Scotland in the United States', in *The Modern Scottish Diaspora: Contemporary Debates and Perspectives*, ed. by Murray Stewart Leith and Duncan Sim (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 171–90 (p. 183). There has been some discussion of whether *Outlander* is, strictly, a romance novel – see Jodi McAlister, 'Travelling through Time and Genre: Are the Outlander Books Romance Novels?', in *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre, and the Female Readership* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), pp. 94–105.

³ Beth Dickson, 'Annie S. Swan and O. Douglas: Legacies of the Kailyard', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy Macmillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 329–46 (p. 329). Juliet Shields explores Swan's 'literary personae' in 'Preaching without Practicing: Middle-Class Domesticity in Annie S. Swan's Serial Fiction', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 52.3 (2019), 566–87.

⁴ Dickson, p. 329. A letter from Glasgow-based bookseller Donald Gillies to Swan in 1939 noted that he had managed to collect "not less than 173 separate works – about 130 by A. S. Swan, and 43, by David Lyall" (Letter from Donald Gillies to Mrs. Burnett-Smith (Annie S. Swan), 18 June 1937, Acc. 6003, Box 1E, Papers of Annie S Swan, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh).

⁵ Margaret Beetham, 'Periodical Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 221–35 (p. 232); Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1990), p. 1050; Beth Palmer, 'Assuming the Role of Editor', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Peterson, Linda H. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 59–72 (p. 63); Kemp, Mitchell, and Trotter, p. 380.

⁶ Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 339; Charlotte Reid, 'A Cursory Visit of Inspection to Annie S. Swan', *Cenchrastus: The Curly Snake*, 38 (1990), 28–31 (pp. 28, 29); Kemp, Mitchell, and Trotter, p. 380. For a comprehensive overview of Swan's career, see Gillian Neale, 'Annie S. Swan, Publishing Phenomenon: A Book Historical Perspective', *Scottish Literary Review*, 12.2 (2020), 91–109.

⁷ She does not appear in Alan Bold's *Modern Scottish Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1983), Glenda Norquay's *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) (which contains chapters on domestic fiction and the periodicals for which Swan wrote, but does not mention Swan), Joanne Shattock's *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Paul and June Schlueter's revised *Encyclopedia of British Women Writers*, 2nd ed (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), Lorna Sage's *The Cambridge Guide to*

Women's Writing in English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Ian Brown and Alan Riach's *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Swan is mentioned in Volume 1 'to the nineteenth century' of Watson's *The Literature of Scotland*; and she appears in Kemp, Mitchell and Trotter, *Edwardian Fiction*. Seventeen lines are devoted to Swan in John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009).

⁸ Sutherland, p. 622.

⁹ Reid, p. 28.

¹⁰ Dickson, p. 334.

¹¹ Juliet Shields, *Scottish Women's Writing in the Long Nineteenth Century: The Romance of Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 29.

¹² Shields, *Scottish Women's Writing*, pp. 183–84.

¹³ Shields, *Scottish Women's Writing*, p. 69.

¹⁴ Shields, *Scottish Women's Writing*, p. 27.

¹⁵ See Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 160.

¹⁷ Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 115.

¹⁸ Jay Dixon, 'History of English Romance Novels, 1621-1975', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. by Hsu-Ming Teo, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Jayashree Kamblé (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), pp. 27–50 (pp. 34–35).

¹⁹ Regis, p. 14.

²⁰ Shields, *Scottish Women's Writing*, p. 6.

²¹ Shields, *Scottish Women's Writing*, p. 6.

²² Hague, p. 178.

²³ Hague, p. 174.

²⁴ 'Avon Books - An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers'

<<https://www.harpercollins.com/pages/avonbooks>> [accessed 22 June 2022].

²⁵ Hague, p. 184.

²⁶ Euan Hague and David Stenhouse, 'A Very Interesting Place: Representing Scotland in American Romance Novels', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 354–61 (pp. 360, 358–59). While she does not discuss Scottish romance, Diane M. Calhoun-French's chapter 'Time-travel and Related Phenomenon in Contemporary Popular Romance Fiction' offers a good overview of the trope in late-1990s romance (in *Romantic Conventions*, ed. Anne K. Kaler and Rosemary E. Johnson-Kurek (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 100–112).

²⁷ 'About the Romance Genre'

<https://www.rwa.org/Online/Romance_Genre/About_Romance_Genre.aspx> [accessed 22 June 2022].

