Introduction
Scottish Medicine and Literary Culture, 1726–1832

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The cross-disciplinary study of literature and medicine is now an established and expanding field.¹ The seminal work of such leading scholars as Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau has particularly drawn attention to the affinities between literature and medicine in the long eighteenth century, emphasising that ‘[r]ather than C. P. Snow’s “two cultures”, there was, in a sense, “one culture” precisely because, throughout the eighteenth century, much the same men – and it was necessarily males – were active in the fields of medicine, natural philosophy, and general writing.’² However, despite the centrality of eighteenth-century Scotland as an internationally significant hub of Enlightenment medical thought, there has been no volume exclusively focussing upon the influence of Scottish medicine on wider literary discourse and culture within and beyond Scotland.

The present volume builds upon the reappraisal of the centrality of natural philosophy and medicine to the project of the Scottish Enlightenment begun in the essay collection, Science and Medicine in the Scottish Enlightenment (2002). In their introduction, Paul Wood and Charles W. J. Withers trace the development of the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment, highlighting the influence of Hugh Trevor-Roper and Nicolas Phillipson in delineating moral philosophy, history, and political economy as the core subjects, the ‘social behaviour of mankind’ as the central concern, and the Union of 1707 as the primary catalyst.³ Thus society, rather than nature, is largely seen as the key feature of the Scottish Enlightenment after Trevor-Roper.
However, as they indicate, Roger Emerson offers a key counter-argument, pre-dating the beginnings of Enlightenment to the late seventeenth century through his examination of the patriotic virtuoso activities of the Scottish physician, botanist and geographer, Sir Robert Sibbald (1641–1722), and his circle who were associated with the founding of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in the 1680s. Pushing back the emergence of Enlightenment culture to before the Union and identifying Newtonian science and Baconian inductive philosophy as the internal driving forces, Emerson points to medicine as a key site for the development of Enlightenment ideologies. For Wood also ‘[s]cience and medicine were central to, and in some cases the driving force behind, the intellectual changes encompassed by the term “the Scottish Enlightenment”.’ Richard Sher forwards a more conservative and inclusive claim, arguing that science and medicine ‘constituted one crucial component, one vital part, of the cultural and social world of polite learning and “enlightened” values that lay at the heart of the Scottish Enlightenment.’ As historians of the book, both Sher and Fiona Macdonald note the specific importance of Scottish medical imprints in this cultural configuration. Macdonald observes that, with the Edinburgh Medical School marking ‘the zenith of medical achievement in eighteenth-century Britain’, it also ‘led the way in medical publishing’, as ‘using print and especially the periodical to improve medical practice became a way for practitioners to enhance their professional status’. But while there has been a degree of consensus on the cultural importance of medicine, until recently, with the emergence of electronic media, substantial cross-disciplinary work was to an extent inhibited by the relative difficulty of accessing the primary medical texts. Even such a useful source-book as Alexander Broadie’s *The Scottish Enlightenment; an Anthology* (1997) has no section specifically devoted to medical writing, and John Gregory (1724–73), the only medical writer represented, appears in his capacity as an ethicist.

Rather than explicitly endorsing any camp within the long-standing debate over origins, the present volume takes the international significance of Scottish medicine during the Enlightenment as a historical given and instead responds to the surprising neglect of the inter-relationship of Scottish medicine and literary culture dur-