

KIT KENNEDY 120

'All Authors have one hero, the boy they would have liked to be...'

One of Crockett's finest contributions to literature is his portrayal of the 'ordinary' hero. And these are often either boys or young men. Where told in the first person we often get a retrospective position with the older 'self' reflecting back upon the foibles of youth.

With the 120th anniversary of the publication of Kit Kennedy upon us, I'm exploring Crockett's 'boy heroes' in some depth - but be aware, this is very much a work in progress. I'm making my current thinking available to Raiders Members simply because it might spark interest and debate. It's not, by any means, well developed or finished! You have been warned.

WHERE DOES KIT COME FROM? EXPLORING BOY HEROES.

Kit Kennedy appears in 1895 in the collection of stories *Bog Myrtle and Peat*, as 'Kit Kennedy Ne'er do well'. This sketch was most likely published earlier (eg *Christian Leader*) but I haven't tracked it down yet. Like so many thing, I suspect the answer lies in Richard Jackson's comprehensive research archives.

Kit also appears as a 'bit part' character in Crockett's successful 1896 novel 'Cleg Kelly'. So we can certainly date him as character from 1895, and looking earlier, he shares many characteristics with another of Crockett's 'boys', one Walter (Wattie)Anderson, who first came to light in the sketches that became 'A Galloway Herd.'

LITERARY AND MATERIAL CONTEXT.

The Sketches ran in magazines in the late 1880s and early 1890s (again, I need to check the archive for complete accuracy) and were never officially published as a novel in Crockett's lifetime. They remained a set of episodic sketches, though Crockett was keen to work them up and publish them, and pitched the idea to his publisher T.Fisher Unwin in 1894 but received an unenthusiastic response. In 1895 'A Galloway Herd' was published in a pirated form in America. It is a strange work, episodic and uneven perhaps, but that is because as far as Crockett was concerned it was in no way a finished work.

Comparing 'A Galloway Herd' with 'Kit Kennedy' one can, however, see a clear 're-purposing' of the former into the latter. It is also clear that both are semi-autobiographical.

The contract for the serial publication of 'Kit Kennedy' was signed with James Clarke & Co in March 1897 with a delivery date of September 1898. This suggests that Crockett's window of opportunity for working on 'Kit Kennedy' would be from summer 1897 through till end of summer 1898. Archive records show that on

March 12th 1897 Crockett was in London attending the Argonauts Club and on March 20th of that year he was diagnosed with 'nervous exhaustion' and prescribed a walking holiday in Europe. He went to Pomerania that April but was back in Penicuik in May. He spent most of June and July in St Andrews in both 1897 and 1898, and was back in Penicuik for August in both years.

Other contracts in 1897 were 'Love Idylls' (short story collection) and 'Joan of the Sword Hand'. In general, commissioning tended to happen 18 months in advance of serial publication, giving Crockett a clear year to work on text. Still, he would be working on more than one project at a time. The fact that he generally wrote one European and one Scottish fiction during a year offers an answer as to how he managed to hold two distinct storylines in his head at once. However, in busy times, he could get weighed down with multiple stories at various stages of creative production.

During the time he was writing 'Kit Kennedy', he had delivery dates for 'The Black Douglas' (July 1898, which was 'missed' and still unfinished when the serial started in Sept of that year). 'Ione March' was due December 1897 (and serialised in *The Peoples' Friend* Jan-Sept 1898) and 'The Silver Skull' was due February 1898. It was serialised in *Pall Mall* from August 1898 to May 1899. 'Joan of the Sword Hand' was serialised in *The Windsor Magazine* from December 1898 - Nov 1899. This gives you an idea of how busy Crockett was during the period he was working on 'Kit Kennedy'.

We also know from archive records that he was travelling abroad over the winter of 1897 and spring of 1898. He may have spent as much as three months in France over that winter. And in April 1898 he was off on a six week walking tour. The plan was to go to Italy to finish work on 'The Silver Skull' but he went to La Granja in Spain. Here he got the inspiration for another new story, 'The Firebrand', which was commissioned in 1899.

