

Confrontations with the Invisible World:
Religion, History, and Modernity in Romantic Scotland

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the competing tensions of religion and rationalism in the imaginative works of Scottish Romantic writers, and the often conflicting representations of history such influences produced. This project begins with Walter Scott—whose novels epitomized for many the triumph of progress and moderation and helped to create a mythologized Scotland—and reads *The Tale of Old Mortality* through the lens of the religious and nationalist outrage it inspired. The next chapter turns to James Hogg’s most well-known novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, arguing that neither religious fanatics nor enlightened rationalists ultimately emerge with a believable claim to objective truth. The second half of this project shifts to poetic works that challenge both historical and religious authority: Robert Pollok’s *The Course of Time*, an epic poem that expands on the Book of Revelation, and Anne Bannerman’s *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*. Pollok’s use of apocalypse flirts with the genre’s radical associations, although he ultimately retreats from such possibilities. Bannerman is more unsettling, and—like Hogg’s *Confessions*—draws troubling connections between religious belief and rational understanding. This last chapter examines both approaches’ inability to translate much of human experience, particularly for those ignored by the patriarchal structures from which both Presbyterianism and the Scottish Enlightenment were inextricable.

Although the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was often credited with ushering in a new age, the Romantic texts studied here reveal the persistent legacy of the preceding century's religious fanaticism and violence. They also challenge a longstanding narrative of modern progress, most notably articulated by the secularization thesis—the thesis that societies become proportionately more secular as they develop. Even Scottish writers who arguably supported these progressive models wrote imaginative literature that raised doubts about the forward, secular propulsion of human development. What is ultimately at stake in these debates is nothing less than who gets to define modernity: these works call our attention to the way history is transcribed with a particular end in mind, and reveal how such an end can be simultaneously advanced and undermined in Romantic literature.

Introduction

In 1792, Anna Barbauld announced: “The age which has demolished dungeons, rejected torture, and given so fair a prospect of abolishing the iniquity of the slave trade, cannot long retain among its articles of belief the gloomy perplexities of Calvinism, and the heart-withering perspective of cruel and never-ending punishments.”¹ Roughly thirty years before Barbauld’s assertion, a fervor of “improvement”—a civic and material manifestation of this age of progress—led Edinburgh officials to drain the Nor’ [North] Loch.² This cleared a space that is now the Princes Street Gardens, its previous life as a fetid dumping ground and favorite torturing place of accused witches mostly scrubbed out of existence. But try as they might to erase a gruesome history no longer welcome in a rational and enlightened world, both Barbauld and Edinburgh’s improvers were premature in their over-confidence. Elements of “gloomy” Calvinism and other features of radical Scottish Presbyterianism persisted in Scottish literature alongside these developments, cropping up and haunting writers and their works—some more explicitly than others—bobbing up like the hundreds of bodies that emerged during the Nor’ Loch’s draining process, grotesque reminders of a past more conveniently forgotten.

¹ *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (London: Johnson, 1792), pp. 75–76; qtd. in *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction*, by Mark Knight and Emma Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 38.

² Such “improvements” were not limited to urban centers, and their civic-mindedness was complicated by class concerns and an influential social movement away from religious austerity. See David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth-Century Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 8.

My project seeks to challenge this selective amnesia, primarily by redressing the emphasis on the Enlightenment as the heyday of Scottish literature, and turning instead to its Romantic-era imaginative works. Most critics acknowledge Scotland as one of the main eighteenth-century European centers of learning, and its influence on the modern western world cannot be over-estimated. Edinburgh, the “Athens of the North,” played a central role in disciplines that are now frequently associated, if not conflated, with the “modernization” of the western world—fields such as philosophy, historiography, the natural sciences, law, economics, medicine, and literature. And yet, until relatively recently, this last area—imaginative literature—has remained in the shadow of that produced in Romantic and Victorian England.

This is somewhat of a paradox given that the early nineteenth century was a period of tremendous literary output in Scotland, and Edinburgh’s centrality as a publishing powerhouse was rivaled only by London’s.³ From the mid-eighteenth century on, Scots actively sought to make a place for their literature within the context of the Union: figures such as Ossian (James Macpherson) prompted renewed attention to archaic forms, Robert Burns unapologetically demonstrated the intellectual and political force of the Scots language, and Joanna Baillie became a successful playwright in London, and was arguably “the first woman in Scottish literature to regard herself as a fully professional, publishing author.”⁴ Still, Romantic Scotland was at a pivotal crossroads: running alongside the rise of rationalism was a fascination with Scottish mythology, and—mere decades after “The Forty-Five” (the second Jacobite uprising)—

³ See Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), for the most comprehensive study to date on Edinburgh’s prominence as a publishing center.

⁴ Robert Crawford, *Scotland’s Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 376.

the Highlands were transformed from backwoods embarrassment to tourist destination for visitors seeking a brush (but just that) with the sublime. These tensions played out in often contradictory and unresolvable ways in Scottish texts that explored the limits of literature's imaginative capacity to produce ways of understanding and communicating history. And, in many of these works, there is a nearly obsessive return to earlier eras punctuated by a religious fanaticism that—modernity notwithstanding—continued to resonate.

The recent secularization debates have opened up a particularly fruitful space to reconsider Scottish texts' representation of history and tradition, and, more broadly, our understanding of the relationship between modernity and secularism. At their core, these debates have challenged a longstanding uncritical acceptance of the secularization thesis; put baldly, this thesis states that as a society modernizes, it also becomes less religious—that, as societies become more rational, they move beyond a “pre-modernity” that is punctuated by religious belief and ritualistic practice. Related to such a perspective is the assumption that the religious beliefs that remain become increasingly moderate, limiting religion's capacity to animate radical and fanatical causes. Influentially articulated by Max Weber and achieving widespread consensus in twentieth-century sociology (although it is certainly now contested), this theory has had a profound impact on the way we organize the world, pitting what is modern and “enlightened” against a retrograde illusion.⁵ Just *how* such a process actually unfolds, though, is a matter of disagreement. Sociologists Philip Gorski and Ateş Altinordu recognize that “[s]ome sociologists insist that secularization is an outcome or an effect; others prefer to conceive of it as a cause or

⁵Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7.

a process; and some tacitly treat it as both, leading to circular or tautological forms of analysis.”⁶ For many social scientists, the positivist approach has been tempered, and Norris and Inglehart’s conclusion that “Secularization is a tendency, not an iron law” would, at this time, likely be accepted by all but the extreme ends of the debate.⁷ But this qualification does not dramatically question one of the most successful results of this thesis: a dominant teleological narrative of history that emphasizes rational progress, and ignores or treats as anomalous texts that trouble such a continuum.

However, after enjoying predominance in western Europe and the United States for generations, secularization as a foregone conclusion is becoming more and more open to challenge. These recent debates have prompted me to reconsider Scottish literature that appears out of the mainstream, as well as those texts, like Scott’s, that have been increasingly reincorporated into the canon. Literary critics are becoming more involved in such a reassessment, although additional work needs to be done to come to grips with how imaginative texts might offer unique ways of framing the debate. One of the more recent of such studies, Lori Branch’s *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (2006), seeks to interrogate “our inherited narratives about the emergence of secularism.”⁸ Branch focuses on the apparent transition from codified practices of ritual to a Romantic “spontaneous overflow,” a transition that occurs in both (Protestant) Christianity and the literary realm. Through this lens of presumed spontaneity (its “natural” or “organic” emergence is a main area of critique), Branch sees her work helping

⁶ Philip S. Gorski and Ateş Altınordu, “After Secularization?” *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008): 61.

⁷ Norris and Inglehart, p. 5.

⁸ Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), p. 8.

to unravel the puzzling persistence of religion—and of a particular sort of religion—in a modernity that by the best predictions of the secularization thesis should long ago have been done with it. The religious and quasi-secular enthusiasms continually reinvoked by Enlightenment rationality most often function as the vexed sites of attempts to quarantine—through quasi-scientific notions of spontaneous sentiment and emotional response, and through the familiar contours of sentimental narrative—the uncertainty that always lurks in the shadows of language...⁹

In this project, I also look to “vexed sites” of containment—to moments that seem to defy rational explanation. But I see more than just uncertainty in these spaces, for what may be discounted as a brief moment of passing anxiety actually indicates a multiplicity of perspectives simultaneously available even after the Enlightenment and the ostensible triumph of rationalism.¹⁰ In other words, I argue that a broad range of Scottish literature in the Romantic period illuminates a cultural scene much less organized by what many have tacitly accepted as the linear development of modernity. The chapters that follow are my contribution to this valuable and necessary project of “restor[ing] a dynamic relationship between the secular and the religious as it meaningfully functions in a variety of discursive contexts.”¹¹

For much of the western world, “secular” implies the absence (whether forcible or supposedly natural/developmental) of religion. Of the different kinds of secularity Charles Taylor articulates in his massive *A Secular Age* (2007), this is what he refers to as the “subtraction” model, in which secularism connotes the *absence* of religion.¹² Taylor describes earlier forms of secularity as consisting of the separation of the public and religious spheres and the gradual movement toward an internalization of religious

⁹ Branch, p. 22.

¹⁰ See the following pages for an elaboration of how this word “multiplicity” has offered new ways of theorizing secularism.

¹¹ Michael W. Kaufmann, “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession,” *New Literary History* 38 (2007): 621.

¹² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 4.

belief and practice; however, it is Taylor's "Secularity 3," "in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others" that best describes post-Enlightenment Scotland.¹³ Colin Jager uses the concept of "multiplicity" in a similar way; pointing to the work of a number of scholars "working under the rubric of 'multiple modernities' or 'alternative modernities,'" Jager notes that, "although modernization may be largely inevitable, that process is dialectically shaped by the cultural traditions it encounters, so that modernity itself must be understood, in the words of one scholar, as a 'continual constitution and reconstitution of a *multiplicity* of cultural programs.'"¹⁴ Humanism and ever-increasing moderation—self-consciously linked to the notion of modern progress during the eighteenth-century as well as by later scholars—would seem in many ways to reflect this movement, but these are not the only perspectives represented by "multiplicity."

In fact, "multiple modernities" may sound tolerantly ecumenical, but, at least in the context of Romantic Scotland, multiplicity didn't necessarily bring with it an absence of violence, disavowal, or repression. What this notion of secularity actually meant played out against a backdrop of war, torture, and terrible suffering was often something far more fraught, anxiously producing Christian apocalypse or historical revelation as a bulwark against the unknown. Taylor's "Secularity 3" and Jager's "multiplicity" produce a more nuanced appreciation of the complexity of modernity, but it is important to reiterate that, for some historical actors, the intensity of their individual beliefs was not lessened by an epistemological pluralism. Not all enthusiasms died out, but what Taylor

¹³ Taylor, p. 3.

¹⁴ Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 27, added emphasis. Jager is quoting S. N. Eisenstadt's "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129.1 (2000): 2.

and Jager's insights offer us is a way of reckoning with writers who, even at their most partisan, were unable to create a fictional reality in which theirs was the only way of viewing the world. These tensions erupt in fascinating moments of narrative fracturing, producing uncanny challenges to a concept of modernity that was (and remains) not such a settled project, after all.

It is through this lens that I also hope to add to the growing body of work being done in other areas of Scottish literature. Recent examples include Ian Duncan's monumental *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (2007), which lays out in considerable detail the vitality of Edinburgh's periodical press while also making a case for the historical and epistemological work of the novels of Scott and his peers. Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (1997) argues for a reconsideration of a long-dominant conceptual framework in English literary studies that positions a center (England) against its peripheries (Scotland, Ireland, Wales). She identifies a compelling paradox between the latter's nationalistic impulses and the literary forms that emerged from them, and how they were then deployed in the service of British imperialism. And in 2004, Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen co-edited *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, bringing together experts in both the fields of Romanticism and Scottish literature to cover a range of writers, including not just the expected Walter Scott and David Hume, but also Joanna Baillie, Robert Burns, and the marginally known (but particularly important for *my* work) poet, Anne Bannerman. Today, academic conferences and popular festivals compete to define "Scottishness," and if the mythology perpetuated by historically misleading films like *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* continues to shape public perception, it is productively challenged by writers who

focus just as much on the impact of devolution, an increasingly ethnically and racially diverse population, crime fiction, the posthuman, and ecology, as they do the distant past. Edinburgh University Press is actively publishing excellent essay collections focusing on Scotland's broad range of literary contributions, while the international collaboration of the Stirling/South Carolina edition of James Hogg's collected works has brought this long-neglected writer back into wider circulation. Still, as Caroline McCracken-Flesher puts it, "Scotland is haunted by the corpus of Walter Scott," and there is much more work to be done in this particularly rich period that so profoundly shaped a particular sort of understanding of history via imaginative works.¹⁵

Even as these twentieth and twenty-first century studies have revitalized interest in Scottish literature, there is still a tendency to replicate the teleological narrative of progression when it comes to the country's religious history—of Scotland's movement away from the religious radicalism of the seventeenth century in favor of increased moderation and Enlightenment in the eighteenth, which then culminates in Scott's novels in the nineteenth. My project challenges this progression. I am interested in the interpretive possibilities of disrupting this literary and historical chronology, a move prompted by Scottish literary works' recurrent confrontations with Presbyterianism's way of conceptualizing the world, however much they might repudiate, vanquish, or simply dismiss it. The most extreme manifestations of the *civic* power of this form of Christianity certainly decreased over the course of the eighteenth century, but it is contestable whether its *imaginative* power similarly waned.

¹⁵ Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4.

The impulse to distance “modern” Scotland from radical religion is not a recent development, but emerged not long after the terminus of the religious and national wars of the seventeenth century. T. M. Devine observes that

Scottish historical scholars of the eighteenth century were increasingly seeing the history of the nation in negative terms. The leading historian of the eighteenth century, William Robertson, dismissed the Scottish past before the Revolution of 1688 as a dark story of anarchy, barbarism and religious fanaticism, and his scathing critique was repeated many times over in the volumes of other writers of less renown.¹⁶

For many Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment writers, it must have seemed nearly miraculous that rationalism could flourish in the once fanatical environment of pre-Union Scotland, and the discomfort such a past engendered (and continues to provoke) may provide a reasonable explanation for its disavowal. Such attempts at detachment continue with modern critics and historians: Colin Kidd argues that these tensions contributed to the lack of a robust Scottish nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and challenges fellow theorist Tom Nairn’s “confidence that Scotland’s possession of ‘a cast of national heroes and martyrs, popular tales and legends of oppression and resistance’ could be crudely equated with a strong historiographical platform for a nationalist movement.” Moreover, Kidd insists, “much of this superficially glorious history was, according to David Craig, ‘so coarse and violent and its mark so deeply felt’ that it had had to be ‘disowned or censored away’ by Scotland’s embarrassed eighteenth-century provincial elite.”¹⁷ But, even if such rejections took place, how effective were they? The literary works I examine in this project directly challenge

¹⁶ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700–2007*, rev. ed. (1999; repr., London: Penguin, 2006), p. 29.

¹⁷ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5.

whether it is possible for such vehemence of belief to be overcome and left in the past, dispossessed of its ability to play an integral role in modernity.

The longstanding emphasis on the Scottish Enlightenment is understandable, as the tempered, generally good-natured writings of Edinburgh's cosmopolitans and their capacious intellectual curiosity had a profound impact on the intellectual history of the west. By contrast, the screeds of some of their contemporary brethren reflect a view of the world that appears alien to many today—a world in which both heavenly and hellish forces exerted their power on individuals, and in which martyrdom and salvation were still *felt* as lived (and dying) experiences, even as their actual occurrence dwindled. But we need to pay more than passing lip-service to the *existence* of these alternate figures. Historian David Allan exhorts us to move past the myopic practices exemplified by Victorian scholar Henry Buckle, who studied a grossly limited range of Scottish thinkers and writers, setting the stage for what is now the common understanding of the period:

It is arguable, moreover, that other significant elements in the Enlightenment historical texts have suffered correspondingly from this distorted and highly partial perspective. There has, for example, been no serious consideration of the possible relationship between the classic historical writings attributable to the recognised literati and the prolific outpourings of the more anonymous Scotsmen of the same period, scholars who look much less like the ancestors an economist or sociologist might choose.¹⁸

My project aims to apply this recommendation to the literary realm, and, in addition to reassessing the texts of more well-known figures such as Scott and Hogg, to expand our study of Romantic Scottish literary works that have been ignored for too long. I do so by attending to both groups' preoccupation with Scotland's messy relationship between history and radical religion.

¹⁸ David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 11.

Religion, politics, and national identity

The focus on Scotland's eighteenth-century modernity has framed the seventeenth century, a period wracked with violence and upheaval, as a study in contrasts—as a moment in history striking in its difference from those that followed. And yet the tumult of Scotland's seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries returns like Banquo's ghost in numerous Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment works. The particularly energetic and constantly shifting blend of political, religious, and national allegiances both attracted and repelled later writers who used this history and tradition to a number of different ends. Originally published in 1775, John Howie positioned his *Scots Worthies* as a rational martyrology, focusing on the crimes of state against worthy (Protestant) individuals. Walter Scott's *The Tale of Old Mortality* combines gripping battle scenes and a thoroughly anachronistic central character in what many would come to read as a “history” of the Covenanter uprising of 1679. And James Hogg frustrates partisanship altogether with *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a defiantly tricky novel in which theology and rationalism both are called into question in the heady days leading up to the Acts of Union (1707).

This project originated in a curiosity to unravel why writers fully immersed in Edinburgh's post-Enlightenment milieu kept returning not to the “enlightened” mid- and late-eighteenth century, but to this more distant past—to eras commonly referred to as “the Killing Times” or the “turbulent times”—in their imaginative works. Was it now safe to return to these periods if for many, as Ina Ferris skeptically observes, modernity operated “temporally, in the way in which one stage replaced another in successive, as

opposed to dialectical, fashion (hence they did not, in theory, incorporate earlier phases so as to allow for recognition across stages)”?¹⁹ In the case of Scott, it is a matter of debate if a belief in “progress” dominates his novels or if a vested publishing institution marketed them as such to an audience receptive to this use; regardless of his intentions, though, it is notable how quickly Scotland’s relatively recent radical past was relegated to a world and time in many ways separate from his own.²⁰ The scourge of fanaticism appeared to have been rendered harmless outside the pages of historical fiction, but I will argue in the first two chapters that this interpretation is *not* borne out by Scott and Hogg’s novels. At various moments, such fanaticism retains an affective capacity that undermines its supposed impotence, and at others, it shares shocking similarities with the rational perspective presumed to have supplanted it. In the second half of this project, I consider two authors who seem to move in a different direction altogether: Robert Pollok, whose *The Course of Time* (1827) evokes a realm “beyond” history, and the Romantic medievalism of Anne Bannerman’s poetry, which, despite its gestures toward antiquarianism, unleashes the inevitable consequences of patriarchal aggression, whether sanctioned by western progress or religious faith. I argue that, although these examples *look* strikingly different in form and ostensible content, they in fact engage with the issues and beliefs that are addressed more explicitly by Scott and Hogg’s historical fiction, and reflect that “gloomy” Calvinism—or Scottish Presbyterianism—remained dynamically present (however contested) in post-Enlightenment Scotland.

