

# **Comparative Literary Analysis: Three Modes of Crockett's Art revealed through three short stories set in Galloway.**

## **Introduction: The Range of a Writer**

These three pieces from S.R. Crockett's work—"The Little Green Man" (1912), "Love Among the Beech Leaves" (1901), and "Night in the Galloway Woods" (1895)—span seventeen years of his career and demonstrate remarkable versatility across three distinct modes: the metafictional children's story with frame narrative, the romantic comedy grounded in rural realism, and the nature essay combining scientific observation with literary craft. Yet beneath their generic differences lie consistent preoccupations, techniques, and qualities that mark them as products of the same literary sensibility.

## **Generic Versatility**

### **Three Distinct Modes**

"The Little Green Man" operates within the tradition of oral storytelling for children, employing a sophisticated frame narrative that creates multiple levels of reality. The outer frame presents "Father" telling stories to his children whilst the inner tale recounts the Little Green Man's adventures in the Bogle Thorn. This structure enables metafictional commentary—Hugh John has "grown tired" of the story, suggesting both the character's maturation and the story's self-awareness about narrative conventions.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" works as romantic comedy grounded in rural social realism. It follows conventional courtship narrative patterns—spirited heroine, bookish hero, separation, reunion—but embeds these within authentic agricultural economics, class dynamics, and labour relations. The story balances romance with practical concerns: rabbit snaring as both economic necessity and romantic bonding, Shakespeare reading as both self-improvement and class transgression.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" represents nature writing in the tradition of Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson, structured temporally rather than narratively. It documents the progression from twilight through darkness to dawn, organised by observational sections rather than plot events. The essay eschews human drama entirely in favour of avian behaviour, atmospheric change, and sensory experience.

### **Formal Experimentation**

Despite these generic differences, each piece demonstrates formal sophistication. "The Little Green Man" employs nested narration with multiple time frames: the present moment of telling, Father's childhood encounters with the Little Green Man, and the tale's internal chronology of marriage,

children, and crisis. The frame narrative constantly interrupts the tale with the children's reactions, creating dialogue between story levels.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" structures itself through paired scenes that mark temporal progression: the initial marble game and final reunion, the tree-climbing episodes, the night-time rabbit expeditions. These parallel moments demonstrate both continuity (Elizabeth and Rab's essential characters) and transformation (their physical and social maturation).

"Night in the Galloway Woods" organises experience through clearly demarcated temporal sections, yet within each section Crockett creates mini-narratives: the worm versus blackbird tug-of-war, the missel thrush's bullying, the hen harriers' predation. Even without human characters, the essay generates dramatic interest through these animal encounters.

## **Common Thematic Concerns**

### **Place and Topographical Specificity**

All three pieces demonstrate Crockett's deep attachment to Galloway landscape and his conviction that authentic place-names and topographical detail enhance rather than limit literary effect.

"The Little Green Man" anchors fantasy in real locations: "the Bogle Thorn on the road between Laurieston and the Duchrae," the Edam Water with its "first Torres Vedras," Woodhall Loch, John Knox's Pulpit, the Folds Firs, "the Falls of Drumbledowndreary." Father insists the tale is true "because you know yourselves that you have seen the very place and the Bogle Thorn and all." This grounding of fantasy in recognisable landscape creates what might be termed "magical realism" before that term existed.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" establishes Pitlarg as a fully realised working farm with specific features: the Playing Green, the mill with its iron bar, the three great beeches, the march dyke separating the farm from neighbouring sporting estates, the view from the tree-tops to "Criffel an' the three Cairns mores." The agricultural economics—game from neighbouring estates devastating crops, the Ground Game Act enabling legal snaring—emerge from specific land-use patterns in Galloway.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" locates itself precisely in Galloway terrain: "the marshes by Loch Moan," the river pool, the pheasant coverts. The essay documents species characteristic of the region and notes local nomenclature: the jay as "jay piet," the hen harrier as "Blue Gled" and "Ringtail."

This consistent topographical specificity serves multiple purposes: it validates Crockett's authority as regional chronicler, it creates immediacy and authenticity, and it resists the universalising tendency that could render Scottish experience generic or interchangeable with English countryside writing.

### **Trees as Central Presence**

Trees function significantly in all three pieces, not merely as setting but as active presence and symbolic resonance.