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- ²⁸ Kristin Ramsdell, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), p. 27.
- ²⁹ Ramsdell, p. 28; Ann Bouricius, *The Romance Reader's Advisory: The Librarian's Guide to Love in the Stacks*, Chicago: American Library Association, 2000, pages 3-4, cited in Angela Toscano, 'Teach Me Tonight: What Is Romance?', *Teach Me Tonight* <<https://teachmetonight.blogspot.com/p/romance-novel.html>> [accessed 23 June 2022].
- ³⁰ Regis, pp. 14, 35.
- ³¹ Annie S. Swan, *Aldersyde. A Border Story of Seventy Years Ago*. (Edinburgh, 1883).
- ³² Edmond F. Gardiner, 'Annie S. Swan-Forerunner of Modern Popular Fiction', *Library Review*, 24.6 (1974), 251-54 (p. 251).
- ³³ Annie S. Swan, *Wrongs Righted* (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 17.
- ³⁴ Swan, *Wrongs Righted*, p. 45.
- ³⁵ Annie S. Swan, *The Family Name* (Dundee: J. Leng & Co., 1942), p. 15.
- ³⁶ Swan, *The Family Name*, p. 13.
- ³⁷ Swan, *The Family Name*, p. 57.
- ³⁸ Swan, *The Family Name*, p. 88.
- ³⁹ Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 4.
- ⁴⁰ Lynsay Sands, *An English Bride in Scotland* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), chap. 1 <https://nls.idls.org.uk/welcome.html?ark:/81055/vdc_100081351391.0x000001> [accessed 21 June 2022].
- ⁴¹ Thomas D. Knowles, *Ideology, Art, and Commerce: Aspects of Literary Sociology in the Late Victorian Scottish Kailyard*, Gothenburg Studies in English, 54 (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1983), p. 15.
- ⁴² Annie S. Swan, *The Third Generation* (Dundee: John Leng & Co., 1940), p. 41.
- ⁴³ Annie S. Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1938), pp. 229-30, 214.
- ⁴⁴ Annie S. Swan, *The Secret of Skye* (Dundee: J. Leng and Co., 1940), pp. 15-18.
- ⁴⁵ Annie S. Swan, *A Maid of the Isles: A Romance of Skye* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), p. 218.
- ⁴⁶ Swan, *A Maid of the Isles: A Romance of Skye*, p. 221.
- ⁴⁷ Karen Marie Moning, *The Highlander's Touch* (New York: Dell, 2000), p. 136.
- ⁴⁸ Moning, p. 187.
- ⁴⁹ Moning, p. 187; my emphasis.
- ⁵⁰ Swan, *A Maid of the Isles: A Romance of Skye*, p. 112.
- ⁵¹ Annie S. Swan, *An American Wife* (Dundee: J. Leng & Co., 1937), p. 32.
- ⁵² Swan, *The Family Name*, p. 15.
- ⁵³ Swan, *The Family Name*, p. 44.
- ⁵⁴ Swan, *The Secret of Skye*, p. 20.
- ⁵⁵ Hague and Stenhouse, p. 359.
- ⁵⁶ Stephenie McGucken, "'A Love Letter to Scotland' The Creation and Conception of Heritage', in *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience*, ed.

by Valerie Estelle Frankel (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), pp. 7–22 (p. 7); Pittock, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Moning, p. 155.

⁵⁸ Moning, p. 304.

⁵⁹ Moning, p. 308.

⁶⁰ Moning, p. 219.

⁶¹ Swan, *The Secret of Skye*, p. 120.

⁶² Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 89.

⁶³ Swan, *A Maid of the Isles: A Romance of Skye*, p. 192.

⁶⁴ Lynsay Sands, *An English Bride in Scotland*, Ebook (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), chap. 4.

⁶⁵ Sands, chap. 10.

⁶⁶ Sands, chap. 10.

⁶⁷ Sands, chaps 11, 12.

⁶⁸ Sands, chap. 12.

⁶⁹ Sands, chap. 12.

⁷⁰ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 48.

⁷¹ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, pp. 28–29.

⁷² Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 214.

⁷³ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 214.

⁷⁴ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 255.

⁷⁵ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 127.

⁷⁶ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, pp. 96, 322–23, my emphasis.

⁷⁷ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, pp. 307–8.

⁷⁸ Swan, *A Breaker of Hearts*, p. 350.

⁷⁹ Moning, pp. 137, 208.

⁸⁰ Swan, *The Third Generation*, pp. 13, 81.

⁸¹ Swan, *The Third Generation*, p. 160.

⁸² Swan, *A Maid of the Isles: A Romance of Skye*, p. 343.

⁸³ Swan, *An American Wife*, p. 21.

⁸⁴ Swan, *An American Wife*, p. 127.

⁸⁵ Swan, *An American Wife*, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 1–23 (p. 3).

⁸⁷ Hague, p. 184.

⁸⁸ Lyndsay Lunan and Kirsty A. Macdonald, "Introduction: Vision and Re-Vision," in *Re-Visioning Scotland: New Readings of the Cultural Canon* ed. Lyndsay Lunan, Kirsty A. Macdonald and Carla Sassi (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), xviii.

⁸⁹ Christine Pawley, "What to Read and How to Read: The Social Infrastructure of Young People's Reading, Osage, Iowa, 1870 to 1900," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 68 no. 3 (1998): 289.

⁹⁰ Letter from 'a Scot abroad' to the editor of the *People's Journal*, 27(?) July 1938, Acc. 6003, Box 1E, Papers of Annie S Swan, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.