¹⁹ Ina Ferris, “Melancholy, Memory, and the ‘Narrative Situation’ of History in Post-Enlightenment Scotland,” in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 77–93; p. 79. Ferris further elaborates that “Enlightenment thought was clearly invested in understanding itself as operating in a present that had left behind forms of order belonging to a clearly distinct past, so that the writing of figures like Adam Ferguson and David Hume decisively situates itself in a ‘civil’ present set off from a ‘superstitious’ or ‘savage’ past,” p. 80.

²⁰ See Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, passim for more on Scott’s alleged versus actual ideological positioning.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Scots joined forces with English revolutionaries in Parliament to resist Charles I's attempts to incorporate religious power more directly underneath the umbrella of his political power. Although this was an ambivalent partnership, Scottish Presbyterians were ultimately willing to forge it in order to resist what they saw to be the sovereign's extension of episcopacy. This form of English Protestantism shared too many similarities with Catholic hierarchy, and, according to historian Callum Brown, "[Scottish Presbyterians] became resolute from the seventeenth century that rule by bishops under episcopacy was merely 'popery' in another guise."²¹ This encroachment of Scottish religious autonomy became untenable in 1636 when Charles I insisted upon the replacement of the Scottish *Book of Common Order* with a new Prayer Book, which was met with what should have been an unsurprising degree of resistance and hostility.²² As a result, the Scots drew up the National Covenant in 1638, which insisted upon the right of Scotland's free assemblies to maintain control over the protocols of worship, as well as their right—and duty—to protect their church and form of worship from outside intervention by whatever means

²¹ Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 14. Moreover, the religious concerns always overlap the political, for "Episcopacy was seen as the religion of royalty and aristocracy and but a short step from Catholicism, and everything associated with it attracted presbyterian hostility: the episcopal prayer book, liturgy, and celebration of saints' days (including Christmas which presbyterians prohibited)." Brown, pp. 14–15.

²² For a more detailed account of this chain of events, see Wallace Notestein, *The Scot in History: A Study of the Interplay of Character and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1947), pp. 140–49. T. C. Smout adds that "when [Charles I] finally blundered into the north with an innovating and alien church policy he was like a man with a burning torch tripping into a carefully stacked powder magazine." T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560–1830* (London: Collins, 1969), pp. 113–14.

necessary.²³ Ultimately, the National Covenant was as much a nationalist movement as it was a religious one. It resonated not only with Presbyterian believers of the time, but came to be heralded by later generations as a meaningful revolt against monarchical tyranny, helping to trigger the wars that would dominate the British Isles for much of the seventeenth century.²⁴

In this way, “presbyterianism became with time a focus and a means of social protest” (linking it to a radical/revolutionary tradition), as well as “the unrelenting inquisitor and persecutor of a wide range of civil and religious offences,” an image of Calvinism Barbauld invoked approximately 150 years later.²⁵ However, the tides quickly turned after the Restoration of Charles II, and the Scots—especially the Presbyterians formerly in power—were treated with severity, subject to both civil and religious injunctions. Up until the Glorious Revolution, Scots—again, particularly Presbyterians—were hounded for gathering together en masse for conventicles (large, typically outdoor worship services), deprived of their armaments, and impressed with oaths of fealty. Even after William and Mary’s ascension in 1689, life remained terribly unstable for many: those who remained loyal to the Stuarts led the periodic Jacobite Risings well into the following century (Scott’s *Waverley* fictionalizes “the ’45,” the last major resistance).

²³ I draw on Smout’s description of the National Covenant and its political consequences in this section. See *A History of the Scottish People*, especially pp. 66–71.

²⁴ Gordon Donaldson, *The Faith of the Scots* (London: Batsford, 1990), p. 88. Donaldson also notes: “The covenanting concept was only a passing phase, discarded by all save a small minority after little more than a generation, but for a brief space it captivated the vitality of the nation. Without appreciating the Scottish people’s concept of a perpetual contract with God giving them an unique place in the Divine Purpose it is impossible to understand how ministers expounding the Covenant could stir their hearers to frenzy”; p. 88. For more on Scotland’s role in the Civil Wars, see Notestein, esp. p. 139. See also Thomas Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), especially ch. 4 (“The Westminster Tradition: 1647–1690”), which examines the fallout of the National Covenant and its relationship to the Westminster Confession, a major articulation of Presbyterian faith. Torrance is at his most convincing in his elaboration of how the results of these “scholastic” clerics’ debates affected political developments as well as a broad spectrum of Scottish society.

²⁵ Brown, p. 15.

Furthermore, the 1690s were referred to as the “lean years” by contemporary and modern historians for reasons beyond those of rebellion, and the country lost nearly 160,000 people to famine, disease, immigration, and declining birth rates.²⁶

The political turmoil continued in the years leading up to the Acts of Union (1707), with Scots hotly debating the repercussions of becoming one kingdom with England. Scottish nationalists worried about freedoms both existential and practical, a reasonable fear given England’s interference with the disastrous Darien colony, Scotland’s failed attempt to enter the colonial race.²⁷ Resistance to the union was often framed by a hazy blend of mythopoiesis and history,²⁸ and as in the seventeenth-century battles over episcopacy, religious independence was a primary concern, and defended with boasts of a past that was exceptional to all of Christianity. Kidd notes that this impulse crossed denominational boundaries: “both for presbyterians and episcopalians the need to bind Scotland’s religious tradition to an ethnocentric historiography depended less on justification of the nation’s original break with Rome at the Reformation than on the later need to fend off the encroachments of protestant Canterbury.”²⁹ Add to this the comparison between historical constitutional freedoms enjoyed by each country (tilted by Scottish partisans in Scotland’s favor, of course), as well as shifting allegiances between vested parties, and it becomes clear that achievement of this Union was hardly a guaranteed matter. But pragmatism eventually won the day. Devine notes that, even in the wake of failed ventures and “improvements” of the second half of the seventeenth

²⁶ T. M. Devine, *Scotland’s Empire, 1600–1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 28–29.

²⁷ See Kidd, pp. 33–34; see also Douglas Watt, *The Price of Scotland: Darien, Union and the Wealth of Nations* (2007; repr., Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2007).

²⁸ See William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 2.

²⁹ Kidd, p. 24.

century, it became clear that their mere attempt “was the confirmation that the Scottish governing classes were now on the side of material progress and lending their considerable political authority to the cause of economic reform.”³⁰ This reforming impulse helped to foster greater acceptance of the merging of kingdoms, a union that would offer substantial benefits in commercial and trade relationships between Scotland and England, as well as between Scotland and England’s North American colonies.³¹

Nationalism did not just go away, though, absorbed into an entity called “Great Britain.” Over the course of the eighteenth century, Scotland played a pivotal role in the two major challenges to Hanoverian rule. The Jacobite Risings created their own set of myths, but for my purposes they are most interesting for the way in which they shift a sense of who a “Scot” *was*, from a Presbyterian Whig in the seventeenth century (although this was by no means uncontested) to an Episcopalian (and possibly even Catholic!) Royalist Highlander in the eighteenth. And yet, simultaneously, the Scottish Enlightenment (largely dominated by more moderate Presbyterians) was occurring, fostering attitudes and developments that would ultimately *increase* Scottish incorporation within the Union. The Highlander was a convenient figurehead—one that remains in popular imagination today—particularly once the clearances following the Jacobite Risings took hold and this population posed a considerably diminished risk to Scotland’s stability. But for many lowland Scots their identification with a vehement, martial Presbyterianism remained, even as tartanry came to dominate the mythological landscape, and moderation and rationalism the day-to-day.

³⁰ Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, p. 51.

³¹ For more on the economic drives and consequences of the 1707 Union, see Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, esp. ch. 3.

The imaginative literature of Romantic Scotland

The texts that follow occupy a spectrum of religious and political commitments, but each reflects a more complicated negotiation of Scotland's modernity than any ideological litmus test might indicate. In the first chapter, we see how Walter Scott's *The Tale of Old Mortality* was taken up as erroneous historical revisionism by some readers, and historical correction by others, but what has been less common is to take seriously the religious and nationalist furor that arose when Scott was accused of slandering the seventeenth-century Scottish Covenanters (radical Presbyterians) while white-washing their widely hated "persecutor," John Grahame of Claverhouse. And, to my knowledge, Scott's invocation of the long Scottish history of martyrology through the character of Ephraim Macbriar has been largely overlooked, occluding recognition of the *range* of Scott's influences—religious, historical, national, and political—that come together in remarkable ways within the novel. Of all the authors I spend substantial time on in this project, Scott stands out as having been most fully reincorporated within the canon of English literature (however reluctantly), but his relegation to the role of *either* a cynical Tory *or* a perpetuator of Whig history flattens his connection to traditions closer to home. Moreover, there is a distinct shift in the conclusion of *Old Mortality* that hints at the limitations of "history" to bring the novel to a resolute finale, and it is precipitated by the crisis of the Covenanter Macbriar's martyrdom.

My second chapter shifts to James Hogg's most well-known novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Hogg, or "the Ettrick Shepherd," was Scott's pet among the Edinburgh literati, and their relationship was as complicated and often ambivalent as expected in such a dynamic involving two talented writers from very

different backgrounds and class. It is not unusual to suggest that Hogg's novel is in some ways a response to Scott's corpus and their relationship, but this is not the extent of its achievement. Hogg actively played with his more precarious social standing, often performing as the "rustic" in public and feigning ignorance of social niceties and expected decorum (for this, he was no great favorite of his benefactor's wife, Charlotte). This winking irony is evident in his fiction, as well, in which he disrupts what his audience would have come to expect from historical narratives while offering multiple (untrustworthy) narrators, frequent interjections, and a dizzying refusal to provide a satisfying closure—a denial of revelation. What has long been read as a possibly secular attack on Calvinism is actually far more complex, and neither religious fanatics nor enlightened rationalists ultimately emerge with a believable claim to objective truth. Instead, the novel provides nothing more than a fleeting glimpse of the ineffable—a rare moment of transcendence that is always temporary and always under threat.

In the next section, I move to Robert Pollok's *The Course of Time*, a ten-book epic poem that attempts, to paraphrase one cheeky reviewer, to out-Calvin Milton. Set in a post-apocalyptic celestial realm, Pollok expands on the Book of Revelation in more than two-hundred pages, offering up a host of horrors occurring between the Millennium and the Last Judgment, while also describing the state of a world that bears a more than striking resemblance to Pollok's own. Common targets (e.g., Catholicism, Spinoza, Hume) appear as unsurprising trespassers, due to receive a punishment elaborated at times in Gothic detail. More often, though, Pollok brings together many of the fruits of the Enlightenment—the natural sciences, "true" philosophy, mathematics—as reflections of the *true* religion: Presbyterianism. Although this work is now almost completely

forgotten, it stands at a fascinating crossroads, attempting to synthesize (if not always coherently) perspectives that seem almost jarringly disparate two centuries later:

Calvinist doctrine; human flourishing and intellectual development; and both formal and (however fleeting) political apocalypse.

In my last chapter, I examine the poetry of Anne Bannerman, considering the less direct ways in which imaginative writers grappled with the tension between religious superstition and enlightened empiricism, particularly texts that delve into contents and genres other than those of the Covenanters or the historical novel. If, as I have suggested, Presbyterianism and the Scottish Enlightenment do indeed function together in a complicated relationship that is widespread and pervasive in Scottish literary works, Anne Bannerman embraces a mode that seems to offer an alternative way of dealing with this many-headed Hydra. Her *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* enters Gothic territory, and the most obvious reference to religion is in “The Perjur’d Nun,” an expected anti-Catholic trope. However, Bannerman does not rely on the same hackneyed Protestant/Catholic clichés, and instead her characters (many of them female) seem to play out the confrontation between historical events and their potential for exaggerated, supernatural consequences. They also offer a gendered alternative for those ignored by the patriarchal structures from which both Presbyterianism (with its General Assembly and Kirk Elders) and the Scottish Enlightenment (with its university doors barred to women) are inextricable. In the most effective poem of this collection (“The Dark Ladie”), Bannerman levies a surprising indictment against both the nationalist and masculine pillaging that occurs in war. Scottish nationalism, even after the Union of 1707, is often inseparable from (often Presbyterian) religious affiliation, and, although

Bannerman cloaks her critique in the vaguely medieval trappings so common of antiquarianism, this is an unmistakable challenge to the very representation of a Scottish self that was to crystallize a decade later in Scott's work. However, the preoccupation with punishment exhibited by the vast majority of poems in this collection suggests that, if Presbyterianism's more masculine martial nationalism is critiqued, its theological justification of indiscriminate human suffering at the hands of a higher power might remain intact.

The growing interest in the relationship between secularization and religion has opened up an opportunity to reconsider these Scottish texts and their negotiation of a past that would not stay away. For some sectarians, it was never gone. For others, radical religion increasingly became an object of study, distance, and even wonder, allowing for an affirmation of the present moment. Much of intellectual history has followed this latter perspective, but these Scottish imaginative texts challenge us to consider, if only momentarily, that the irrational, the supernatural, and the violence of previous ages that the model of progress insists to be safely relegated to the annals of history instead threaten to return with a vengeance—bubbling up, uncanny and unwelcome.

Chapter 1

Martyred Covenanters and Recuperated Cavaliers: Religion, History, and the Problem of Legacy in Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*

*Ye send me from darkness into day
—from mortality to immortality—
and, in a word, from earth to heaven!*

Walter Scott, *Old Mortality*

What is it about the religious enthusiasm of the seventeenth century that attracted three of Scotland's most critically acclaimed (in their own time, if not now) post-Enlightenment novelists: Walter Scott, James Hogg, and John Galt? Why did they return to a period of fanaticism, intolerance, and violent oppression when their own circumstances seemed to be far removed from such "turbulent times"? For some of their readers, this contrast between Scotland's bloody history and the relatively peaceful decades of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reaffirmed models of progress put forth by contemporary historians and critics. If the past could be made comprehensible—if the roots of its most violent and irrational cruelties could be uncovered and made sense of—it would be captured, documented, objectified, and stripped of its affective and intellectual power to terrorize.

And yet for many nineteenth-century Scottish readers, this past was not solely a time of horror, but also one of particular national pride, offering potential connections

between two very different moments in history that may surprise modern readers.¹ Douglas Ansdell goes so far as to claim that “[t]here is considerable evidence within the Presbyterian tradition to suggest that the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century were glorious times to which later generations should aspire.”² Ansdell’s analysis recognizes the complex web of associations that render any simplistic use of the term “national” problematic; for example, within Scotland this is due to the differences one finds between the low- and highlanders, the Whigs and Royalists, and even among the Presbyterians themselves. Nevertheless, “the nation” proved to be and remains a powerful invention, and religion played a vital and dynamic role in shaping a number of subsequent national mythologies in which many Scots found a sense of self, and a set of features distinguishing them from the rest of Great Britain and Ireland.³

This is in some ways a paradox: Scotland in the seventeenth century was not for the faint of heart, nor did it enjoy the relative peace and prosperity that marked the decades following the Acts of Union in 1707. In the pandemonium unleashed by Charles I’s overreaction to the National Covenant of 1638, T.C. Smout describes a gruesome scene:

Old scores were then paid off—Campbell tenants were harried and slaughtered in Perthshire, Clackmannan and Argyll by men from the north; Macdonalds in turn were massacred or transported after Campbell

¹ See Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) for a discussion of the historical novel’s negotiation of competing models of history (disruption versus continuation), esp. chapters 5–7.

² Douglas Ansdell, “The Fluctuating Fortunes of ‘Old Mortality’: Identity, Religion and Scottish Society,” in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c. 1700–2000*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 186–99; p. 189. Ansdell’s analysis focuses on two particular religious moments—the Covenanting period in the lowlands and the evangelizing of the highlands in the years leading up to the Disruption of 1843—and connects them to distinct versions of Scottish nationalism.

³ See Ansdell for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between identity and Covenanting history. He is particularly convincing in his delineation between the low- and highland experiences during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, reminding us that the Scottish Enlightenment was not necessarily a monolithic experience, and describing the rise of evangelicalism in the highlands in the early nineteenth century.

victories in Kintyre...Disorder brought its own reckoning as the tale of destruction lengthened and levels of production sank. The plaiding drying on the tenting frames in peaceful Aberdeenshire valleys was burnt along with the houses of the weavers by the Highlanders hurrying south; two generations of fisher captains and their boys from the prosperous little burghs of east Fife perished at the battle of Kilsyth; in 1651 Dundee, the second burgh to the capital in population and wealth, was brutally sacked by English troops; by then there were scarcely a dozen Scottish boats paying dues at the Danish Sound—before the wars started a hundred or more had paused there every year on their way to and from the Baltic markets. Famine and plague stalked in the footsteps of war: faction, chaos and poverty seemed again to be the order of things.⁴

However, Smout makes clear that this was not a return to the turmoil that had plagued Scotland in prior centuries, for these battles were not centered on clan, kinship, and narrow self-interest, but on religion.⁵ There is a distinct difference between the earlier types of social conflict based upon familial allegiance and that which occurred in the seventeenth century, and was reliant upon a larger and arguably more coherent (if not recognizably rational) system of religious belief, messily bound up with the conception of a nation-state, however fraught it might be.

Religion became the arena in which the Scots found an organized, more broadly appealing call to arms; it played an inextricable role in Scottish politics and nationalism, and provided its followers a way of defining themselves, both individually and as a larger body. However, inherent within Protestant (and particularly Presbyterian) theology is the tension between heeding that inner voice of personal conscience and the expectations and requirements of the larger group, whether it be a congregation, region, or even a nation. In the second Covenanter uprising (beginning in 1679) that sets the stage for *Old Mortality*, Scott depicts this tension as a driving force in the competing interests and loyalties fueling Scotland's conflict with England, but also within "North Britain" itself.

⁴ T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560–1830* (London: Collins, 1969), pp. 114–15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

The Covenanters rebelled against the official prohibition of conventicles, the displacement of Protestant and Resolutionist ministers through the practice of patronage and episcopacy, the enforced swearing of oaths (anathema to pious Calvinists), the housing of soldiers, and a mandated disarmament. But to reject these measures was to invite the swift and cruel punishment of the state, which often extended to the offender's family and associates. Additionally, not all Scots sympathized with the subjected Presbyterians, and the Scottish Royalists (those who supported Charles II) also confronted the pull between allegiance to a monarch and claims of a more personal nature. The Royalists' fidelity to Charles II was as all-encompassing as that expected by any religion, and in some ways a mirror image of their opposing countrymen and women: if the Presbyterians viewed the kirk as necessarily omnipresent in all earthly matters, the Royalists accepted that the authority of their King extended to heavenly concerns, as well (i.e., episcopacy).