In "The Little Green Man," the Bogle Thorn serves as the 'Green' family's dwelling, with "loveliest little parlour and bedrooms all in the inside of the tree, everything finished neat as cabinet-making, and the floor carpeted...and there were little windows, too, with glass in them, and shutters that shut with the bark outside." The tree becomes domestic space, its interior adapted to family life with "a beautiful pleasure-ground at the top" and "a clipped-hedge parapet all round to keep the Little Green Children from falling over." The tree's vertical structure—from Rooty's "corkscrew staircases" in the roots to Toppo's realm in the crown—provides the story's spatial organisation.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" features trees centrally in its title and romantic geography. The three great beeches in Pitlargo's courtyard provide the setting for Rab's reading retreat, where he creates "a seat where you can sit and swing, and the wind rocks ye, an' the leaves birl about ye and tell ye stories." The trees become the locus of intellectual and emotional intimacy: Elizabeth keeps "a hand twisted permanently in the crisp curls at the back of his head" whilst Rab performs Shakespeare. The story's resolution occurs "under the beech trees," where "the leaves rustled invitingly" and the hawthorn hedge creates "a fragrant dusk of shade" for the first kiss.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" presents trees as habitat and acoustic environment: wood-pigeons preferring "above all trees...the spruce," starlings roosting on branches, the barn owl settling "in that oak without a sound." The "copses" and "coverts" structure movement and sight lines, whilst "the tops of the tall trees" provide elevated perspectives for rooks. Trees create the "shade of the wood" where observation begins and the "dark coverts of the underbrush" where birds flee for safety.

This arboreal focus connects to broader patterns in Crockett's work (his environmental concerns, his interest in Galloway's woodland ecology) and creates symbolic resonances—trees as dwelling, as shelter, as site of transformation, as vertical axis connecting earth and sky.

## **Childhood, Education, and Development**

All three pieces concern themselves with growth, learning, and the passage from innocence to experience, though each addresses these themes differently.

"The Little Green Man" makes growing up its explicit subject: "It was about then that Hugh John suddenly grew up...This time, however, it was for keeps." The story Hugh John has outgrown becomes the story told to younger siblings, particularly "Margaret the Maid." Within the tale itself, Little Rooty's disobedience, capture, and rescue function as bildungsroman in miniature—the child who "would not 'take a telling'" learns through mortal danger the wisdom of parental guidance. Yet the promised punishment never materialises; instead, the family celebrates together, suggesting a more psychologically sophisticated understanding than simple didacticism.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" traces dual development. Rab Christie arrives as awkward seventeen-year-old farm labourer but carries Shakespeare, Macaulay, Milton, and Carlyle. His trajectory from "new loon" hired at a penny an hour to Edinburgh college bursar embodies the self-improvement narrative central to Victorian Scottish culture. Elizabeth's development proves equally significant: from barefoot marble-playing "hempie" at fifteen to "sedate young lady" at eighteen, though the story insists her essential character survives transformation. The final scene demonstrates this continuity: when Rab kisses her, she delivers "as sound a cuff on the ear as she would have done before he went away"—maturity coexisting with the "old Bess."

"Night in the Galloway Woods" addresses development through natural cycles rather than individual maturation. The essay documents the transition from night to day as a kind of awakening or birth: "Nature is freshest with the dew of her beauty-sleep upon her." The progression from darkness through twilight to "full chorus" mirrors developmental stages, whilst observations of specific behaviours—the barn owl feeding "an open-mouthed family," the early worm's painful education about early rising—embed growth and learning within natural processes.

## **Humour and Deflation**

All three pieces employ humour, often through deflation of romantic or sentimental conventions.

"The Little Green Man" generates comedy through the children's interruptions and Father's responses. When the Maid asks how Father could see inside the tree, he answers matter-of-factly: "the Little Green Man touched a spring, and let me look through the windows." When she asks whom the Little Green Man married, Father replies "in a tone of surprise mixed with reproof": "Why, he married the Little Green Woman." This deadpan delivery to questions the child should know the answers to creates gentle humour about storytelling conventions.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" employs comedy at multiple levels: physical humour in the marble game scene, verbal wit in dialogue (Mistress MacAndrew's confusion about "Shakespeare" as possible ailment—"Is't a swallin' or a 'luppen shinnin'?"), and situational irony throughout. The running presence of Donald the perpetually hungry pet sheep provides comic punctuation, whilst Uncle William's discovery of Elizabeth's schoolbag contents—including Wull Beattie's love note ("The rose is red, the vilet's blew, / Sugar's sweet, / And so are you!")—creates comedy from adolescent mortification.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" deflates poetic conventions about nature. The wood-pigeon, despite association with Tennyson's "moan of doves in immemorial elms," proves "a vulgar and slangy bird," his mystical moaning consisting of "squabblings and disputings about vested rights." The starlings behave like "jolly students" pushing drowsy companions off branches for amusement. The extended comedy of worm versus blackbird—with the worm's tail "tangled up with the centre of the earth"—finds genuine humour in predatory mechanics.