So it is most likely that 'Kit Kennedy' was largely written either during the summer of 1897 or 1898. If the former it would be competing with golf at St Andrews as well as several other works besides; 'The Black Douglas' (possibly 'The Red Axe' and 'The Standard Bearer'). 'Ione March' was also due for delivery in December of 1897.

In 1898 Kit would be competing with golf and 'The Black Douglas' which was proving problematic, not least because he was encouraged to alter the story - in his original pitch he envisaged the story that encompassed both 'The Black Douglas' and its sequel 'Maid Margaret', but for some reason (we may speculate it was due to the 'Dracula' effect) it changed - some may say, lurched half way through to become a kind of gothic horror. He was also working on 'Little Anna Mark' and 'Joan of the Sword Hand' during this period.

Of all these, 'Kit Kennedy' would be by far the easier story to write, being so largely biographical and given the previous Galloway Herd writings.

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KIT.

The first half of 'Kit Kennedy' is set in Crockett's childhood area of Castle Douglas (fictionalised as Cairn Edward) and the Glenkens, and then moves to Edinburgh. The transition from country boy to city boy is perhaps reminiscent of 'Great Expectations', but it was not simply re-using a popular (or hackneyed) trope, it was redolent with the reality of Crockett's own lived experience.

Crockett regarded his memory as a strong support, writing:

'When in doubt, always shut your head and... observe! Take my word for it, you are not wasting your time. They say in our country 'Keep a thing seven years and you will find a use for it.' But I say, 'Remember a thing... exactly, mind you... thirty or forty years and you will find a place expressly hollowed out for it, where it will grow and branch out and seed like a potted plant'

This good memory of a romantic/romanticised childhood in the Glenkens served Crockett very well throughout his fiction, as 'Kit Kennedy' amply demonstrates. In her 'Life and Work' Dr Donaldson points out that the setting for the first half of 'Kit Kennedy' is the same as that of 'The Lilac Sunbonnet' five years previously, and the Glenkens chunks certainly have a summery feel. Chapters 22 and 23, featuring Kit going to school, are particularly interesting - especially if compared with Chapter 11 in 'The Lilac Sunbonnet' which sees Andra Kissock procrastinating his own way from home to school. In both cases 'home' is a fictionalised version of Little Duchrae and the road is the A762 towards Laurieston along Woodhall (or as Crockett called it in tribute to its earlier name, Grenoch) Loch. You can still walk this route. I was there this June and can confirm that Crockett's description of its charms is still both evocative and accurate.

But some of 'Kit Kennedy' may have been written while Crockett was in St Andrews on 'holiday' with his family. At this time his pattern tended to be to rise and write from four to eight am, then play a round of golf and another in the afternoon. His children were aged between 9 and 1 years old - it can't have been much of a holiday for Ruth! The family stayed at The Scores which was then a boarding house but is now a fairly swishy hotel.

All that said, 'Kit Kennedy' must have been fairly easy for Crockett to write, drawing as it does from so much of his real life both in the country and the city.

Kit, like Crockett, is the child of an unmarried mother (though Kit's illegitimacy is commuted to a sham marriage in order to appease the sensibilities of *The Peoples' Friend* audience - or publisher!) He also won the Galloway Bursary to Edinburgh University - and lodged in the same area he describes in the novel, though we can only speculate on the romantic elements of the story.

Syndication was rampant in the late 1890s and 'Kit Kennedy' was serialised both in *The Christian World* and *The Peoples' Friend* magazines PF from January 1899 guaranteeing two ready audiences. The novel published that autumn when

the serial ended, giving him another bite at the cherry - and another revenue stream. Crockett worked hard at his fiction and it was made to work hard for him by his agent A.P.Watt. The novel was published by James Clarke & Co who had also bought the UK serial rights. It was also published in America and worldwide.

If you are interested (as I am) in the development of Crockett's ideas and characters through his writing you might like to look at the chapters online:

Chapter 11 Andra Kissock Goes to school can be found [HERE](#)

And chapters 22 and 23 of Kit Kennedy are available as a download in the Kit Kennedy 120 section of the website.

I am working on a comparative literary analysis of the two works, but that's a story for another day!