Understanding the trauma, violence, and fanaticism of the seventeenth century and the implications for subsequent generations is particularly challenging for modern readers given the great move toward political and philosophical (and—most would argue—religious) moderation Scotland experienced shortly thereafter. The works of thinkers such as Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Francis Hutcheson are far more amenable to current literary scholarship, and the Scottish Enlightenment of the long eighteenth century has eclipsed much of Scotland's history, literature, and culture of the periods before or after. Within American universities, it was only in the last half of the twentieth century that Scott experienced a revival (Hogg to a lesser degree, and Galt not at all outside of Scottish studies), and it is unsurprising that his novels are most

frequently read within the context of Enlightenment philosophy and historiography. Scott is often paradoxically credited with achieving a faithful representation of the historical times he depicts in his novels while also offering a protagonist who is sympathetic to what are usually viewed as the more modern sensibilities of moderation and an individualism within certain constraints.⁶ These qualities are noted by readers who see Scott as trenchantly conservative as well as those who consider his works to participate in the Whig notion of progress.⁷ Although I do not argue that Scott was a pessimistic Tory,

⁶ Douglas Mack and Suzanne Gilbert acknowledge that “[Henry] Morton is, in effect, more a man of Scott’s own time (1810s) than of the seventeenth-century milieu of the novel. The hero of *Old Mortality* is positioned as the way forward out of the darkness, the earlier evolutionary stage represented by seventeenth-century turmoil, and into the full sun of the Scottish Enlightenment.” See Mack and Gilbert, “Scottish History in the Waverley Novels,” in *Approaches to Teaching Scott’s Waverley Novels*, ed. Evan Gottlieb and Ian Duncan (New York: MLA, 2009), pp. 26–37; p. 35. Compare to Lukács’s insistence “that Scott, in sharp contrast to the post-1848 development of the historical novel, never modernizes the psychology of his characters.” Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 60 (original emphasis).

⁷ Critics continue to wrestle with the problem of a “divided” Scott. For some, he is the consummate Tory; for others, he is the man of progress championing a move into modernity that neither could nor should be stopped, placing him staunchly within the tradition of “Whig” history. In the mid-twentieth century, David Daiches eschewed Scott’s “romantic” qualities, instead aligning the best of Scott’s novels with the highest order of historical fiction: works that reflect “an attempt to use a historical situation to illustrate some aspect of man’s fate which has importance and meaning quite apart from that historical situation.” Additionally, he popularized the notion of a “divided” Scott, one pulled between the emotional needs of a high-Tory romanticism and Hanoverian pragmatism. Duncan Forbes perpetuated the writer’s “division,” as well, although he rooted Scott within his post-Enlightenment milieu, emphasizing his connection to people (such as the philosophers Adam Ferguson and Dugald Stewart) and place (Edinburgh). Georg Lukács’s *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962) also considered seriously Scott’s engagement with history and its effects on both individuals and large groups, and how Scott’s novels’ endorsement of a “middle way” represented the course of English history and development. More recently, Cyrus Vakil altogether rejects the notion of a division functioning within the writer, insisting that “[t]he problem with such a radical dualism is that it renders Scott virtually schizoid; and nothing in Scott’s life, letters, or opinions of contemporaries at all suggests such a state of mind.” Julian D’Arcy reads Scott’s novels not as “a cathartic assimilation of his sentimental Jacobitism into a pragmatic Hanoverian modernity,” but rather representative of a strident nationalism to which only a Scottish audience would be receptive. Mary Cullinan is less polemical in her reading, and, attentive to an understanding of history as a conflicted enterprise reliant on multiple perspectives, asks us to read *Old Mortality* with a more capacious understanding of “the cyclic and linear patterns underlying all human history,” acknowledging that “truth emanates from a composite of viewpoints.” Stuart Ferguson’s conclusions are more foreboding, and he claims that “Scott was less progressivist than critics such as Lukács cared to believe. This reflects, in part, Scott’s growing pessimism about events in his own time.” See Daiches, “Scott’s Achievement as a Novelist (Part One),” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6.2 (1951): 81–95; p. 83; Forbes, “The Rationalism of Sir Walter Scott,” *Cambridge Journal* 7 (1953): 20–35; Lukács, *The Historical Novel*; Vakil, “Walter Scott and the Historicism of Scottish Enlightenment Philosophical History,” in *Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference (Edinburgh, 1991)*, ed. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993), 404–18, p. 405; D’Arcy, *Subversive Scott: The*

in this chapter I follow critics such as Ina Ferris, Ian Duncan, and Caroline McCracken-Flesher in pushing against assumptions of his historical project's unambiguous participation within the grand narrative of progress, a perspective that requires the reader to overlook his irrational figures and their beliefs. These examples of radicalism prove equally impervious to the reasonable hero as well as any expectation that, once Scott has dispatched with them, they will return, safely managed, to their appropriate historical moment. Instead they linger, seeking immortality and—at least in the case of *Old Mortality*'s radical Presbyterians—finding it in the popular imagination of many Scots.

Born in 1771 to a family of firm Calvinist stock, Scott described “the discipline of the Presbyterian Sabbath [as] severely strict, and I think injudiciously so.”⁸ He debated theology and the history of the Scottish Church with a tutor whose beliefs regrettably (according to Scott) turned fanatical; from early on, Scott was instead sympathetic to the Cavaliers, “with a head on fire for chivalry,” but “[i]n all these tenets, there was no real conviction on my part, arising out of acquaintance with the views or principles of either party.”⁹ Many modern readers have been quick to take Scott at his word, regarding his use of religious turmoil as a mere means to establish the appropriate historical scenery for his novel.¹⁰ However, I am less convinced that the long reach of Scotland's particular

Waverley Novels and Scottish Nationalism (Reykjavik: Vigdis Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages and University of Iceland Press, 2005), p. 37; Cullinan, “The Possibilities of History: Scott's *Old Mortality*,” *Philological Quarterly* 58 (1979): 321–335, p. 334; and Ferguson, “Walter Scott and the Construction of Historical Knowledge: A Lukácsian Perspective,” *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association* 103 (2005): 43–63, p. 52.

⁸ From chapter one, “Memoir of the early life of Sir Walter Scott, written by himself,” in *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, by J. G. Lockhart (New York: Conner and Cooke, 1838), p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰ See, for example, Jill Rubenstein, “Scott Scholarship and Criticism: Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?” in *Scott in Carnival: Selected Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference* (Edinburgh, 1991), ed. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993), pp. 594–600; p. 597. Others have been more willing to consider Scott's representation of (and concern with) religious matters; for example, George Drake writes about Scott's uses of ritual throughout *Old Mortality*, claiming that “the improvised rituals and invented traditions of *Old Mortality* are

brand of religious fanaticism is by any means a settled matter, either in *Old Mortality* or its criticism, and my reading of the novel is illuminated by the Scottish tradition of Protestant martyrology, a tradition that—for most of Scott’s contemporaries—would have centered on the very Presbyterian Covenanters his novel depicts.

Protestant martyrology is, of course, neither homogenous nor uniform, but varied in its concerns according to geography and period. John Howie’s *Scots Worthies* (first published in 1775) recounted the sufferings of Protestants and proto-Protestants alike, and was Enlightenment Scotland’s most popular contribution to the field. Claiming a moment of *kairos* precipitated by what he considered to be the perversions of historians and attacks of the periodical press (his text mentions the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* by name), Howie set about rehabilitating the reputations of hundreds of individuals.

Although he includes momentary scenes of torture and suffering, what is most notable about *Scots Worthies* is the degree to which he shows restraint by avoiding prolonged, graphic, and sensationalized descriptions of these scenes. In many ways, in fact, he appears to be adopting the role of the Enlightenment historian: his mini-biographies frequently include footnotes and enter directly into conversation with earlier histories, many of which he explicitly challenges. But even as he questions the content of these other texts, the form of his own replicates their structure and the underlying rational epistemology that fuels their authority. In other words, not only does Howie eschew protracted scenes of supernatural intervention in making his case for the status of his martyrs—scenes that had gained traction two centuries earlier in John Foxe’s *Acts and*

more than fantasy: despite their lack of historicity, they express historical change.” George A. Drake, “‘Fanciful Devotion’: Ritualization in Scott’s *Old Mortality*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 49 (2010): 134. See also Judith Wilt, who contemplates the potential destructiveness of religious language and the Covenanters’ “Babel condition.” Judith Wilt, *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 101.

Monuments (The Book of Martyrs)—but he also moves away from the common practice of “linger[ing] over abuses of the body.”¹¹

Moreover, *Scots Worthies* generally reflects a more common movement away from a focus on the martyr as a relatively passive victim with an emphasis on the suffering body to a more active and militant “saint” who is not loathe to take matters into his own hands, and is as likely to meet death by means of punitive execution as by persecution. According to John Knott, whose *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694*, addresses the early part of this tradition’s history, Milton figures as the catalyst for this transformation of the suffering martyr into the martial saint. Knott contrasts this with Foxe’s sixteenth-century *Acts and Monuments*; in this text, like Milton’s, the “emphasis is on the heroic faith of the individual and the poignancy of the scene rather than on the fusion of human and divine,” but, unlike Milton’s, it is not as anxious about the role of the martyr (i.e., sufferer or soldier).¹² This problematic tension remained unresolved at the time of *Old Mortality*’s publication, ambivalently addressed by both Scott’s literary text as well as the inflamed responses it elicited.

According to Ina Ferris, “it is not surprising that *Old Mortality*, dealing as it does with a period (the late seventeenth century) central to powerful and often competing notions of national identity and legitimacy in early nineteenth-century Scotland... should have generated the sharpest critical debate of Scott’s career.”¹³ The anger toward Scott’s

¹¹ John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 10.

¹² Knott, p. 46.

¹³ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, p. 140. Ferris offers perhaps the most comprehensive summary (and compelling analysis) of this “controversy,” arguing that it represented a larger debate about the function and purpose of history. *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, pp. 137–72. See also Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 40–42, for a discussion of the responses to *Old Mortality*, as well as the responses to these responses, all of which produced an exchange that Duncan highlights throughout his study as imperative to our

text was twofold, provoked in seemingly equal measure by his undeniable attempts to rehabilitate the widely loathed Claverhouse, depicted as an honorable—if periodically vengeful and ruthless—knight, and by the perception that Scott had disparaged the Covenanters, national heroes for so many even in the nineteenth century. Burley of Balfour, often considered a foil to Claverhouse and the most prominent Covenanter in the novel, is a madman, twisted and violent due to a fanatical devotion to a radical and unforgiving Presbyterianism. John Galt's *Ringan Gilhaize* pointedly responded to *Old Mortality* in novel form, amending what Galt considered to be Scott's flawed depiction. James Hogg's *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* also offered a more sympathetic portrayal of persecuted Covenanters; although Hogg himself claimed that he had written his novel before *Old Mortality*'s publication, it was nonetheless considered to be yet another (critical) response. Most explicitly confrontational, however, was the book-length review, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters*, by Rev. Thomas McCrie.¹⁴ Dismissed as partisan anger at its worse, McCrie's review acknowledged the novel's artistry while condemning its (according to McCrie) manipulative tactics and blatant falsity.¹⁵ The irate

understanding of Post-Enlightenment Edinburgh. See also Mack and Gilbert, pp. 32–34, for a brief but helpful overview of the religio-political contexts of Scotland's role in the English Civil War, Restoration, and Glorious Revolution.

¹⁴ McCrie also published popular biographies of John Knox in 1811, and Andrew Melville in 1819. See T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700–2007*, rev. ed. (1999; repr., London: Penguin, 2006), p. 292.

¹⁵ David Daiches argues that “[g]enerations of subsequent research have only confirmed the essential justice and fairness of Scott's picture of both sides. The only scholar ever seriously to challenge Scott on this was the contemporary divine, Thomas McCrie, who made an attack on the accuracy of Scott's portrait of the Covenanters, but posterity has thoroughly vindicated Scott and shown McCrie's attack to have been the result of plain prejudice.” Daiches, “Scott's Achievement as a Novelist (Part Two),” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6 (1951): 159. I strongly disagree with Daiches's dismissiveness, particularly given that the outraged response to *Old Mortality* expanded far beyond McCrie's nearly one-hundred-page rebuttal, included religious and national-historical objections, and even prompted fictional rejoinders.

churchman rejected any suggestions by the novelist of an equivalence between the cavaliers and the Covenanters, instead cataloguing various examples of Scott's perfidy.¹⁶

But it was not merely historical inaccuracy that enraged McCrie. As Ferris insists,

The Covenanters, in other words, continued to function centrally in various ideologies in the present. For someone like the Reverend McCrie, a heroic reading of the Covenanters was fundamental to his sense of the authentic inheritance and identity (what he calls the 'ancient spirit') of Scotland, whereas for Scott and his allies, as the *Quarterly* review suggests, a contending version of 'legitimate' inheritance and identity cast the Covenanters in a rather different mode.¹⁷

This is certainly borne out by much of his review, but McCrie was not merely a Scottish nationalist, as this kind of perspective might indicate. He seems equally committed to reengaging an understanding of martyrdom that is *not* reliant on the martial as a defining feature, but that acknowledges a particular status afforded by a persecuted body. McCrie inveighs against

the bad tendencies of a practice which has of late become too general among our popular writers, who exert all their eloquence to exalt the military character above every other, to invest it with 'the highest qualities,' and to throw such a dazzling glare over the display of personal valour and martial abilities, as to conceal the cruelties with which it is accompanied, and in a great measure to reconcile the mind to it, even when it is employed to enslave mankind, and to rear or uphold the empire of despotism and tyranny.¹⁸

The novel's disavowal of the Covenanters as legitimate martyrs—its insinuation that their suffering had more to do with being bigoted enthusiasts or imperfect soldiers than "legitimate" victims¹⁹—is the ultimate betrayal. In his review, McCrie includes a number of examples in which Covenanters are clearly identified *as* suffering martyrs—an attempt

¹⁶ Thomas McCrie, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters: Consisting of a Review of the First Series of the "Tales of My Landlord,"* (Philadelphia: James M. Campbell, 1843), p. 11ff.

¹⁷ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, p. 143.

¹⁸ McCrie, p. 44.

¹⁹ See McCrie, p. 48, and *passim*.

to correct Scott's historical revision while offering the type of stories the novelist presumably *should* have included in *Old Mortality*.²⁰ Surprisingly, he pointedly discounts Macbriar's torture scene as one of these examples, insisting that its affective power is minimized by its textual proximity to the Covenanters' near-execution of Henry Morton (which occurs not long before). This proximity highlights Macbriar's culpability, and he is, therefore, an unacceptable model of martyrdom. McCrie may be correct that this complicates the reader's response to Macbriar, but if Morton is meant to provide some guidance in responding appropriately (or "modernly"), his sympathetic response to Macbriar's torture and execution challenges a too-negative reading of the character. What McCrie overlooks is that, first of all, Macbriar is pointedly different from the other Covenanters trying to execute Morton, and, secondly, there remains an unpredictable (and potentially uncontrollable) power evoked by the imagery of a suffering body. Knott observes that within martyrologies:

Such descriptions can be seen as a form of literary sensationalism in the service of religious polemic, but they have the important dramatic effect of magnifying the heroism of the protagonists and the power of God to bring good out of apparent evil. The greater the physical abuse the victims of persecution endure, the more impressive their spiritual victory and the more telling the contrast between the abused body of the martyr and the glorified body of the saint.²¹

Macbriar's martyrdom coincides with a rupture in the text, a rupture that brings to a terminus the "historical" mode of the novel with which Scott is so frequently credited.

It is not my purpose to re-imagine Scott perversely as some kind of radical Calvinist (or even merely an apologist), but rather to take seriously the intellectual and

²⁰ One of these is found in Hogg's *Poetic Mirror*, which claims suffering martyr status for the Covenanters. James Hogg, *The Poetic Mirror: Or, The Living Bards of Britain*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816).

²¹ Knott, p. 10.

affective power of the religious movement he draws upon in his novel, the potential (however inadvertent) of hagiography, and how they reveal possibilities that contradict readings that emphasize an unwitting moderation. If Scott's Covenanters are terrifying emblems of a past he clearly does not mourn, are they in fact as neatly *consigned* to this past as their crumbling monuments (the graves tended to by the eponymous "Old Mortality") might lead us to believe? Despite Ansdell's ultimate conclusion that "recent scholarship has demonstrated that the forces at work in eighteenth-century Scotland and Britain provided little encouragement for the Covenanting legacy to define Scottish identity,"—that, in other words, this radical Protestant movement was superseded by the moderation of the Scottish Enlightenment in setting the tone for Scottish identity and nationalism—this chapter argues that Scott's text raises serious questions that challenge any assumption of religious fanaticism's seamless or untroubled absorption within a more liberal culture.²²

Cyrus Vakil insists that "an isolated anachronism like Old Mortality, who roams the country chiselling away to restore the epitaphs of Covenanting martyrs, merely proves the rule, the law of historical convergence toward the middle path. Such men have been rendered innocuous, even endearingly quaint, by the sweep of history."²³ But how "innocuous" can Old Mortality be, if we accept John Humma's insistence that he is spiritually and temperamentally aligned with the dangerous fanaticism portrayed in the

²² Ansdell, p. 197. See also Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, "Revival: An Aspect of Scottish Religious Identity," in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c. 1700–2000*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 200–220, for a portrait of the strong role Presbyterian evangelicalism played in "ordinary" Scots' lives throughout the eighteenth century. Roxburgh challenges histories that focus solely on the moderation of the urban intelligentsia.

²³ Vakil, p. 414.

novel? In a reading that shares Ferris's insistence upon this ideology's staying power, Humma observes:

The Whig spirit manifest in the early decades of the nineteenth century nourished itself on the religious enthusiasm of *Old Mortality* and similar types...In speaking with *Old Mortality*, Pattieson and also Scott stood in the presence of one who had known the insurrectionists of 1679–89. Pattieson's and the 1830 Introduction posit a fear of the extremism embodied in *Old Mortality*'s code and contain an implicit plea for moderation. Each speaker recognizes *Old Mortality*'s role as link in a cultural heritage and, more dramatically, his spiritual, or moral, influence operating within the context of cultural and historical immediacy.²⁴

Dissent was still a feature in the nineteenth-century Presbyterian church, and Humma connects civil and religious unrest by noting that, when textile workers gathered in 1815 to express their discontent, they met “in the hills of Drumclog where the Puritans had routed the Cavaliers in 1679, the first of the battles recorded in *Old Mortality*.”²⁵ Despite Vakil's insistence that “[Scott's] eighteenth-century Scottish novels bear witness, again and again, to the process by which the passage of time causes people, once partisans of extreme doctrines (political or religious) to gradually adjust to the moderation and anti-ideological character of modernity,” he overlooks this undercurrent of fear—that history may repeat itself, undermining any triumphalism of progress or unwary veneration of the past.²⁶

²⁴ John B. Humma, “The Narrative Framing Apparatus of Scott's *Old Mortality*,” *Studies in the Novel* 12 (1980): 312.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²⁶ Vakil, p. 413.