This consistent humour serves serious purposes: it prevents sentimentality, it creates tonal variety, and it acknowledges the gap between literary convention and observed reality.

## **Narrative Voice and Perspective**

### **The Observing Presence**

Each piece establishes a distinctive narrative voice, yet all three share certain qualities: warmth without sentimentality, authority without pedantry, and engagement with the reader or listener.

"The Little Green Man" employs a child narrator looking back on family storytelling sessions. This voice comments on Father's technique ("A father who can be conveniently deaf at times is the best kind"), on Hugh John's betrayal in outgrowing the tale, and on the story's status as repeated ritual ("she had heard it above a thousand times before. So it stayed quite new to her"). The narrator exists

simultaneously inside the story (as one of the children listening) and outside it (as adult reflecting on childhood).

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" uses third-person narration with strong access to multiple characters' internal states. The narrator moves between Elizabeth's perspective (her hurt at Rab's departure, her embarrassment at Uncle William's discovery of her schoolbag), Rab's viewpoint (his confusion at Elizabeth's transformation, his obliviousness to her feelings), and William MacAndrew's observations. Yet the narrator also makes direct addresses and asides: "Which was Mrs. MacAndrew's way of saying that her husband did not love hard work."

"Night in the Galloway Woods" employs first-person plural: "We wait a little in the shade of the wood," "Let us stand beneath this low-branched elder," "We can see them now." This "we" creates companionship between narrator and reader, inviting shared observation whilst maintaining the narrator's guiding authority. The voice combines scientific precision with literary allusion, naturalist's expertise with accessible explanation.

### **Authority and Accessibility**

All three voices balance specialist knowledge with accessible presentation. "The Little Green Man" demonstrates deep familiarity with Scottish fairy lore and landscape whilst remaining comprehensible to children. "Love Among the Beech Leaves" reveals understanding of agricultural economics, rural class relations, and Victorian literary culture without becoming didactic. "Night in the Galloway Woods" displays genuine ornithological expertise—noting that "many birds have a night cry quite distinct from their day note" or that danger calls function across species whilst courtship calls remain species-specific—whilst maintaining conversational tone.

This balance reflects Crockett's position as mediator between learned culture and popular readership, university-educated intellectual and regional chronicler, urban literary marketplace and rural Scottish experience.

## **Language and Style**

### **Scots Dialogue and Standard English Narration**

Two of the three pieces employ distinctive patterns of Scots dialogue within standard English narration, creating linguistic texture that marks them as specifically Scottish without becoming incomprehensible to non-Scottish readers.

"The Little Green Man" uses standard English throughout except for occasional Scots words ("oot o' that," "bools"). This reflects the piece's status as Father's performed story for children, already translated into a more universally accessible register. The story-within-the-story uses entirely standard English, creating a fairy-tale atmosphere unconstrained by regional dialect.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" employs rich Scots dialogue for all the MacAndrews and for Rab Christie, contrasting with standard English narration. Mistress MacAndrew's exasperated calls—"Elizabeth Macandrew! Saw ye ever the make o' that lassie?"—and her later confusion about Shakespeare—"What's Shakespeare?—Is't a swallin' or a 'luppen shinnin'?"—demonstrate Crockett's ear for idiomatic speech. The dialogue creates characterisation through linguistic register:

William MacAndrew's thoughtful deliberation ("I was jaloosin' that it wadna be your Bible"), Bess's imperious demands and later sedate formality.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" uses standard English throughout except when noting local nomenclature: "jay piet," "Blue Gled," "Ringtail." This reflects the essay's genre—nature writing addressed to an educated, potentially non-Scottish readership—and its scientific aspirations.

## **Sensory Precision**

All three pieces demonstrate remarkable sensory precision, particularly regarding sound.

"The Little Green Man" includes onomatopoeia for the arrow's flight: "CLIP!" for the bowstring, "IZZ—IK!" for the arrow striking and the point breaking off. The story emphasises acoustic detail throughout: the Little Green Children "pattering up and down the dainty little turning staircase," the Grey Dwarf's chuckle "like thunder among the hills very far away."

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" captures the summer afternoon's drowsy quality through sound: hens "clucking low to themselves for very content," Donald the sheep thrusting "his nose into every pail and bucket," the "sharp, breathless rush" of wild ducks "like quick rifle shots cutting through brushwood" ending in "Splash! splash!" The night-time rabbit snaring includes the sound of snares "being filled up only a few hundred yards from where they were working."