The Tale of Old Mortality

In their introduction to the Oxford University Press edition (1993; reissued 2009) of *Old Mortality*, editors Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson claim that (at least according to Scott) “[t]he lesson of *Old Mortality* is that the religious passions which tore Scotland in the seventeenth century are dead and gone”—that “[t]he faults and limitations of extreme Protestantism are severely examined,” and “the period can be seen as one of transition from the unruly past to the beginnings of the reasonable present.”²⁷ These are problematic conclusions, which I challenge later on.²⁸ The protagonist, Henry Morton, is an amiable if naïve young man who inadvertently finds himself embroiled in the desperate clash between Charles II’s Royalist forces (or Cavaliers) and Scottish loyalists, on the one side, and the radical Presbyterians (or Covenanters) and lowland Scots who supported them on the other. Morton is a Presbyterian and the son of a famed though deceased Covenanting soldier, but is not a religious fanatic and is in fact closely tied to the local Royalist family, the Bellendens, particularly his childhood playmate and romantic love-interest, Edith Bellenden. His temperateness notwithstanding, Morton allows himself to be drawn into the machinations of the radical Calvinist, John Balfour of Burley, who—just before the opening of the novel—has orchestrated the assassination of the Archbishop James Sharp, a historical figure loathed by Scottish Presbyterians, especially those of the more radical persuasion who considered his appointment as Archbishop and acceptance (and conveyance) of episcopacy in Scotland an unforgivable

²⁷ Walter Scott, *The Tale of Old Mortality*, ed. Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson (1816; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. xi, xi, and xiii.

²⁸ D’Arcy also criticizes this interpretation, arguing that “for both Scott and the Scottish reader the ending of *Old Mortality* is a deeply ironic comment on Scotland in the late seventeenth century.” D’Arcy, p. 124.

betrayal.²⁹ Although his death is the catalyst for the Royalists' aggression toward the Covenanters, Sharp is killed off the main stage of the novel, a move that renders him a martyr in name only (and only according to Claverhouse and the Royalists). We hear of the attack's violence, but it is a violence that is related secondhand, and deprived of the shock value that punctuates Macbriar's end. It does, however, move the plot along, as Morton becomes complicit when he assists Burley's escape from government troops.³⁰

After staying the night at Milnwood, Morton's family home, Burley makes a successful escape. Morton, however, is not so fortunate, and, if his respect for family and the debts of loyalty incurred by his father's relationship with Burley prompt his assistance to the older man (as opposed to any sympathy of feeling or shared religious convictions), his personal integrity and refusal to equivocate on the truth of these actions result in his detainment by the Cavaliers. This is also an opportunity for Scott to illustrate the abuses of the government at this time, an illustration that has been read as his even-handedness in depicting the fraught political situation of the "Killing Times." The Royalist soldiers are indeed presumptuous, crass, and overbearing, but, ultimately, Scott backs away from too vicious an indictment of their actions, and in making one of them—Cornet Grahame—a victim to Burley's extremism later on, this initial bad behavior loses much of its force. However, if Scott's intentions were purely partisan, the scene of Cornet Grahame's death would be the perfect moment to dwell on Burley's action, seeing as it was a violation of martial etiquette (the Cavalier was carrying the white flag and attempting to negotiate) that resulted in a pathetic—rather than glorious—demise. But the

²⁹ Sharp was also a consummate politician whose treatment of the Covenanters only added to his widespread loathing.

³⁰ Burley served with Morton's father against both Charles I and Oliver Cromwell during the Civil War, and he takes full advantage of the relational tie in order to convince the younger man to assist him in evading those who seek to avenge the Archbishop's death.

action is abrupt, the description brief, and it seems, once again, more of a means for moving the plot in a particular direction; there is very little narrative attempt to capture the audience's sympathy for a character that has been, if anything, a rather careless but not entirely ill-intentioned buffoon of a young man.

Nonetheless, Scott provocatively positions both sides as being equally and culpably violent (along the lines of terrible atrocities being committed by both armies in a war), while at the same time refusing the vast majority of Covenanters the honor and chivalry with which he is at pains to depict the Royalists led by John Grahame of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, and Lord Evandale, Morton's Royalist counterpart and rival for Edith Bellenden's affections. Early in the novel, Evandale saves Morton from Claverhouse's sentence of death.³¹ Later on, as the Covenanting insurrection winds down and Morton is nearly executed by the more radical faction of his own side, Claverhouse intervenes, slaughters the vast majority of the Cameronians, and rescues Morton. A surprising amount of the novel is preoccupied with appropriately chivalrous men on opposite sides of a rebellion going to great lengths to rescue each other. Compare this to the ill-equipped farmers, peasants, and other decidedly *non*-martial individuals who helped assure the Covenanters' victory at the battle of Drumclog (a victory from which Morton benefited directly), and we see the groundwork for the intersectionality of competing loyalties, affinities, and identification occurring between the novel's main characters.

Following this victory, Morton finds himself a leader within the Covenanting Army. Placed in this position of responsibility as much because of his father's legacy and

³¹ Evandale acts on Edith's request, highlighting his chivalry and character. At the battle of Drumclog, Morton returns the favor and saves Evandale's life.

his high social rank (relative to the other men) as any earned acclaim, he is viewed suspiciously by the more radical of his fellow insurgents. Macbriar, who first appears just after the initial victory at Drumclog when he addresses the victorious Covenanters, is one of the most skeptical. He is surprisingly young—“hardly twenty years old”—surprising because of his preaching’s ability to capture the ragtag army’s imagination “as they listened to doctrines which elevated them alike above the wants and calamities of the world, and identified their cause with that of the Deity” (18:209, 211). And while he may distrust Morton, Scott contrasts Macbriar favorably against the older Reverend Gabriel Kettledrummle, who directly precedes him in preaching to the crowd, but who has been exposed as a coward in the preceding chapter. Held captive by the Cavaliers along with Morton and two others, Kettledrummle is the epitome of a pedantic Calvinism that is all too easily discarded when convenient (i.e., when the minister’s life is at stake). This figure is mocked and caricatured by Scott, who exposes his hypocrisy and self-preservation. However, if Scott creates a cartoonish version of the rogue Covenanter (down to the humorous name, “Kettledrummle”), the fervent Macbriar is far more difficult to dismiss, and is consistently faithful to his espoused beliefs throughout the novel.

Moreover, for the most part, the radicals’ skepticism is warranted, as Morton does not hide his religious moderation, his continued concern for the Bellenden family, and his respect for members of the opposite side. For the Covenanters, this is a justified (religiously, nationally, and politically—all of which are wrapped up into one) rebellion against what they view to be the illegitimate extension of Stuart rule, particularly into Scottish religious affairs. However, Morton considers their resistance to be warranted on

the basis of more general episodes of government tyranny, centering on the unfairness and human cost of English heavy-handedness in Scotland, as opposed to any commitment to the theological debates. These debates are represented by the more extreme Covenanting arguments which occur during their “disputations,” which in large part rely on a code of typological jargon, and from which Morton distances himself. For the truly fanatical, his moderation is anathema—they are fighting nothing less than a holy war, and compromise is tantamount to selling one’s soul.

Despite his stated adherence to this fanatical stance, Burley plays a mediating role between Morton and the radicals, reflecting a pragmatism that recognizes the usefulness of having someone like Morton on their side in order to gain the upper hand against the Royalist troops, while placating the true believers that—once victory has been gained—the younger man will either come around or be dealt with appropriately.³² Using the religious language common to the cause, he acknowledges that the Cameronians “cannot yet do without the help of the Laodiceans and the Erastians; we must endure for a space the indulged in the midst of the council—the sons of Zeruiah are yet too strong for us” (21:231).³³ Macbriar, on the other hand, decries Burley’s “worldly craft” (his verbal acrobatics as he attempts to convince Morton to join the Covenanting cause), declaring that “this temporizing with sin and with infirmity, is in itself a falling away; and I fear me

³² Burley is “particularly anxious to secure the accession of Henry Morton to the cause of the insurgents” in order gain a much-needed unity among them. The older Covenantanter realizes that if he can draw Morton into a position of power, he can also use Morton’s father’s legacy to his own advantage and “exercise some influence over the more liberal part of the army, and ultimately, perhaps, ingratiate himself so far with them, as to be chosen commander-in-chief, which was the mark at which his ambition aimed” (21:233). As is always the case with Burley, self-interest motivates his actions as much as any religious fervor.

³³ Scott’s narrator notes that “Balfour, however enthusiastic, and however much attached to the most violent of those tenets which we have noticed, saw nothing but ruin to the general cause, if they were insisted on during this crisis, when unity was of so much consequence. Hence he disapproved, as we have seen, of the honest, downright, and ardent zeal of Macbriar...” (21:233). Burley does not hesitate to compromise his spiritual ideals in order to bring his immediate worldly goals into practice.

Heaven will not honour us to do much more for His glory, when we seek to carnal cunning and to a fleshly arm. The sanctified end must be wrought by sanctified means” (21:231). He has no interest in recruiting Morton through such measures, washing his hands of Burley’s deceptive rhetoric and declaring “I will not assist to mislead the youth, nor bring him into jeopardy of life, unless upon such grounds as will ensure his eternal reward” (21:231). It is not enough for Morton merely to play an active role in the rebellion; for Macbriar, intention is everything, reflecting an idealism that is uneasily handled throughout the rest of the novel.

And while Burley wins this argument and Morton becomes a leader of the uprising, he does so under a cloud of suspicion from the more fanatical elements of the rebellion. This is an ominous foreshadowing of the risk Morton will soon face from those with whom he is supposedly fighting, and after this initial victory, internal clashes, prompted by an almost compulsive need to “dispute” and proselytize, stymie the rebellion’s ability to continue a successful campaign.

Macbriar presents a model of unquestioning religious fanaticism that compares favorably to the more opportunistic (or, in the case of Mucklewrath, downright insane) versions surrounding him, even as it proves irreconcilable to the more moderate sensibilities of Morton. Morton is temperamentally unsuited to many of the Covenanters’ arguments, claiming that “much of this sort of language, which, I observe, is so powerful with others, is entirely lost on me” (21:229). Moreover, he is epistemologically incompatible, as well, condemning tacitly what he sees as the radicals’ habit of misusing Scripture “by wrestling particular passages from their context” and then applying them “to circumstances and events with which they have often very slender relation” (21:230).

This is a direct assault on the Protestant practice of typology, and indicates Morton's appropriately "historical" understanding as it is contrasted against the Covenanters' symbolic means of knowledge. Unsurprisingly, Macbriar is horrified by this, but Burley is undeterred, tempering his language and appealing to Morton's nationalism. Scott's description of Burley's manipulative way with words is underscored by an unflattering biographical aside, in which the narrator depicts the older man's transformation from dissipated youth to staunch Calvinist, but who nonetheless retains "the vices of revenge and ambition" (21:232).³⁴

This tension between the moderate and radical factions of the Covenanters dominates many of the following chapters, and members of these groups run the gamut from the most violent and enthusiastic Cameronians to moderate clergymen who have accepted the indulgence of the state.³⁵ Morton discovers that "[t]he calm and anxious gravity which it might be supposed would have presided in councils held on such important subjects, and at a period so critical, seemed to have given place to discord wild, and loud uproar, which fell on the ear of their new ally [Morton] as an evil augury of their future measures" (22:238). What emerges from these scenes is a sense of dread and anxiety about the power attending such religious fundamentalism, and the self-sabotaging effect it has when conflated with military planning; it seems to reaffirm McCrie's complaint about Scott's representation of the Covenanters as an inept military (and, thus, somehow less-than-martyred when they are eventually routed and killed). The most

³⁴ This negative description—along with the "worldly craft" in which he consistently participates—makes it difficult to accept Lukács's assessment that "Burley's single-minded, dauntless, heroic fanaticism marks the human summit of the rebellious Scottish Puritans at the time of the Stuart Restoration." Lukács, p. 40.

³⁵ Stevenson and Davidson note that this is one of Scott's anachronisms, claiming that "there is no historical evidence that any indulged ministers joined the rebellion. This is one of Scott's tinkering with the facts for literary effect, in order to permit dialogue between indulged and proscribed ministers." See p. 524n239.

grotesquely terrifying example of this is Habakkuk Mucklewrath: tortured by the state and radicalized beyond reason, he is a “ghastly apparition, which looked more like the resurrection of some cannibal priest, or druid red from his human sacrifice, than like an earthly mortal” (22:243). This is the moment when the disparate and violently fanatical nature of the uprising becomes truly apparent to Morton: typology and vengeance are uttered simultaneously, and Mucklewrath lives up to his name (“much” or “great” wrath), transforming his insanity and bitterness into a biblical call for decimation. This is very much the old man’s moment: he rejects Macbriar’s “soothing” attempt to placate him, and responds instead with the challenge “is this a time to speak of peace, when the earthquakes” (22:242). Although he remains for the most part silent during Mucklewrath’s diatribe, Macbriar does concur “that these are the latter days, when signs and wonders shall be multiplied” (22:244). The apocalyptic overtones of this are unmistakable; Scott does not directly challenge nor contextualize the long history of such apocalypticism within Scottish writing, nor does he paint a particularly sympathetic picture of the madman.³⁶ Nonetheless, this graphic description appears to contradict the motions of progress, and opens up a raw wound centering on state power and the atrocities of which it is capable. Mucklewrath draws on both the language of the Covenanters *and* refers to his persecution by the government:

Who talks of signs and wonders? Am not I Habakkuk Mucklewrath, whose name is changed to Magor-Missabib, because I am made a terror unto myself and unto all that are around me?—I heard it—When did I hear it?—Was it not in the Tower of the Bass, that overhangeth the wide wild sea?...Where did I see it?—Was it not from the high peaks of Dunbarton, when I looked westward upon the fertile land, and northward on the wild Highland hills; when the clouds gathered and the tempest came, and the lightnings of heaven flashed in sheets as wide as the banners of an host?—What did I see?—Dead corpses and wounded horses, the rushing together

³⁶ See Stevenson and Davidson, pp. 525–26n244, for a gloss on this history.

of battle, and garments rolled in blood.—What heard I?—The voice that cried, Slay, slay—smite—slay utterly—let not your eye have pity! slay utterly, old and young, the maiden, the child, and the woman whose head is grey—Defile the house and fill the courts with the slain! (22:244)

Although Mucklewrath gets his typology wrong,³⁷ this cry for blood is a chilling repudiation of every “natural” human response Scott privileges throughout his novel. It is also a foreshadowing of state violence to come.

Ultimately, the infighting and blind faith that the cause of heaven will assure them victory instead assure the Covenanters’ defeat, and Scott describes a scene of absolute chaos at the next major confrontation. “Instead of being drawn up in line of battle, and listening to the commands of their officers, they [the Covenanters] were crowding together in a confused mass, that rolled and agitated itself like the waves of the sea, while a thousand tongues spoke, or rather vociferated, and not a single ear was found to listen” (31:328). The uncontrollable rage of “the insane preacher,” Mucklewrath, is turned not just on the Royalist army, but upon Morton himself, whom he accuses of being “one of those men of Belial,” a turn that effectively divides the rebellion (31:329). Unsurprisingly, the government troops are victorious and the Covenanters routed.

Even as Macbriar is positioned as a principled foil to the worldlier Burley, he is nonetheless a figure whose unwavering convictions are extremely threatening to both Morton and the moderation he represents. This becomes clear following the disastrous battle of Bothwell Bridge, at which the Covenanting rebellion experiences a resounding defeat, when Morton and his faithful sidekick, Cuddie, stumble across a remote cottage hiding a group of the most extreme insurgents, including both Macbriar and Mucklewrath. These Cameronians blame Morton for their defeat, and his life is immediately threatened.

³⁷ See Stevenson and Davidson, p. 526n244.

However, Macbriar insists upon giving him an opportunity to defend himself, although it is immediately clear that Morton's answers will be inadequate. The young preacher's line of questioning, relying once again on typology and theological interrogation, reinforces that the two speak different languages. Linguistically revealing himself to be operating under a wholly alien epistemology, Morton damns himself as effectively as he did during his interview with Claverhouse at the beginning of the novel, when his insistence upon his liberty of conscience nearly results in his execution. Both scenarios share resonances with the "call-and-response" structure so common in Presbyterian liturgy (and frequently functioning as a means of community confession and/or forgiveness),³⁸ but with one major difference: in the earlier interrogation, Claverhouse is clearly predisposed to find Morton guilty, shaping the tenor of the interaction. However, as alien and dogmatic as Macbriar's questioning may seem, it is motivated by the genuine desire to give Morton the opportunity to change his position by accepting the Cameronians' religious tenets. He first admonishes his more bloodthirsty companions—"let us not use the sword rashly, lest the load of innocent blood lie heavy on us"—and, when that is not enough, remonstrates "I say, hear the youth... for Heaven knows our bowels have yearned for him, that he might be brought to see the truth, and exert his gifts in its defence" (33:344). But

³⁸ This emphasis on confession and forgiveness is echoed in the cases of immorality that came in front of the Church courts, and if there are liturgical resonances in these scenes, there are also surely evocations of the Church's legal power. If "public confession and reprimand was the way to expiation of moral shortcomings and reinstatement in the eyes of the community," the stakes are much higher for Macbriar in his questioning of Morton, for he is searching for a revelation of his alignment with the radical cause, an indication of Morton's elected status on which his worldly allegiance must be predicated. John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton, Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 1998), p. 15.

Morton's answers cannot satisfy and, despite some reservations, Macbriar concludes that "the punishment of one that hath wrought folly in Israel" is justified (33:345).³⁹

In an ironic turn, Morton is saved by Claverhouse mere moments before the Cameronians can murder him, and all but Macbriar are killed in the skirmish or executed immediately thereafter. The remaining Whigs—Morton, Cuddie, and Macbriar—are taken to Edinburgh to go before the Privy Council, the extension of the English government in Scotland, and they meet a terrible scene. The Royalist troops march into the city accompanied by "two heads borne upon pikes; and before each bloody head were carried the hands of the dismembered sufferers, which were, by the brutal mockery of those who bore them, often approached towards each other as if in the attitude of exhortation or prayer" (35:361). Scott describes this terrible spectacle as much to indict the cruelty of the victors as to decry the attitude of the "rabble," whose "tumultuous outcries and shouts...are too happy in being permitted to huzza for any thing whatever which calls them together" (35:361). The perfidiousness of the mob can be channeled both by religious extremists as well as an oppressive government, neither of which the novel endorses.

This chaotic brutality is then institutionalized within the operations of the Privy Council. At the behest of Claverhouse and Lord Evandale, Morton escapes with his life, but is banished to the continent, and Cuddie is released into the service of the Bellendens. Macbriar, on the other hand, suffers terribly due to his refusal to compromise his religious ideals. Whereas Morton and Cuddie must make concessions that—however

³⁹ Scott notes that Macbriar is "somewhat disconcerted" when Morton raises the possibility that the Covenanters are not entirely motivated by heavenly concerns; Macbriar's "fierce zeal did not perhaps exclude some feelings of doubt and compunction" (33:345, 346), which appears to be a positive characterization.

understandable—require a turn from their earlier beliefs in order to save their lives, the young preacher stands firm, lamenting when he witnesses “Morton in the act of what he accounted apostasy” (36:366). Refusing to disclose any information about Burley, Macbriar is tortured with “the Scottish boot,” in which the prisoner’s leg is enclosed, a piece of iron is inserted “between the knee and the edge of the machine,” and then hammered into the flesh and bone at regular intervals as long as the prisoner refuses to answer the Council’s questions and remains conscious (36:368, 369). This consistency is not necessarily exemplary; nonetheless, it demands Morton’s shocked admiration—one that only grows as the executioner strikes the metal into Macbriar’s leg five times before he finally collapses. Upon the Council’s final sentence of execution, Macbriar declares:

My Lords, I thank you for the only favour I looked for, or would accept at your hands, namely, that you have sent the crushed and maimed carcass, which has this day sustained your cruelty, to this hasty end. It were indeed little to me whether I perish on the gallows or in the prison-house; but if death, following close on what I have this day suffered, had found me in my cell of darkness and bondage, many might have lost the sight of how a Christian man can suffer in the good cause. . . . Ye send me to a happy exchange—to the company of angels and the spirits of the just, for that of frail dust and ashes—Ye send me from darkness into day—from mortality to immortality—and, in a word, from earth to heaven! (36:371)

In embracing “immortality,” the Cameronian is certainly referring to the state of his soul, but he is also well aware of how his public execution can be folded into the mythology of the Calvinist Saints, bearing the testimony of his sacrifice not just by means of its physical witnesses, but also the literature inspired by his and others’ deaths. Although Claverhouse makes an attempt to minimize the power of this sacrifice, and Morton attempts to frame it in chivalric tones as well as in the martyr-as-soldier model, its effect on the novel is, ultimately, apocalyptic.

Both Morton and Claverhouse's attempts to discuss what they have just witnessed are wholly inadequate. For all of his abstract musings on the subject of government oppression, Morton can manage sympathy, but must return to the language of chivalry that is increasingly becoming the foundation of his understanding: "Marvellous firmness and gallantry...what a pity it is that with such self-devotion and heroism should have been mingled the fiercer features of his sect!" (36:371). Claverhouse is not insensitive to the question of one's posthumous legacy, but is limited to describing it as a martial attribute.⁴⁰ He is, however, incapable of applying it to the Covenanters: the idea of Macbriar as a soldier-martyr is laughable to Claverhouse; the idea of him as a martyr-sufferer is inconceivable.

The last one-hundred pages of the novel hastily rush through Morton's banishment from Scotland, his anonymous return in 1689 (the year following the Glorious Revolution, which effectively reversed the balance of power between Whig and Cavalier), and a reunion with Edith Bellenden. An awkwardly jocular conclusion returns the reader to the "present day" by relating a dialogue between the narrator (Peter Pattieson) and a Miss Buskbody that ties up the story's loose ends, despite Pattieson's objection "that a history, growing already vapid, is but dully crutched up by a detail of circumstances which every reader must have anticipated" (456). Given the sheer abundance of the "detail of circumstances" Scott has seen fit to include throughout the previous four-hundred-plus pages, his narrator's sudden reservation to do so at this juncture is provocative. But it is not only this brief conclusion that seems a little too neat

⁴⁰ "It is not the expiring pang," Claverhouse asserts, "that is worth thinking of in an event that must happen one day, and may befall us on any given moment—it is the memory which the soldier leaves behind him, like the long train of light that follows the sunken sun—that is all which is worth caring for, which distinguishes the death of the brave or the ignoble" (34:352).

in its wrapping up of events: the *deus ex machine* that is Morton's sudden reemergence from overseas—he arrives just in the nick of time to rescue the Bellendens from an unscrupulous kinsman who has taken possession of their estate but *not* in time to save Lord Evandale's life—lacks the emotional depth and complexity that punctuate the majority of the preceding novel. Others have noted that Scott's narrative disruption and silent glossing over of the violence of the intervening decade play a role in this sense of artificiality (a term that is not used pejoratively).⁴¹ However, it is Macbriar's execution that directly *precedes* this aporia and creates a moment of crisis in the text, one that portrays the full force of state power and its "legitimate" violence, resulting in a "crushed and maimed carcass" that becomes readable only through the narrative of the martyr. The specter of this fanatical legacy is rendered all the more haunting by the forcedness of the novel's final pages, calling into question how we make sense of such trauma.⁴²

The ten years Morton spends away from Scotland were punctuated by terrible crackdowns on its people, culminating in the despotism and then expulsion of James II⁴³ in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Moreover, any

implication that the old wild Scotland has turned into an enlightened modern Scotland [is] again wishful thinking. The dreadful famine known as 'King William's Ill Years' was looming: bad harvests and cattle disease devastated the country from 1695 to 1699. Scotland was to be reduced to near-starvation in the first years of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴

A text that has for the most part relied on a tone of careful documentation and psychological complexity now suddenly relies on the stock elements of misperception and (mis)timing (Edith confuses Morton's appearance at a window for a ghostly

⁴¹ See, for example, Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 61, and *Scott's Shadow*, pp. 138–39, 141–44.

⁴² In his reading of *Old Mortality*, Duncan sees *Morton* "as a kind of ghost, haunting the scenery of his former life." *Scott's Shadow*, p. 189.

⁴³ James VII of Scotland.

⁴⁴ Stevenson and Davidson, p. 538n375.

apparition,⁴⁵ and Evandale's convenient death). The final development that allows the plot to come to its "natural" conclusion—the death of the Bellendens' unscrupulous kinsman, Morton and Edith's marriage, and the resumption of Edith's estate—occurs *not* because of any triumph of reason or moderation, but because Cuddie, Morton's former comrade, hides behind a hedge and shoots the kinsman from a decidedly unchivalric vantage point.

Why, then, does the novel lead up to such a traumatic scene, only to retreat from and gloss over its fallout, and hastily resolve any lingering loose ends? Scott's son-in-law and biographer, John Gibson Lockhart, insisted that *Old Mortality* "made the Covenanting heritage safe ('a new and innocent fervour') for the national tradition by purging it of its political energies and turning it into an object for aesthetic contemplation."⁴⁶ But it seems this "aesthetic" transformation is only made possible by manipulating history in a way that—at the very least—challenges the ethical implications of a literary form's claim to participate within a modern, rational discourse. And such a move comes with inherent risk: as Duncan reminds us, "[a]bsence and death constitute tradition, the mystic bond of connection between generations. Yet there is something unwholesome about this covenant with the dead."⁴⁷ Returning to this period is risky, and the moderation the novel repeatedly advocates is revealed as inadequate. In a letter pleading with Major Bellenden to remove Lady Margaret and Edith from their besieged estate, Morton writes of his (very moderate) desire that the

peace [be] restored, which, without injury to the King's constitutional rights, may substitute the authority of equal laws to that of military violence, and, permitting to all men to worship God according to their own

⁴⁵ See Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 189, and Wilt, p. 104, for discussions of this scene.

⁴⁶ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

consciences, may subdue fanatical enthusiasm by reason and mildness, instead of driving it to frenzy by persecution and intolerance. (25:268)

But Major Bellenden reacts with anger and scorn, first declaring Morton's insurgence to be "without even the pretext of enthusiasm," and then concluding that he is "a presbyterian—I ought to have been aware that I was nursing a wolf-cub, whose diabolical nature would make him tear and snatch at me on the first opportunity. Were Saint Paul on earth again, and a presbyterian, he would be a rebel in three months—it is in the very blood of them" (25:269–70). Morton cannot penetrate the clear partisanship of the old soldier.⁴⁸ Compare this to his similar inability to convince the radical faction of the Covenanters to listen to his sound advice when preparing for battle, and the impotence of Morton's moderation to effect any real impact upon the historical events taking place around him is suddenly striking. For a novel that is so frequently read as an endorsement of the "middle way," its very representative is rebuffed, manipulated, and threatened at every turn, and, finally, banished from the land.

Macbriar's execution is the turning point—a lifting of the veil on the futility of the optimism upon which Morton's moderation appears to be predicated. If this "middle way" is in fact impotent, it is suggestive of a deep spiritual pessimism that is too frequently overlooked because of the more heartening humanity so often conveyed throughout Scott's novels. The tortured preacher recognizes what the Privy Council does not: the more broken and battered his body is made, the stronger, more compelling, and intimately affecting his story becomes. And while the structure of eighteenth-century martyrologies may have closely resembled their counterparts in historiography, Scott's blend of graphic account and formal disjunction does something far more troubling than

⁴⁸ Although they are not religious fanatics, Major Bellenden and Lady Margaret are blinded by their own superstitions and bigotry.

Howie et al. accomplished: it reasserts the power of the individual body to determine the narratives that shape history—or to end them. The form of the novel itself seems to crumble under the weight of the atrocity it has just described. Morton flees into exile, and, despite the eighty-plus remaining pages, time seems to stop. Even Scott’s narrator appears to recognize that something drastic has occurred, framing as artistic license the years-long gap between the execution and resumption of the narrative following the Glorious Revolution: “It is fortunate for tale-tellers that they are not tied down like theatrical writers to the unities of time and place, but may conduct their personages to Athens and Thebes at their pleasure, and bring them back at their convenience” (37:375).⁴⁹ The narrator has this luxury because of course he is telling a tale, *not* relating “history” in any literal sense. He makes choices about how to stitch these episodes together, but then explicitly calls our attention to the very process. The limitations of fiction determine that this edited chain of events is the most the novel can offer us; however, Scott’s explicitness—his blatant insistence on announcing that this is *exactly* what he is doing—suggests not only that this edited chain is all we can ever hope for, but that it was all there ever was to begin with. There is no “history” without narrative, an insight the Covenanters seem to fully appreciate given their insistence on dominating any and all conversations with constant smatterings of scripture and exegesis. There is a typological understanding of history, though, contrasting against the linear structure of Enlightenment versions. Although Scott appears to favor one of these competing models over the other, it is less clear that he wholly believes in it.

“Confidence of divine support in some form or another,” Knott suggests, “characterizes representations of martyrdom in the tradition I have described. Without it,

⁴⁹ Duncan also notes the importance of these lines in *Scott’s Shadow*, pp. 143–44.

a sacrificial death would lose its meaning.”⁵⁰ Macbriar willingly accepts this fate, confident not only in his place in heaven but in the worldly legacy such a martyrdom will produce. Scott, too, realized that for so many of his countrymen and women, this sacrificial death still carried substantial meaning, and *The Heart of Midlothian* registers a shift in Scott’s use of religious language, possibly in response to the outpouring of criticism he received following the publication of *Old Mortality*.⁵¹ If the novel does in fact devise a teleological narrative with moderation as its endgame, the epistemological endurance of the Covenanters’ radical theology is, nonetheless, insufficiently contained. Scott may indeed have hoped that this move to moderation would be triumphant; however, the ending of *Old Mortality* leaves open the question of how much any faith in progress and modernity is merely an unconvincing panacea—an illusion that even the author can no longer maintain by the end of his tale. *Old Mortality* reveals gaps, fissures, and anxieties that indicate a much more troubling and pessimistic view of human progress and the lessons of history available to, if not endorsed by, the author.⁵² These questions must challenge any residual belief in the novel as an objective interlocutor for the modern world. Narrators may have a habit of allowing certain voices greater authority over others, but these ghosts at the margins threaten the very possibility of historical

⁵⁰ Knott, p. 177.

⁵¹ David Hewitt, “*The Heart of Midlothian* and ‘The People,’” *European Romantic Review* 13 (2002): 299–309.

⁵² Other examples of critics who take seriously the ominous tone present throughout the novel include Antony Hasler, who notes that some of his students “found a troubling bleakness in *Old Mortality*’s final disintegration. Here, Scott’s ‘very curious emptiness’ . . . denotes not some imputed deficiency but a strategic and thoroughly disquieting acknowledgment of the insufficiencies of narrative closure.” Hasler, “Framing the Covenanters (Again): Teaching *Old Mortality* in Context,” in *Approaches to Teaching Scott’s Waverley Novels*, ed. Evan Gottlieb and Ian Duncan (New York: MLA, 2009), pp. 140–49; pp. 143–44. Ina Ferris also notes how one of Scott’s narrators (Peter Pattieson) “insists, almost obsessively, on the pastness of the past.” It is this supposed “pastness” that is so provocative. Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, p. 170.

narrative altogether. A form that relies on certain voices being silenced is inherently vulnerable to such a return.

Chapter 2

Religion, Rationalism, and Hogg's *Confessions*: Capturing History

Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* offers an account of a central moment of seventeenth-century Covenanting history, fictionalizing one of the pinnacle expressions of Scottish nationalism before the Acts of Union in 1707. Employing the trappings of the historical method he is often credited with popularizing, Scott's novel invited its contemporary audience to experience these tumultuous times as events that were very much tethered to the past, and to experience them as a history whose dynamism had long since fizzled, even as crumbling memorials remained on the landscape. If this was in order to achieve a kind of mastery of said past via narrative (en)closure (and critics do disagree on Scott's intentions), I have argued that this was not achievable given the martyrdom of the radical minister, Ephraim Macbriar, and the narrative splintering at the end of the novel. Within a decade of *Old Mortality*'s publication, Scott's protégé and rustic "pet," James Hogg, produced *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a fun-house mirror of a novel that—when held up next to Scott's—boasted an ostentatiously different style, form, and take on religion, Scottish history, and the "promise" of rational modernity. Like Scott before him, Hogg turned to the fanaticism of earlier times, but Hogg's text differs from that of his mentor and sometimes-patron more than it resembles. From the non-linear structure of *Confessions* (referred to as "a kind of

premature post-modernist novel”¹) to its focus on the excesses of a particular offshoot of radical Scottish Presbyterianism (Antinomianism), this novel frustrates most attempts to classify its politics or perspective in any totalizing fashion. Moreover, it calls attention to an issue too frequently flattened by secular approaches: the persistence of *intra*-religious dissent, and the obstacles such tensions create for any unifying movement (be it political, nationalistic, or Protestant). Scottish Presbyterianism was not (and is not) monolithic, and the national religion faced as many challenges internally as it did from other denominations and political powers. Hogg’s novel reflects this tenuousness, and gestures toward a far more conflicted struggle to define this powerful aspect of Scottish history and identity.

This chapter focuses on James Hogg’s contribution to this self-fashioning. Hogg’s novel challenges easy adherence to any epistemological approach, making strange bedfellows of religion and rationalism. Both are critiqued, revealing fundamental flaws in how they reach their own versions of narrative truth, and it is in Antinomianism that we find a startling case study of how such “competing” approaches can come together in particularly dangerous ways.² This theological strand strongly relies on a perverse deployment of reason to its most radical ends in order to justify the often antisocial actions of its adherents. Antinomianism’s heady mixture of extreme religious belief and unforgiving, syllogistic logic creates the conditions that allow an easily duped “sinner” to backslide down the path of damnation.

¹ Magdalene Redekop, “Beyond Closure: Buried Alive with Hogg’s Justified Sinner,” *ELH* 52 (1985): 162.

² Susan Manning notes that both positions (as represented by the novel’s two narrators) “are, finally, found wanting as complete and objective accounts. But neither do they complement one another and between them reveal the ‘truth’ to the reader.” *The Puritan-Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 80.

Just as damning are the blind spots shared by religious and secular characters alike, producing a delusional certainty that is the cause of their undoing. In this chapter, I consider Hogg's juxtaposition of the obsessions of a religious fanatic against the emerging dominance of enlightened reason. Both the form and plot of this novel reflect a messy, complicated history in which destiny is a weapon used to silence opposing beliefs, but one that has a troubling habit of turning on the individual or belief system foolish or naïve enough to deploy it.

Initially, *Confessions* seems like a relatively straightforward tale of family intrigue, resentment, and fratricide. An older, wealthy, hedonistic man marries a strictly pious and much younger woman, which unsurprisingly results in a terrifically unhappy union. Given their unsuitability for one another, they quickly turn to separate lives, maintaining residences on different floors of the same house. George Colwan, Sr. returns to his drinking and carousing, and his reluctant wife, Lady Dalcastle, takes up with Rev. Wringhim, a radical Calvinist minister with whom she spends countless hours "disputing" (and, we're led to believe, succumbing to more carnal pleasures, as well). Colwan recognizes and accepts her first child as his own, but attributes paternity of the second to Lady Dalcastle's spiritual advisor, and has nothing to do with the boy. The two brothers could not be less alike: George, Jr., is a golden boy, hearty, athletic, and popular with the lads, while Robert is a gloomy, "glowering" wet blanket who has inherited his "adopted" father's religious bigotry and zeal for sharing it with an unwilling audience.

The action of the plot takes off during the debates in Scotland leading up to the 1707 Acts of Union, and it is during this heady period of history that the personal and the political collide for George and Robert. For reasons we are never entirely sure of, Robert takes it upon himself to shadow his older brother, stalking him in both public and private locales, and lecturing him on the errors of his misspent, secular existence. These confrontations escalate into violence, mutual recriminations, and ultimately to George's murder. His father dies a broken man not long after, and Robert, Lady Dalcastle, and Rev. Wringhim take over the family estate. More death and intrigue soon follow, and it becomes clear that the pious young Robert plays a central nefarious role in these crimes. The extent of his guilt, though, is one of the great puzzles of the novel: is he a vicious, self-interested killer, or is Gil-Martin, who appears during a moment of transcendence (Robert's assurance of being "justified" and thus one of the Calvinist elect), the guilty party? Moreover, what is Gil-Martin's status in the novel? Is he a "real" character, or a fever-dream produced by a mind twisted and warped by religious fanaticism?

These are questions made even more difficult to answer given the form of the novel. Broken into three distinct sections, Hogg's shifting perspective prevents the reader from discerning the "true" story. *Confessions* begins with "The Editor's Narrative," which appears to provide an objective, rational synopsis of the story (the editor writes it from a nineteenth-century vantage point), before moving on to the "Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner, Written By Himself," roughly one-and-a-half times the length of the first. This second section is a first-person narrative from Robert Wringhim's perspective, and although it begins by mirroring the events of the editor's version, Wringhim's diary includes far greater detail and includes previously unrecorded episodes.

It follows him to the edge of madness and an uncertain end—does he commit suicide or is he in fact killed or spirited away by a supernatural entity?—before the editor picks up the narrative once more. What follows is an ironic account of a group of mostly Edinburgh gentlemen calling on one “James Hogg” to help them find the body of “the suicide” (that of Robert Wringhim), and details the excavation of said body and the horror that this reveals. It is vital to recognize the way in which this last, “objective” stance does not actually have the last word—how Hogg undermines modes of rational thought that might otherwise be used to overcome and resolve religious fanaticism. This is not to suggest that said fanaticism is vindicated by reason’s limitations; instead, what I wish to consider in this chapter is the way in which a novel most celebrated for its post-modern tricksiness may in fact offer contingent moments of hope and strategies for human success—moments and strategies that are nonetheless always fighting off the aggression of enthusiasm, whether it is the enthusiasm of radical religion or a secular attachment to reason and the Enlightenment.