"Night in the Galloway Woods" makes sound central to its observational method. Crockett documents the "melancholy hoot of the barn owl," the "iterative and wearisome" corn-crake, the "whistling swoop" of wood-pigeon wings, the sheep's "short, sharp bites—one, two, three, four, five bites," the heron's "heavy flaps of his labouring wings" resounding "in the still morning." He notes acoustic variations: distant cock-crows "like pixies blowing their horns" versus nearer roosters whose chronic colds send their voices "deep down into his spurs."

This acoustic attention serves multiple purposes: it creates immersive atmosphere, it demonstrates the writer's observational precision, and it acknowledges that much of rural experience occurs through sound rather than sight.

## **Metaphor and Simile**

All three pieces employ vivid comparative language, though to different effects.

"The Little Green Man" uses simile to make the fantastic comprehensible: the Grey Dwarf falls "with a 'squelch' like a big heap of wet clothes thrown down on the laundry floor on washing-day morning." The Little Green Man's house has "walls wainscoted with green silk from a fairy Liberty's, its ceilings done in Grass of Parnassus with sprigs and tassels of larch"—domestic detail rendered fantastical.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" employs comparison for comic and characterising effect: Elizabeth and Rab "hooked on to three branches like a great grey homespun squirrel," sheep without lambs "very like an Arab encampment," Rab's joints "like knots on beech branches, and his long neck gave him the look of a jack heron that has just alighted." These comparisons create visual clarity whilst revealing character through the terms of comparison.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" uses metaphor both scientifically (night as tide: "the high tide of darkness pauses before it begins to ebb") and comically (the blackbird pulling at the worm "for all the world like a sailor at a rope," the worm's tail "tangled up with the centre of the earth"). The essay's extended comparison of sleeping sheep to "an Arab encampment" draws on either personal travel or literary knowledge to expand the reader's frame of reference.

## **Social and Cultural Context**

### **Rural Economy and Class Relations**

Two of the three pieces engage substantively with rural economic realities and class structures.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" embeds its romance within authentic agricultural economics. Pitlarg's difficulties stem from being surrounded by sporting estates whose game devastates crops—a genuine grievance in late Victorian rural Scotland. The Ground Game Act (1880) provides legal framework for Rab's rabbit-snaring enterprise, which addresses both economic necessity and social injustice. Rab's trajectory from penny-an-hour labourer to college bursary student demonstrates real possibilities of social mobility through education and enterprise, whilst the story never pretends class barriers don't exist. The detail about "the cheap edition of Carlyle (blessed treasure of Providence for boys in their teens during the sixties and seventies!)" points to historical processes of cultural democratisation through affordable publishing.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" includes social criticism regarding land management. Jays are killed "for the sake of a pheasant's egg or two," demonstrating the gamekeeper as "the worst of hanging judges. To be tried by him is to be condemned." The keeper would shoot hen harriers "if he thought that the laird would not find out," revealing tensions between sporting preservation and biodiversity. The quotation from Lockwood Kipling—gamekeepers "look at nature along the barrel of a gun / Which is false perspective"—introduces explicit critique of sporting estate management.

"The Little Green Man" operates in fantasy mode and thus engages less directly with social realities, yet even here details carry social markers: the Little Green Man's concern about "the insurance people," the interior decorated with "green silk from a fairy Liberty's," the "cabinet-making" quality of the furnishings—all transpose bourgeois domesticity into fairy-world.

### **Education and Self-Improvement**

All three pieces value education and intellectual development, though they approach these themes differently.

"The Little Green Man" presents storytelling itself as educational—Father's tales teach moral lessons about obedience and danger whilst entertaining. The frame narrative explores how children grow beyond certain stories, suggesting education as process of expanding beyond earlier frameworks.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" makes education central. Rab Christie's books—Shakespeare, Macaulay, Milton, Carlyle, the Bible—represent his intellectual ambitions and provide both practical benefit (William MacAndrew's respect for Shakespeare readers) and romantic connection

(reading to Elizabeth in the tree becomes the foundation of their relationship). The story validates both practical skill (rabbit snaring) and literary culture, suggesting these need not be opposed.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" educates through demonstration, teaching readers to observe natural processes with precision. The essay combines scientific nomenclature with accessible explanation, folk knowledge with ornithological expertise, demonstrating that nature study requires both patience and informed attention.

## **Psychological Acuity**

Despite generic differences, all three pieces demonstrate considerable psychological insight.