Where I believe Hogg does offer a more positive and productive understanding of the world (however oblique) is in the character of George, and in a key scene that is described in the language of the sublime—that invokes a series of scientific discoveries—and yet defies rational explanation by the editor. Hogg holds onto some sense of the ineffable, of the mysterious, and rewards George (however briefly) for his appropriate response that is simultaneously aesthetic, ethical, and—I would argue—deeply spiritual. But this is a fleeting moment, one that’s eclipsed by the intrusion of a murderous brother, and an experience of the sublime is wholly consumed by horror. In order to read the novel in this way, it is necessary to recognize the specificity of the religious movement

Hogg negatively portrays (Antinomianism) and the way it contrasts with Arminianism, a theological offshoot that offers possibilities forestalled by both mainstream Calvinism and its more radical splinter groups.

Religion, politics, and national identity

Earlier in this project, I described the seventeenth-century historical context that prompted Scottish Presbyterians to push back on external threats to their religious liberty. The perceived extension of episcopacy catalyzed Scottish resistance and provided a unifying rallying cry. However, our analysis of these events and their far-reaching consequences run the risk of flattening the very real divisions and distinctions extant within this branch of Protestantism. In Gordon Donaldson's *The Faith of the Scots*, he claims that

Apart, therefore, from a few years in mid-century when the Westminster Confession may have been enforced, it would have been hard to find grounds for condemning any thought as 'unorthodox' in the sense of being contrary to officially upheld standards. When we turn to the papers to which representative figures, laymen as well as churchmen, committed their thoughts, we find little awareness of doctrinal standards to which they could look for guidance, still less from which they dared not deviate.³

This challenges some of the more commonly held perceptions of a unified, cohesive organization,⁴ and historian Callum Brown argues that the development of such a

³ Gordon Donaldson, *The Faith of the Scots* (London: Batsford, 1990), p. 83. He goes on to state that the Westminster Confession "was more emphatic than ever on predestination...And it went on to remarks which would appear to have opened the way to the possibility of an antinomian interpretation"; p. 83.

⁴ See, for example, Thomas Torrance, who claims that "the *Westminster Confession* was also a socio-political instrument designed to give rational doctrinal cohesion to the participating Churches in the Commonwealth, both in order to strengthen their Protestant stance over against the Church of Rome, and to bring about a rather Rome-like uniformity of religion in the British Isles—there must be only 'one face of the Kirk'. That intention was undoubtedly reinforced, especially for the Scots, by the ratification of the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643, a definitely religio-political covenant, which has ever since had the effect of politicising theology in the Westminster tradition. Nevertheless the powerful intellectual coherence in theological outlook achieved in the *Westminster Confession* has given an enduring unified

hegemony did not occur until the eighteenth century, which helped to produce a separate movement of religious dissent, as well. He observes that

Nonconformism of the sort known in sixteenth and seventeenth century England was alien to Scotland where the Established Church remained contestable territory for all groups but the Catholics. The result was an important tradition of internal and informal dissent in Scotland in which groups could drift in and out of close harmony with the prevailing party of the church. Not only did this tradition survive into the nineteenth century, it permitted the continuation of the concept of a “recoverable” Established Church which could be reclaimed from perceived corruption at an opportune moment by the maintenance of “true” presbyterianism in dissenting churches and sects.⁵

This suggests that rigorous challenge and critique were fundamental within many Scots’ religious and formal educations long before the more celebrated rise of the universities in the eighteenth century.⁶ Donaldson and Brown identify a multiplicity of differences, tensions, and contingency of religious beliefs in Scotland, suggesting Charles Taylor’s “Secularity 3” at the micro-level⁷; recognition of this rich complexity can help prevent reductive readings of Hogg’s novel.

Although Calvinism, with its emphasis on predestination, election, and faith alone (versus good works), is often viewed synonymously with Scottish Presbyterianism, from early on there was resistance to its most central tenets, and Arminianism was a key rival. Donaldson notes that “on the continent a reaction against the strict determinism associated with Calvin had been headed by Arminius, but it was condemned by

character to Scottish theology and culture ever since, even one that still spans the sad divisions in the Kirk.” Thomas Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 126–27.

⁵ Brown, p. 16.

⁶ Notestein describes seventeenth-century ministers’ preciseness in their execution and transmission of theology and doctrine, which “was precisely what they had been trained to do at the universities, where they were taught logic and dialectic,” p. 175.

⁷ Taylor’s definition is generally used in reference to *inter*-religious disagreements and those between belief and unbelief, but it can also help us better understand just how complicated the generic label of “Protestant” was in practical terms.

theologians of several nations at the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1619.”⁸ Held by the Dutch Reformed Church, this challenge to but ultimate triumph of Calvinist principles (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints—otherwise known by the acrostic “TULIP”) nonetheless had implications for Scotland. Long connected to the low Countries via trade and hired military service, T. M. Devine points out that until the end of the seventeenth century, the vast majority of Scottish migration was eastward (including Scandinavia and Poland)⁹; the Scots also brought continental ideas back with them, particularly in the field of education, which was to have a profound (and increasingly moderating) impact on the university system. Although it is unclear to what degree the Synod of Dort directly impacted the British Isles, similar challenges (real and perceived) to Calvinism’s centrality also occurred in Scotland, notably by Robert Baron in the seventeenth century, and William Hamilton (professor of divinity at Edinburgh) and John Simson (professor of divinity at Glasgow) in the early eighteenth.¹⁰

Antinomians, who considered themselves exempt from moral and legal dictates, resisting “the growing humour of the times to turn religion into mere morality,” were even more disruptive, challenging Presbyterianism’s growing civic power and coalescing administrative structure.¹¹ Antinomianism held that predestination was so unconditional that it could not be threatened by any worldly misdeed, and gained a particular foothold in the early eighteenth century, when elements of this movement emerged within the

⁸ Donaldson, pp. 82–83.

⁹ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700–2007*, rev. ed. (1999; repr., London: Penguin, 2006), p. 52.

¹⁰ Donaldson, p. 83.

¹¹ Qtd. in Donaldson, p. 105.

Church of Scotland.¹² Claimed by some to be an interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles taken to their most logical (if extreme) end, most of Antinomianism's opponents rejected its conclusions as based on a flawed misreading of scripture. Considering the possibilities such a system might allow (total exemption from moral *and* legal strictures), it may seem at first glance to be just another breed of religious fundamentalism, but it had surprising staying power, even at the heart of institutional Presbyterianism. This is exemplified by the Marrow Controversy, centering on the religious text *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*; long charged with invoking Antinomian ideals (for which the General Council of the Church of Scotland condemned it in 1720), it was nonetheless used for worship well into the nineteenth century.¹³

Even as such hyper-reactive responses to threats (real and otherwise) moderated throughout the eighteenth century, the national church ultimately could not escape these internecine challenges, momentarily culminating in the Disruption of 1843 and the founding of the Free Church of Scotland. This "Disruption" was only one of the more overt moments of contentious debate and struggle, and although the kirk waged many battles of words (and occasionally of arms) against perceived threats from Catholicism, Episcopalianism, Anglicanism, and other external Protestant sects, it was from within that some of Presbyterianism's strongest challenges originated. While it may be tempting (particularly by the time more enlightened doctrine began to take the upper hand) to position a moderate church against a variety of splintering, fringe-type denominations, it

¹² John Bligh, "The Doctrinal Premises of Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 19.1 (1984): 148–49ff.

¹³ Bligh, pp. 152–53. Periodic debates and controversies broke out over whether the text was actually Antinomian or just a guide to navigate Antinomianism's temptations.

is not how the church actually operated, and this still common—if inaccurate—assessment is predicated upon the notion of a stable, “authentic” church.¹⁴

What I seek to emphasize is an inherent instability that resists the narrative of a moderate Presbyterianism existing as an entity separate and distinct from the ostensibly more minor (and fanatical) strains that challenged it. For all of their apparent mutual exclusivity and division, these competing strands of Protestant thought influenced each other dialectically, and although the more moderate version is usually portrayed as the winner in this relationship, the synthesis that was actually produced was far more complicated. Analogously, the developments of the Scottish Enlightenment cannot be divorced from the religious beliefs that in many cases helped to shape them or were, at the very least, held simultaneously; despite atheism’s historical connection to rationalism, they were not always—or even typically—mutually occurring in eighteenth-century Scotland.¹⁵ Many religious moderates were themselves responsible for perpetuating Enlightenment beliefs, whether from the pulpit or in the classroom, but other radical groups could make use of reason’s potential, as well, and often with startling results.

¹⁴ Unlike many more recent and overwhelmingly laudatory assessments of the Moderates, Notestein offers this critique: “The Moderates did not offer enough. They did not offer a real liberalism, a breadth of view and comprehension. They were not tolerant of other views, as we have seen. They did not bring Christians together into one flock; their efforts brought about more division. They stressed the importance of patronage which ran dead against Presbyterian schemes of government. Had their aims been really comprehensive, they might have maintained their hold and might possibly have liberalized the Scottish Kirk, though whether they could have done so at that time is doubtful. Their failure threw the Kirk back into the hands of the orthodox and the unco guid.” See Notestein, pp. 210–211.

¹⁵ See William Ferguson for a discussion of this complicated history. “Christian Faith and Unbelief in Modern Scotland,” in *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and George Newlands (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 53–89. He observes that, although “real atheism...stemmed from the rise of rationalism,” atheism did not concomitantly permeate the culture. “Much has been written about the great advances made by philosophy and science in the eighteenth century. Undoubtedly great discoveries were made, and new theories proliferated in philosophy, science, medicine, and nearly every branch of knowledge. And yet the Book of Genesis still dominated in a crucial subject, that of cosmology, whose great concern was the universe and how it came to be. The deists might to the orthodox be ‘atheists’ by imputation, but genuine atheism still could not convincingly replace the account of Creation given in Genesis. This, one of the prime facts about eighteenth-century thought, is too often overlooked or ignored. That it was, however, a massive stumbling block in the path of the Enlightened is only too evident to those who look at eighteenth-century thought in the round.” W. Ferguson, pp. 59, 63.

Why should it matter to today's readers if Hogg's tormented character is more than the mere Calvinist extremist he has been characterized as by so many? Why do widely forgotten points of doctrine really matter for our understanding of *Confessions*? Beyond offering us a richer understanding of the text, I argue that by paying attention to what is at the heart of Hogg's critique we might correct longstanding assumptions about the trajectory of Enlightenment rationalism's development—as well as the irrational ways of thinking it supposedly supplanted—that still persist today even despite challenges to more general notions of progress. And if historical fiction offers a supposedly “modern” way of managing and ultimately neutering earlier belief systems, might not Hogg's upending of this mode deeply trouble any acceptance of the form's ability to effect such management? Concomitantly, this instability may very well indicate the more general persistence of beliefs that do not accord with the more genteel picture of a refined and scholarly Edinburgh elite.

The Ettrick Shepherd

The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824) emerged at a time in Scotland's history that was “post” in a number of ways: seemingly both post-Enlightenment and post-religious sectarianism (at least in its most virulent forms), Hogg's Edinburgh was well on its way to a more comfortable and complacent Victorian respectability.¹⁶ However, Ina Ferris asserts:

¹⁶ Karl Miller notes that “[t]he Edinburgh of [Hogg's] middle years found a new buoyancy and prosperity. The capital of North Britain had become a middle-class city, swollen though it was to twice its population size by Irish and other incomers: a city of books and book production, of concerts, a hive of professional activity, rather than a patrician faubourg or an aggregation of factories.” Karl Miller, *Electric Shepherd: A Likeness of James Hogg* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 9. Ian Duncan also comments on Scotland's “post”-ness, particularly its postmodernity, although Duncan is careful to historicize his application of this

The history mindedness of turn-of-the-century Scotland, expressed most influentially for Europe not so much in the histories of Hume and Robertson as in the novels of Walter Scott, moved into the foreground anxieties about social connection that always—and explicitly—shadowed the confidence of Enlightenment analyses of the “state” of societies moving through historical time.¹⁷

And “the Ettrick Shepherd”—“the literary persona created partly by Hogg himself, partly by the tight circle that ran *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*”¹⁸—does indeed offer a wealth of anxieties in the *Confessions*; he invites us into a weird little tale of dogma, the devil, and the damned, producing a text that has resisted definitive interpretation for nearly two hundred years.¹⁹ It is a text that troubles any definitive separation between historical progress and religious truth, denying the comfort and solace of the former, while portraying the latter as a double-edged sword that—in its fanatical variety—is just as likely to lead to damnation as salvation. One of many who returned to Scotland’s turbulent past in his literary works, Hogg’s *Confessions* lacks the forward historical propulsion that distinguishes so many of Scott’s works (however problematically), and challenges the resolution that both the apocalyptic imagination and stadial theory offer. Ian Duncan asks: “If the Scottish historical novel narrates—and so performs—a dialectical closure of modernity, in which historical conflict yields to civil society, what

term. See Ian Duncan, “Authenticity Effects: The Work of Fiction in Romantic Scotland,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.1 (2003): 93–116.

¹⁷ Ina Ferris, “Melancholy, Memory, and the ‘Narrative Situation’ of History in Post-Enlightenment Scotland,” in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 77–93; p. 79.

¹⁸ John Barrell, “Putting Down the Rising,” in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, pp. 130–38; p. 130. Barrell goes on to assert that this title “was invented as a souvenir of the pastoral lowlands, a survival whose presence among one of the Edinburgh literary elites could represent both the continuity of modern Scots culture and the impolite past it had left behind. . . [but who] could not always be relied upon to play this part, and had occasionally to be reminded of his place by editors, reviewers, even by himself,” p. 130.

¹⁹ Ismael Velasco simply but accurately articulates this critical predicament: “To some, the novel’s inconclusiveness is proof of weakness; to others it is a sign of strength.” Ismael Velasco, “Paradoxical Readings: Reason, Religion and Tradition in James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*,” *Scottish Studies Review* 7.1 (2006): 38.

follows that closure? What will the end or aftermath of the historical novel look like?”²⁰

By taking this undercurrent of anxiety and locating it centrally in both his novel’s content and its form, Hogg rebuffs any self-deluding vision of history and its complicity with certain theories of progress. Instead, *Confessions* explicitly calls attention to the inadequacy of solutions both “traditional” doctrine and “modern” philosophy offer, and unnervingly aligns these worldviews by dismantling them, revealing the fallibility of both faith and reason.²¹

For many twentieth and twenty-first-century critics of Hogg, the centrality of religion (namely, Scottish Presbyterianism) in this text is the elephant in the room that they must acknowledge, but it’s often a perfunctory gesture.²² Surely, Hogg must have been referring to something besides merely religion, and of course that “something else” is often rooted in concerns that speak far more sympathetically to current interests.²³ The

²⁰ Duncan, “Authenticity Effects,” p. 98.

²¹ My perspective is further influenced by Ferris, who writes: “For a Romantic historiography, coming after the philosophical history articulated most powerfully by the Scottish Enlightenment, the passage of and gap between generations became a *historical* problem as it had not been for earlier classical and humanist forms of history. Where the uniform and non-progressive temporality of the latter allowed for the ready transfer of values across generations—the ‘exemplary’ function of the past—the rewriting of historical process as linear but non-synchronous progress blocked the kind of relation and recognition permitted by the older historical genres.” “Melancholy,” p. 78. See also Velasco, who sees Hogg’s text as a challenge to the supremacy of “progressive” history, although Velasco mostly highlights the mutual exclusivity of the two models.

²² Manning’s discussion of *Confessions* in *The Puritan-Provincial Vision* is a notable exception. See esp. pp. 80–84.

²³ For issues of narrative instability, see Victor Sage, “The Author, the Editor, and the Fissured Text: Scott, Maturin and Hogg,” in *Authorship in Context: From the Theoretical to the Material*, ed. Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 15–32; Regina Oost, “‘False Friends, Squeamish Readers, and Foolish Critics’: The Subtext of Authorship in Hogg’s Justified Sinner,” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 31 (1999): 86–106. For a psychoanalytical reading of homoerotic repression, oppression, and violence in both Hogg and Mary Shelley, see George E. Haggerty’s “‘Dung, Guts and Blood’: Sodomy, Abjection and Gothic Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Gothic Studies* 8.2 (2006): 35–51. Although Haggerty’s examination of cross-genre motifs in *Frankenstein*, the *Confessions*, and *The Phoenix of Sodom, or the Vere Street Coterie*, an early nineteenth-century text relating an infamous sodomy trial, offers purchase for his reading of the *Confessions*, I think that he misses a particularly fertile area for analysis. Namely, if indeed “Robert is attracted to the very things [homoerotic desire] that disgust him,” why doesn’t Robert’s Antinomian mandate offer him the same reprieve he claims for the other activities in which he indulges, but society also (if not equally) abhors: murder, fratricide, matricide, (heterosexual) rape, and even possibly infanticide. Additionally, Haggerty’s tempering

French writer André Gide is largely credited with bringing *Confessions* back into critical awareness in the 1940s, penning a now-famous introduction that not only advocated fiercely for Hogg's novel, but also for its psychoanalytic interpretation. Moreover, Gide argued, he “doubt[ed] whether Hogg's personal point of view is that of true religion or whether it is not rather that of reason, common sense and a natural Tom Jones-like expansiveness.”²⁴ Although Gide concludes that Hogg's sympathies were aligned with George, a point I somewhat agree with (although not for the psychological reasons that Gide posits), it has been more common for readers to see in Hogg's supposed rejection of religion an identification with the rational perspective of the editor. In the introduction to Oxford University Press's 1969 edition (reissued in 2009), John Carey notes (and rejects) this critical perception of Hogg as “an eighteenth-century man of sense, derisive of ‘enthusiasm.’”²⁵ The Ettrick Shepherd tends to be more appealing when he is viewed as a subversive performer of rustic belief, rather than a subscriber to it.

More productive readings have turned to the text's structural complexities, interrogating the way Hogg uses form itself to frustrate the expectations of historical fiction that were well-established by the time of the novel's publication. In a 1992 essay, Rebecca Pope fleshes out the relationship between *Confessions* and other gothic texts' challenges to the role of narrative, objective distance, and the implication of the reader. Hogg achieves his most important insight, she argues, by his pointed use of a frame, which makes clear that “realism is not innocent but interested... Fiction, it appears,

description of Robert at the beginning of the novel—“bookish and lonely Robert Wringhim forms an emotional attachment to his lively and athletic older stepbrother George”—overlooks this character's formative indoctrination, as well as the anxiety he is kept in until his eighteenth year, when the Reverend finally declares his membership into the “elect.” Haggerty, pp. 47, 45–46.

²⁴ André Gide, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Cresset Press, 1947).

²⁵ John Carey, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, by James Hogg (1824; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. xi–xii.

inhabits what purports to be fact.”²⁶ Pope uses the novel’s “rational” framework (and its inability to position itself convincingly as a principled arbiter of objective truth) as a starting-point for an illuminating discussion of the nature of subjectivity itself, but she treats certain elements of the work—namely, Hogg’s depiction of Robert’s religious upbringing and its consequences—as merely functional facilitators of the plot’s movement. Too often, even when critics note Hogg’s challenge to the philosophical and scientific assumptions of post-Enlightenment Scotland, it still comes back around to a rejection of Calvinism.