"The Little Green Man" captures authentic childhood experience: the Maid's capacity to hear the story repeatedly yet find it "quite new," the sibling dynamics of pinching and whispering, Sir Toady's cynical aside ("Bet he never got a whack!"), Father's strategic "convenient deafness." Little Rooty's psychology rings true: his disobedience stems not from malice but from curiosity and impulse, his regret when captured feels genuine ("wished it had never felt so hot and stuffy and bumble-bee-y inside the house"), yet the narrator notes "Of course Rooty was the first little boy who ever felt like that"—acknowledging the universality of such resolutions.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" demonstrates sophisticated understanding of adolescent psychology and romantic development. Elizabeth's hurt at Rab's departure captures the specific pain of being rendered invisible to someone who has shared one's adventures. Her internal dialogue—"Love!" she said to herself—not such a thing. That is all nonsense; but it is a horrid shame of him, all the same"—perfectly captures denial of romantic feeling whilst experiencing it. The reunion scene depicts mutual awkwardness following transformation, with both characters struggling to reconcile memory with present reality.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" applies anthropomorphic psychology to birds, yet does so in service of genuine behavioural observation. The starlings' practical jokes, the wood-pigeons' territorial disputes, the missel thrush's bullying, the blackbird's warning system—all capture real avian behaviours through psychologically resonant analogy.

## **Treatment of Violence and Danger**

All three pieces acknowledge violence whilst managing tone to suit their audiences and purposes.

"The Little Green Man" presents genuine threat: the Grey Dwarf intends to boil Little Rooty alive, having already prepared "a horrid den where he used to take his prey, and would either roast them before a slow fire, basting them all the time, or else put them into a cauldron of cold water...and boil them alive!" The violence remains cartoonish enough for children yet serious enough to generate real tension. The resolution involves killing—the Little Green Man shoots the Grey Dwarf with a poisoned arrow—but the narrator dispatches this quickly and returns focus to celebration.

"Love Among the Beech Leaves" includes corporal punishment (Mistress MacAndrew's willow wand), hunting (rabbit and hare snaring), and agricultural struggle (game eating crops), but frames these within comic and practical contexts. The violence remains functional rather than sensationalised.

"Night in the Galloway Woods" documents predation directly: the barn owl carrying "field mice and dor-beetles" to hungry owlets, the blackbird attacking the worm, hen harriers catching a sparrow, the missel thrush suspected of egg-sucking and "ornithologic infanticide." Yet Crockett presents these as natural processes requiring neither moral judgement nor euphemism. The essay's humour—the worm wishing to "speak his mind to the patriarch of his tribe," the blackbird's frustrated chuckle—acknowledges predatory violence whilst avoiding either sentimentality or sensationalism.

## **Conclusion: Unity in Diversity**

These three pieces demonstrate Crockett's remarkable range: the metafictional children's story, the romantic comedy with social realism, the nature essay combining science and literature. Yet beneath generic differences lie consistent preoccupations and techniques.

All three pieces ground themselves in specific Galloway landscape and nomenclature, resisting universalising tendencies. All three feature trees centrally, as dwelling, refuge, site of transformation, or habitat. All three concern themselves with growth, learning, and development, whether of children, young adults, or natural processes. All three employ humour that deflates romantic convention whilst maintaining warmth. All three balance specialist knowledge with accessible presentation, creating narrative voices that guide without condescending.

The linguistic texture varies—"The Little Green Man" largely standard English, "Love Among the Beech Leaves" rich in Scots dialogue, "Night in the Galloway Woods" technical nomenclature within accessible prose—but all three demonstrate sensory precision, particularly regarding sound. The social engagement varies—most explicit in "Love Among the Beech Leaves," present but muted in "Night in the Galloway Woods," largely absent from "The Little Green Man"—but awareness of class, economics, and land use informs even the fantasy.

Perhaps most significantly, all three pieces demonstrate psychological acuity appropriate to their modes: the child psychology of "The Little Green Man," the adolescent development in "Love Among the Beech Leaves," the anthropomorphic but observationally grounded animal psychology in "Night in the Galloway Woods."

These pieces reveal a writer of considerable versatility and consistent literary intelligence, capable of working successfully across multiple genres whilst maintaining distinctive voice, regional authenticity, and commitment to both entertainment and insight. They demonstrate why the dismissive "Kailyard" label fails to capture Crockett's actual achievement: here is a writer capable of sophisticated narrative technique, genuine observation, psychological depth, and linguistic craft—qualities that transcend genre limitations and resist reductive categorisation.

The consistency of preoccupation across these diverse pieces—the attention to place, the interest in development and learning, the balance of humour and seriousness, the sensory precision—suggests a coherent literary sensibility adapting successfully to different forms and audiences. Crockett emerges as a professional writer of considerable skill, capable of producing work for children, popular audiences, and educated naturalist readers without compromising literary quality or regional authenticity in any mode.