Certainly, Hogg depicts fanaticism and its potential for violence and perversion, a potential that is fulfilled with multiple murders, in a negative light. However, this aspect of the text—Hogg’s supposed critique of Calvinism—has been over-simplified, when it is actually Antinomianism that constitutes Hogg’s prime target.²⁷ As noted earlier, this theological stance found renewed energy in the early eighteenth century, which is also the setting of *Confessions*, as well as the Acts of Union (1707) and the emerging philosophical and scientific developments that would come to constitute the Scottish Enlightenment.²⁸ These competing approaches (rational and fanatical) both have the chance to make their case to the reader via the editor and Robert, respectively, but one of the most surprising moves Hogg makes is to forge connections between them—to suggest Antinomianism and Enlightenment rationalism’s shared vulnerability to dangerous blind

²⁶ Rebecca A. Pope, “Hogg, Wordsworth, and Gothic Autobiography,” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 27 (1992): 219.

²⁷ For example, Haggerty describes “the mysterious Gil Martin, who teaches Calvinist ‘justification’ as a creed which legitimates the acting out of suppressed desires”; it is unclear if he means that it is Gil-Martin’s version or the creed itself that “legitimizes” Robert’s behavior, but neither is entirely accurate. Haggerty, pp. 46–47.

²⁸ For additional discussion of the religious and the more specifically Antinomian context of *Confessions*, see Velasco, pp. 45–49. For the (central) role of religious concerns in the Scottish decision to enter into union with England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, see Notestein, pp. 183–91.

spots in their end-run around the present and haste to define what it means to reach either religious or secular revelation. Antinomianism's strongest advocate in *Confessions*, Gil-Martin (transparently, the devil or a devilish delusion), simultaneously invokes a bedrock of Scottish Enlightenment's understanding of appropriate human behavior: Adam Smith's notion of sympathy as delineated in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Gil-Martin takes the most irrational of revelations (an assurance of Calvinist election) and spins out its implications in the most rational, if murderous, of ways. Susan Manning concludes that "[t]he claims of 'reason' are most convincingly disposed of by making Gil-Martin its most accomplished and unanswerable exponent," and Clark Hutton recognizes that "Robert's acceptance of antinomianism is the primary example of the value he places on reason. One of antinomianism's strongest appeals is that it is very logical."²⁹ It is not only Robert Wringhim, the religious fanatic, who is at the center of this cautionary tale, but also Robert Wringhim, the rationalist. And although the editor is spared Robert's (likely) violent end, the fool's errand with which the novel concludes is no more promising.³⁰

My reading comes closest to Ismael Velasco's in both his view of Hogg's critique of what they both refer to as "history" and its apparent opposite, "tradition," and—even more so—his analysis of Hogg's use of religion in the *Confessions*. Although I disagree with the separation Velasco ultimately reinforces between these epistemologies (history

²⁹ Manning, pp. 82–83; Clarke Hutton, "Kierkegaard, Antinomianism, and James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," *Scottish Literary Journal* 20.1 (1993): 42.

³⁰ Velasco goes so far as to align the Editor with Robert Wringhim, placing them on the side of "history" in his positioning of it against the side of "tradition": "The suggestions of 'tradition' are conveyed in the novel with equal force as those of history, to be judged on an equal footing, even if, ironically, the transmitters of tradition are the Editors and the Sinner listening sceptically and patronisingly to the fantastic accounts of uncultivated people. Their incredulous and dismissive attitude, far from detracting from the force of the traditionary interpretation, only exposes their own limitations." He also notes that "excessive rationalism obscures or distorts," an accusation more often levied at Robert's theological extremism, but does not explicitly flesh out this comparison. Velasco, pp. 39, 44.

vs. tradition), he makes a strong case for recognizing the complexity of these Calvinist (particularly Antinomian) beliefs, producing a compelling analysis that is vital to a fuller comprehension of the numerous areas of social, civic, and political life Hogg examines through religion's lens.³¹ Velasco asserts that

religion may be said to occupy a structural continuum in the novel between the supernatural, subjective world view of 'tradition' and the rational, objective world view of 'history'. Like 'history' with regard to 'tradition', religion has the potential to be used to legitimate the suppression of difference in the name of higher truth, by filtering, ordering and hierarchising difference in function of an ideology or dogma. On the other hand, religion includes elements of mythic thought that closely align it with 'tradition'.³²

As exciting as Velasco's work is for its recognition of the relationship between religion and rationalism, he nonetheless falls back on a binary that does not fully account for Hogg's liminal position. I do not agree that the "two worlds" he elaborates are necessarily and uncontestedly separate; furthermore, although his model of opposing the urban, literary upper-class against a rural, superstitious lower-class helps to make his conclusions more convincing, Velasco is silently—and problematically—drawing on divisive class boundaries to underscore other kinds of divisions, most notably religious belief and its variegated influence, which is arguably moving between otherwise distinct groups in far more complicated and challenging ways. Moreover, to what degree is our perception of a rational urban elite positioned against an irrational rural peasantry molded

³¹ "The controversy [of Hogg's seemingly splintered text] seems expressive of a wider struggle," Velasco determines, "between a modernising, anglicised, cosmopolitan, rationalist, post-Enlightenment world view, associated with the dominant and literary classes (custodians and purveyors of 'history'), and an elder post-Reformation and pre-Enlightenment *Weltanschauung*, autonomous, indigenous, religiously fragmented, and rooted in a popular oral culture mediated by 'tradition'. It is important to emphasise that the dichotomy between these two visions was not absolute, and, although valid as a generalisation, like all generalisations it has its limits. The lines very much blur at the edges. Hogg himself is a prime example of this interchange between the two worlds." In this much, I agree with him, but Velasco continues: "Notwithstanding this acknowledged fact of interchange however, there is no doubt that broadly speaking the two worlds remained distinct." Velasco, pp. 38–39.

³² Velasco, p. 46.

by the very narrow cross-section of literary works from this time period that are meant to stand in for the larger bulk of writing actually produced? David Allan's point, first referenced in the introduction to this project, is worth repeating: "It is arguable...that other significant elements in the Enlightenment historical texts have suffered correspondingly from this distorted and highly partial perspective."³³ This is a caution well worth remembering, and Allan's lengthy study on the connections between Calvinism and humanism opens the door for my own exploration of just how Hogg may have been navigating and indeed blurring these boundaries.

The justified sinner

Robert Wringhim begins life with the odds stacked against him. His mother, the Lady Dalcastle, loathes her husband, the laird, ostensibly for his loose behavior and lack of religious piety, and this marital discord is fueled from the start by the Rev. Mr. Wringhim,³⁴ a "flaming predestinarian divine" who has had a hand in making her "the most severe and gloomy of all bigots to the principles of the Reformation."³⁵ Balanced against their heavy seriousness (self-perceived if nothing else) is the lighter-hearted laird, with whom the seemingly sympathetic voice of "The Editor's Narrative" aligns itself, taking sides in a less-than-explicit manner. This narrator reveals the couple to be perfectly unsuitable for one another, flippantly relating the husband's disappointment

³³ David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 11.

³⁴ Henceforth, I will refer to the Rev. Mr. Wringhim simply as "Wringhim," in order to avoid confusion with Robert Wringhim, who may or may not be his biological but certainly is his adopted son.

³⁵ James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Carey (1824; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2. Henceforth, all page numbers will be included parenthetically in the text unless otherwise noted.

with a chaste and prayer-filled wedding night. His wife then makes a futile attempt at escape to her father, who—winkingly—abuses her in order to repay George Colwan, Sr., for his mistreatment, underscoring that her position as the legal property of her husband trumps all other roles. Finally, both partners turn to members of the opposite sex to fulfill needs that would be otherwise unmet: Colwan, Sr., to a “fat bouncing dame” (11), who will become increasingly important later in the tale, and Lady Dalcastle (who eschews the title of Mrs. Colwan) to Wringhim, whom the laird names “a mildew, —a canker-worm in the bosom of the Reformed Church” (15). Thus far, and even despite the troubling insinuations of Lady Colwan’s legal and personal powerlessness given the social structure of the time, it is still possible to read this section as a more or less unidirectional attack on the absurdity of both her and Wringhim’s absorption in their endless debates of minor, generally unheard-of doctrinal points, and the long-term consequences of this preoccupation.

In fact, these very debates offer the opportunity for Wringhim and Lady Dalcastle to spend untold hours together, devoting themselves “to the splitting of hairs, and making distinctions in religion where none existed” (16). The narrator does not stop there in his assessment, slyly insinuating that their long nights debating doctrine and dogma are just as likely to be a ruse for a sexual relationship, and the two sons she gives birth to within a year of each other bear similarly ambiguous paternities, the laird and minister’s respective acceptance and adoption of the younger George and Robert notwithstanding.

The editor’s depiction of the younger brother offers the pretense of an unbiased narrative, introducing us to a warped, maladjusted fanatic who is not content merely to grimace and glower at his more sociable brother, but who puts George in harm’s way,

both directly and indirectly. A young man “with black clothes, and a methodistical face,” and who “knew no other pleasure but what consisted in opposition” (21), Robert Wringhim is an increasingly poisonous thorn in his brother’s side: his initial interruption of George’s tennis match is a nuisance, but, later on, he starts a near-riot, alienates George from his friends, nearly lands him in jail, threatens grave bodily injury to him on the top of Arthur’s Seat, and likely commits fratricide while framing one of George’s friends for the murder. From start to finish of the editor’s narrative, there is very little ambiguity, the editor presenting his story in a clear, seemingly “truthful” fashion. However, there are subtle, otherwise insignificant verbal tics that signal that the editor might be less independent than presented.³⁶ In describing Robert’s nasty behavior in Edinburgh, he claims that “[h]is presence acted as a mildew on all social intercourse or enjoyment” (33), applying the same description—“*mildew*”—to Robert that George Sr. applied to the older Wringhim. The narrator silently replicates this term, shifting the very basis of the reader’s perception of the creeping, corrupting personalities of both Wringhims from the *opinion* of a character with a vested (though sympathetic) interest to the more omniscient, documenting voice of the editor. The very pretense of objectivity becomes problematic when we witness this slippage between the voice of a character and that of the narrator.

Even more troubling is the use of this very same term “mildew” by Gil-Martin, that shadowy character who just might be the devil.³⁷ He emerges almost simultaneously

³⁶ “Documentation [via the “Editor’s Narrative”], as a mode of historical discourse, appears to occupy a neutral space between the ideological spheres of ‘history’ and ‘tradition’. Being written discourse however, it becomes the primary if not exclusive domain of the producers of ‘history’, and thus acquires an ideological charge, investing such documentation, and by implication historical accounts grounded on it, with an aura of objectivity that Hogg is careful to subvert.” Velasco, p. 41.

³⁷ Alternately, some have argued that Gil-Martin is a projection of Robert’s troubled psyche, although I find this interpretation to be unconvincing.

with Wringhim's revelation to Robert of the latter's acceptance "into the society of *the just made perfect*" (115, original emphasis); in other words, Robert is now assured of his place as one of the elect, the only beneficiaries of God's grace according to Calvinist theology. Timing is indeed everything, and given what we learn about Gil-Martin as the book progresses, his appearance at this very moment offers a pointed warning about the reliability of any character's information—in this case, the reverend's. But these subtle moments of cross-narrative repetition and reference—the multiple uses of "mildew"—also caution the reader about the veracity, or the interestedness, of either of the narrators. When Gil-Martin uses this description, it is particularly chilling as it becomes a justification for murder. Both Robert and his adopted father purport to adhere to Antinomian tenets, but Gil-Martin takes it a step further than the vehement preaching of the Rev. Wringhim, insisting to Robert that they are obliged to rid the world of moral preachers (those who argue that the behavior of one's life here on earth plays some role in the destination of one's afterlife). This begins almost immediately upon their acquaintance, and the first victim is to be a Mr. Blanchard. "Can there be any doubt," exhorts Gil-Martin, "that it is the duty of one consecrated to God, *to cut off such a mildew?*" (137, added emphasis). And it does make a kind of terrifying sense when analogized in such a way. Three paragraphs later, Robert refers to his new friend as his "enlightened and voluntary patron" (137), the first term resonating on both a spiritual and intellectual level, and while most readers will read the characterization ironically, the verbal slippage elaborated here should remind us to question even the editor's use of language when it is shown to be so easily manipulated to achieve horrific ends.³⁸

³⁸ This is only the first of Robert's numerous references to Gil-Martin as "enlightened"; see, for example, pp. 162, 169, 172, and 193.

Ultimately, narrative distance is consistently thwarted as the editor's role in the story itself (and not just the telling of it) becomes increasingly contentious.

This contentiousness notwithstanding, the editor still presents the most modern version of the tale, relying on a clear style and linear structure that are significantly more accessible for a post-Enlightenment audience. It is a tempered and moderate relation that avoids the punctuated excesses, the narcissistic melodrama of Robert's narrative style; his envy and begrudging resentments are hardly balanced by his repeated assurances of his intellectual and spiritual superiority. But a narrative that avoids offending those sensibilities that, according to Adam Smith, produce sympathy may say more about the reader's values than objective truth, and Hogg calls attention to the ways in which sympathetic identification may pander to pre-existing beliefs, and confirm our own biases even as they pass for reality. This is borne out by Gil-Martin's description of his ability to adopt others' likenesses (echoing Smith's concept of sympathy articulated in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*), although whether this antagonist embodies Smith's beliefs (and thus exposes their inherent fallibility) or perverts them is worth examining more closely.

But it is not Gil-Martin who first makes this connection. In his *Confessions*, Robert accuses John Barnet, the Rev. Wringhim's servant, of slandering his "adoptive" father by insinuating that he is in fact the reverend's biological son. Not surprisingly, this enrages Wringhim, leading to an interrogation of the servant. When John acknowledges that he has "said mony a time, that he resembled [Wringhim]," instead of summarily rejecting the comparison or reiterating his preceding chastisements, it is telling that Wringhim attempts to reason with the man as to the possible causes for this. Just like Robert in the original altercation that precipitated this confrontation—"I attempted to

reason him [John] out of his belief in the spirit of calm Christian argument,” the boy explains (103, my emphasis)—Wringhim scrambles to produce increasingly absurd possibilities for the likeness:

But, John, there are many natural reasons for such likenesses, besides that of consanguinity. They depend much on the thoughts and affections of the mother; and, it is probable, that the mother of this boy, being deserted by her worthless husband, having turned her thoughts on me, as likely to be her protector, may have caused this striking resemblance.... I have known a lady, John, who was delivered of a blackamoor child, merely from the circumstances of having got a start by the sudden entrance of her negro servant, and not being able to forget him for several hours. (106)

For a skeptical audience, these examples, these *natural* reasons, broach the farcical, and a character already indirectly depicted as a pedant and fraud becomes more explicitly so.

Paradoxically, sympathy becomes more plausible when embodied by Gil-Martin: after all, other characters witness Gil-Martin-as-doppelgänger, as well—characters without any vested interest in making such an assertion. In an oft-cited passage, Gil-Martin states:

‘My countenance changes with my studies and sensations... It is a natural peculiarity in me, over which I have not full control. If I contemplate a man’s features seriously, mine own gradually assume the very same appearance and character. And what is more, by contemplating a face minutely, I not only attain the same likeness, but, with the likeness, I attain the very same ideas as well as the same mode of arranging them, so that, you see, by looking at a person attentively, I by degrees assume his likeness, and by assuming his likeness I attain to the possession of his most secret thoughts. This, I say, is a peculiarity in my nature, a gift of the God that made me; but whether or not given me for a blessing, he knows himself, and so do I. At all events, I have this privilege,—I can never be mistaken of a character in whom I am interested.’ (124–25)

Compare this to Smith’s conclusions in the first section of *The Theory of Moral*

Sentiments, Part One:

In all such cases, that there may be some correspondence of sentiments between the spectator and the person principally concerned, the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can to put himself in the

situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. . . . After all this, however, the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned. That imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary.³⁹

Gil-Martin's claim that he can in fact duplicate not only another's physiognomy, but also his or her innermost thoughts—in essence, *becoming* this other—should serve as a warning to both Robert and the reader. If there are inherent limitations to the process of sympathetic transfer, if the individual sympathizing can in fact only ever achieve a simulacrum of another's experience and resulting knowledge, then alarm bells should be ringing that the person claiming far more extensive powers may not be part of that “naturally sympathetic” humanity.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Smith reminds us that the foundational “imaginary change of situation. . . is but momentary”; if Robert were appropriately sympathetic—a relationship he is never shown to share with anyone other than Gil-Martin in either “The Editor's Narrative” or his own “Confessions”—he would be well aware his new friend's similar appearance can be (and soon is) replaced by that of another. If the appearance is fleeting, so too it would seem are the ideas Gil-Martin concomitantly acquires (and Smith would certainly suggest that this is the case), but Robert never questions whether the consistency of their beliefs is as transitory as their

³⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759, 1790; repr., Mineola, New York: Dover, 2006), p. 16.

⁴⁰ Duncan notes that this is particularly troubling as Gil-Martin's “claim on an imaginary brotherhood sustained by ‘belief of the same truths’ subverts the sceptical basis of sympathy, which posited, in Smith's account, likeness rather than identity, harmonized difference rather than unison, as the condition of a working social order.” “Sympathy, Physiognomy, and Scottish Romantic Fiction,” in *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780–1830*, ed. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 285–305; p. 298. More bluntly, Manning diagnoses that “[h]ere is the threatening potential of ‘sympathy’ over personal integrity made manifest,” p. 82.

shared physiognomy. Instead, he accepts what he sees (Gil-Martin's likeness) because it accords with what he already believes, both intellectually and theologically. After this initial leap, he ignores, dismisses, or overcomes the disturbing signs that follow and attempt too late to bring him back to his senses—senses that just might offer the most trustworthy markers of truth-telling, but as they contradict what Robert holds to be true, he rationalizes himself out of any other possible conclusion. Instead, Robert accepts Gil-Martin's explanation of his uncanny ability and gives himself over: "Then, it appears, that it is needless to dissemble with you, since you can at any time extract our most secret thoughts from our bosom" (125).

Robert's obvious *misreading* of his body's physical response to Gil-Martin leaves the reader to wonder if these misinterpretations' disastrous consequences could have been avoided had a more perceptive approach been taken. Robert relates a magnetic and nearly hypnotizing attraction to Gil-Martin, claiming: "I felt a sort of invisible power that drew me towards him, something like the force of enchantment, which I could not resist. As we approached each other, our eyes met, and I can never describe the strange sensations that thrilled through my whole frame at that impressive moment" (116). Moreover, he interprets the figure causing these sensations as portending a heavenly sign, which is of course one of the novel's many darkly humorous misreadings: "I conceived at first," Robert asserts, "that I saw a vision, and that my guardian angel had appeared to me at this important era of my life" (117). These scenes also appear to call for a cultivation of the "moral sense" of Smith's mentor and teacher, Glasgow University's chair of Moral Philosophy, Frances Hutcheson, but Robert is more than simply the anti-"Man of Feeling." By the end of Robert's narrative, physical sensations are no more likely to

assess “truth” correctly, as Robert realizes that the senses can tell one story while some semblance of a moral sense might tell another. Succumbing to local superstitions that advise on how to discern the presence of the devil, he “look[s] steadfastly at his [Gil-Martin’s] foot, to see if it was not cloven into two hoofs. It was the foot of a gentleman, in every respect, so far as appearances went.” Nonetheless, “the form of his counsels was somewhat equivocal, and if not double, they were amazingly crooked” (204). Robert is not entirely out of touch with his sensibilities; however, *they are not enough*. Material reality is not a reflection of moral truth, nor is Gil-Martin’s version of sympathy any more infallible than Robert’s supposed grace. *Confessions* describes an existential state of precariousness unalleviated by recourse to epistemological certainty; for Robert Wringhim, Antinomian dictates and Smithian sympathy—uttered almost in the same breath by Gil-Martin—prove ultimately comfortless.

Calvinist irresistible grace—which Robert has been assured of by Rev. Wringhim—insists that once one is called to God’s grace, one cannot help but to receive it and can never fall away from it; by embracing a passive role in and refusing to accept any sort of responsibility for this interaction with Gil-Martin, Robert appears to be miming this doctrine. It is a particularly fractious point for Protestants following Arminian theology, which argues that this grace is in fact resistable—that its extension (from God) is no guarantee of the person’s acceptance of it—and that one’s acceptance of such grace isn’t necessarily binding. Robert’s continued submission to Gil-Martin throughout the novel, even as he begins to mistrust his enchanter’s motives, raises two distinct possibilities for doctrinal interpretation: is the purpose of the devil-as-double to reflect that, just as it is impossible to fall away from *true* grace, it is equally impossible to

fall away from one's damnation (which would reinforce the author's Calvinism)? Or, per Arminianism, might Hogg be underscoring the *human* role in either accepting or denying grace—that even if Wringhim's pronouncement of Robert's election was correct (which Robert's behavior leading up to it would certainly lead one to regard with a fair measure of dubiousness), it does not stop him from forming an equal attachment to a person and set of ideas that initiate his fall from grace and subsequent damnation.

If there is a hint of redemption within the *Confessions*—beyond party and religious lines, and even beyond the reach of a too-interested narrator—it is George's communion with nature high away on Arthur's Seat, far removed from the roiling city below. *This* is the experience of grace lacking from Robert's own assurance of justification, and the physical world itself seems pregnant with supernatural possibilities. Despite the attempts of both the rational chauvinism of the editor and the violence of the fanatic to lay claim to the scene, attempting to control the way in which its significance is interpreted, I argue that reading it through the lens of Arminian contingency gives us a way of recognizing the possibility of an alternate path.

Fresh on the heels of Robert's dogged persecution throughout Edinburgh, George seeks respite by journeying to Arthur's Seat, a volcanic rock that towers over the city. Almost immediately upon leaving the house, George is surrounded by a "haze [that] was so close around him that he could not see the houses on the opposite side of the way"; as he continues, "[h]e was still involved in a blue haze, like a dense smoke," and his hat

becomes “covered with a tissue of the most delicate silver—a fairy web, composed of little spheres, so minute that no eye could discern any one of them; yet there they were shining in lovely millions” (39). George is not merely an observer and admirer of these small wonders: “[a]fraid of defacing so beautiful and so delicate a garnish, he replaced his hat with the greatest caution, and went on his way light of heart” (39). This is of note because George, who up until this point has seemed a rather good-natured if somewhat dim figure, brings to the fore in this one small act a sense—however temporary—of Hogg’s ethics at work. In a text that so frequently shows us what *not* to do, how *not* to act (at least if we would avoid the catastrophic consequences so many of his characters suffer), this episode offers us, I contend, one of the very few moments of positive action, and a glimpse of what, if anything, Hogg *is* for.

And George seems to be rewarded for his thoughtful gesture, because in the very next paragraph “he beheld, to his astonishment, a bright halo in the cloud of haze, that rose in a semi-circle over his head like a pale rainbow” (39–40). George is too much “of a stirring active disposition” (38) to be viewed simplistically as a martyred Christ-figure, and it would not do justice to Hogg’s structurally complex novel to read it as allegory. However, he *is* the individual in the text who does the least harm, repeatedly turning the other cheek to a brother (literally?) hell-bent on his destruction. Like the hat with its undisturbed “garnish,” this “halo” calls our attention to what is occurring underneath it, and George’s sense of awe seems to blend a kind of natural piety—“‘Here,’ thought he, ‘I can converse with nature without disturbance’” (41)—with the informed understanding of the “modern” man. In regarding “the lovely vision,” the editor informs us, George “soon perceived the cause of the phenomenon, and that it proceeded from the rays of the sun

from a pure unclouded morning sky striking upon this dense vapour which refracted them” (40). This communion provides the opportunity for both the affective intensity of the sublime, along with what seems to be a Kantian assertion of the subject via George’s perception of the cause of his experience (the interplay of “the rays of the sun” and the “dense vapour”). However, there are limits, it would seem, to the perseverance of this subjectivity.

Although this passage is striking as a very reasonable, very rational religious experience, it is also notable because it is one of the most important moments at which the narrative voice allows its veil of objective detachment to slip and give way to a more editorializing tone. In the sentences immediately following George’s discernment of “the cause of the phenomenon,” the editor informs us that “the better all the works of nature are *understood*, the more they will be ever admired. That was a scene that would have entranced a man of science with delight, but which the uninitiated and sordid man would have regarded less than the mole rearing up his hill in silence and in darkness” (40, my emphasis). In other words, it is solely the man of thinking and his aesthetic response that can make any real sense of just such an experience. This appears to be more than idle reference: “The Radical Road, which runs immediately below the [Salisbury] Crags” (Hogg explicitly mentions “Salisbury” in the next paragraph) was a location where “gentlemen of the Scottish Enlightenment would walk along the road to gain inspiration.”⁴¹ However, it is not George who makes the judgment that any true appreciation of his surroundings is necessarily predicated upon his knowledge; indeed, the further he climbs to the top of the hill the more enshrouded the “terrestrial

⁴¹ *Gazetteer for Scotland*, s.v. “Salisbury Crags,” <http://www.scottish-places.info/features/featurefirst250.html> (accessed January 26, 2013).

phenomenon of the early morn” becomes: “Still he could not perceive the body of the sun, although the light behind him was dazzling; but the cloud of haze lying dense in that deep dell that separates the hill from the rocks of Salisbury, and the dull shadow of the hill mingling with that cloud, made the dell a pit of darkness” (40). This description places George in a vacuum between light and dark, a defamiliarized position exposed simultaneously to blinding yet empty space, and it is in between that the rainbow—the symbol of the Christian tradition’s first covenant between god and humanity⁴²—emerges. Despite its presence, the sun in all its physical and metaphorical richness remains hidden; even though George can feel its rays, there are limits to his access.

There are clearly limits to the editor’s own abilities, as well, for when he attempts to describe just what it is that George witnesses at the top of Arthur’s Seat, the editor’s narrative falls far short of the mark. George first sees “this sublunary rainbow . . . spread in its *most vivid hues* beneath his feet” (40, my emphasis). A few sentences later, and without any indication that he is now describing a different rainbow, a *different* “terrestrial glory,” the editor states: “On that shadowy cloud was the lovely rainbow formed, spreading itself on a horizontal plain, and having a slight and brilliant shade of all the colours of the heavenly bow, *but all of them paler and less defined*” (40, my emphasis). If this is the same occurrence, just what has happened to blanch those “vivid hues”? If it is a separate one, then why does the editor conclude the passage with the singular reference to “*this* terrestrial phenomenon” (40, my emphasis)? Why is it so very difficult to make sense of what it is that George is witnessing, and why must the narrator, despite his pronouncement on the necessity of knowledge, on the integral role of “the

⁴² Genesis 9: 11–17

man of science,” ultimately retreat to “the name given of it [the phenomenon] by the shepherd boys, ‘The little wee ghost of the rainbow’” (40)?

By locating the scene on this particular site, Hogg is undoubtedly invoking a well-known and hugely important series of scientific developments (and their religious fallout) that are all centered around Arthur’s Seat. In 1785, James Hutton presented a set of ideas to the Royal Society of Edinburgh that would have great consequences for adherents of Ussherian cosmology. Hutton was “an Edinburgh doctor whose study of the rocks around Edinburgh and in Berwickshire and elsewhere led him to conclude that the earth’s history was much older and more complex than the Bible made out. No single act of creation, he argued, could account for the earth’s crust.”⁴³ Arthur’s Seat—a well-known volcanic landmark on the Edinburgh horizon—was ripe subject material for Hutton and his supporters, “derided as ‘Vulcanists,’”⁴⁴ and studies of it directly called into question any earlier and still-present complacency that the world was “[c]reated for Man’s use,” and that “the earth was more or less co-eval with mankind, or about six thousand years old, calculating by Biblical generations.”⁴⁵ The editor’s insistence that a proper appreciation of this natural wonder requires a “man of science” takes on new meaning when informed by this context, but by now we are of course wary of this voice’s credibility. The editor’s admission of less-than-scientific reservations (the fear of the suicide’s “curse,” for example, at the end of the book) undermines any assertion that rationalism and its perverse double—superstition—cannot exist together simultaneously.⁴⁶ Moreover,

⁴³ W. Ferguson, p. 65. See also pp. 65–66.

⁴⁴ W. Ferguson, p. 66.

⁴⁵ James Buchan, *Crowded with Genius: The Scottish Enlightenment: Edinburgh’s Moment of the Mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), p. 294.

⁴⁶ This is reinforced by the last journey of the editor, as he sets out to unearth the grave of a supposed suicide who just might be the Robert Wringhim of the story, and whose remains (previously exhumed by curiosity-seekers) are reported to be unnaturally preserved. Although the editor seeks to accomplish this

neither of these ways of viewing the world adequately account for what George experiences: his receptiveness to the information provided by his senses; his willingness to take an active role in the exchange (he will “converse with nature”); his perception of “the cause of the phenomenon”; and his ultimate acceptance of the limits of this perception, a limitation that is nonetheless assuaged by a reminder of the ultimate covenant between God and man. All of this occurs while George is surrounded by “dazzling” light, and the surrounding beauty strikes him “motionless” (40).

But George—and the reader—can only remain “motionless,” or out of time, for a brief moment. Although this experience may bring George close to the sublime, grim reality intervenes at the very height of his communion, and what follows is Robert’s second and most menacing attack yet on his brother’s life. As George contemplates his surroundings, “[t]he idea of his brother’s dark and malevolent looks coming at that moment across his mind, he turned his eyes instinctively to the right, to the point where that unwelcome guest was wont to make his appearance” (41). And what he sees is a horror indeed:

What an apparition was there presented to his view! He saw, delineated in the cloud, the shoulders, arms, and features of a human being of the most dreadful aspect. The face was the face of his brother, but dilated to twenty times the natural size. Its dark eyes gleamed on him through the mist, while every furrow of its hideous brow frowned deep as the ravines on the brow of the hill. George started, and his hair stood up in bristles as he gazed on this horrible monster....George conceived it to be a spirit. He could conceive it to be nothing else; and he took it for some horrid demon by which he was haunted, that had assumed the features of his brother in

macabre act in the service of resolving the story to the satisfaction of an audience presumably unconvinced by “traditionary” accounts, even going so far as to bring witnesses to bolster his own credibility and collecting “samples” in order to support his attempts at a scientific explanation (see pp. 246–55), he is ultimately unsuccessful, for neither the body nor the text found on it (Robert’s version of the actual text in our hands) are comprehensible. Moreover, for all of the editor’s ostensible objectivity and attempts at presenting a “modern” understanding via an enlightened skepticism, he confesses that “there being a curse pronounced by the writer on him that should dare to alter or amend [Robert’s text], I have let it stand as it is.” See p. 253.

every lineament, but in taking on itself the human form, had miscalculated dreadfully on the size, and presented itself thus to him in a blown-up, dilated frame of embodied air, exhaled from the caverns of death or the regions of devouring fire. (41–42)

This exaggeration of a supernatural horror simultaneously draws on the language of science in the editor's attempt to explain it, the "dilated frame" a perversion of the exploration of optics just a few sentences before, and "the regions of devouring fire" (presumably hell) resonant with the volcanic eruptions that formed the surrounding landscape. As in the example of light and rainbow just before, the editor's language cannot fully encapsulate just what is occurring in this moment, and seems to be more problematic than merely "Hogg [being] careful to demystify events that would have otherwise been understood as supernatural."⁴⁷

What seems to be lost on critics who ignore the religiosity of Hogg's writing is the brief moment of peace, of what almost might be dubbed Christian grace, that George experiences up there on that high hill, famous in the worlds of both science and legend. But Hogg's text does not ultimately allow representations of religion *or* rationalism definitively to decode or claim this moment; in the end, it does not endorse either approach as presented by Robert, Gil-Martin, or the editor—it defies the finality associated with Protestant justification and objective explanation. This fleeting experience seems most sympathetic with an Arminian logic, holding out the possibility of divine communion conveyed via an aesthetic experience to all who seek it, but reinforcing that this possibility is always contingent, and always under threat. Whether that threat comes spouting religious doctrine or enlightened reason, one must always be on guard.

⁴⁷ Velasco, p. 42. He continues to dismissively claim that "the bright halo that George witnesses on Arthur's Seat proves to be but the light of the sun refracted in the morning vapour," p. 42.

A return to history?

In undermining the editor's attempt to make sense of this tale, in challenging a "man of science" by making the supernatural more and more possible, Hogg resists the primacy of a rational narrative. "Were the relation at all consistent with reason," the editor laments of Robert's "Confessions," "it corresponds so minutely with traditionary facts, that it could scarcely have missed to have been received as authentic" (254). He makes a valiant attempt to offer a rational explanation: "we must either conceive [the "justified sinner"] not only the greatest fool, but the greatest wretch...or, that he was a religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at that height of madness, that he believed himself the very object whom he had been all along describing" (254). But he cannot accept this, and instead offers the resigned admission, "I do not understand it" (253). There are limits to understanding both material and spiritual, and Hogg explodes both sides of the claim to epistemological certainty.

In this way, Hogg's *Confessions* confronts the apocalyptic logic Lee Quinby describes in *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism*, a logic marked by "its insistence on an inevitable end necessary for a new order, its infatuation with doom, its willingness to witness cruelty in the name of righteous justice, and its belief in an elect with access to absolute truth."⁴⁸ Quinby's study focuses on three modes of apocalyptic thinking—divine, technological, and ironic—all of which stymie the potential for ethical, political resistance. This is complicated by a long history of apocalyptic writing in Protestant Scotland beginning with John Knox; apocalypticism and prophecy were bound

⁴⁸ Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. xxii.

up with Scottish historical writing from the Reformation on, although this relationship was more developed and convincingly articulated following the Restoration.⁴⁹ Viewing history as a means of understanding divine providence, its study was generally undertaken by scholars who approached the task seriously, but nevertheless insured that a particular teleological narrative won out, with the Scottish kirk and its followers accorded the status of election—they were God’s chosen people, after all.

Gil-Martin cynically draws on this background, conning Robert into shaping history through both his actions and his documenting journal by frequently reminding him of his election and moral obligation to live up to it. The necessity of Robert’s direct intervention, particularly when it is in the service of murder, is a parody of the individual responsibility George exhibits and for which he is rewarded. It also appears to satirize some of the rhetoric of millenarianism that I discuss in the following chapter, a genre that was frequently used by political radicals to frame their appeals. But such a critique does not necessarily offer the “enlightened” position of the editor as a satisfactory alternative. If aggression and a desire to control another individual drives Gil-Martin’s sympathetic identification, where else might *Confessions* turn for consolation? Is there a sense of security in this promise of science and reason? This would seem more likely if the novel did not end with the unearthing of the suicide’s corpse, a return of the fanatic and his diary insisting upon a continued impact on the modern world.

Hogg indicts the apocalyptic mode of the fanatic *and* the editor’s insistence on a historical progression toward modernity, both of which insist upon teleological progression. These positions collide head-first with the manipulations of Gil-Martin, who can spiritually terrorize *and* rationalize with the best of them. But the very structure of the

⁴⁹ See Allan, p. 52ff.

novel refuses this teleology, and it is in George's fleeting experience that we see the true promise Hogg offers to humanity: not divine election, nor historical destiny, but a brief moment of time, to be witnessed, embraced, and then relinquished without adequate explanation. Most disconcerting for all of those relying on progress (or religious faith) to lead to better things: there are no guarantees, and George dies not long after his communion on Arthur's Seat, and—despite this experience—dies without the elaborate moment of spiritual or moral edification that so often attends scenes of martyrdom. Hogg seems to have little patience with either the cloying sanctity of hagiography or the attempts of science and reason to pathologize behavior that is an embarrassment to modernity; they offer no comfort for the murderous acts of men. George dies not for a cause, or in the line of duty, or for the furthering of a political or religious belief, but because his brother decides to kill him.

Chapter 3

The Promise of an Ending: Millenarianism, Millennialism, and Romantic Apocalypse

In much of today's American culture, the Apocalypse has become a convenient if horrific encapsulation of our fears, our nightmares, and our guilt, relegated to the marginalized genres of science-fiction, horror, and fantasy. It can boast a range of causes—from human destruction of the environment to the revivification of the dead (and their predation on the living)—and a range of religious attachments—from the dispensationalist *Left Behind* series to Justin Cronin's ostensibly secular *The Passage*. Given the potentially disastrous stakes of the world's conflicts, it is unsurprising that this eschatology has seen a resurgence; as Richard Fenn claims: "At times of crisis, when a way of life seems threatened with extinction, the apocalyptic imagination is liable to flare up with special force."¹ But endings also promise new beginnings, and the biblical Apocalypse of John reveals a new world in which the mistakes and evils of the past are contained, punished, and rejected. Imaginative literature has a long history of providing an outlet for these hopes and fears, shaping them into a coherent, common purpose that buttresses *against* meaninglessness and nihilism, and regularly endorses a specific political agenda. The social turbulence permeating British life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries prompted a return to apocalyptic rhetoric, and I argue in this

¹ Richard Fenn, "Apocalypse and the End of Time," *Daedalus* 132.2 (2003): 110.

chapter that such adaptations offer a provocative glimpse into the triangulated relationship between literary production, politics, and the long history and continued importance of radical Presbyterianism in Scotland.

British Romanticism and the Apocalypse

When the apocalypse crops up in Romantic writing, the “crisis” Fenn and others point to as a catalyst is frequently depicted to be an internal one; in other words, earlier apocalyptic writings (particularly those of seventeenth-century Britain) and their overtly political and frequently revolutionary tendencies evolved into a personal, individual experience.² According to Christopher Rowland,

Romantic thought and imagination remained apocalyptic in form, but with a radical shift from faith in a violent outer transformation to faith in an inner moral and imaginative transformation—a shift from political revolution to a revolution in consciousness—to bring into being a new heaven and new earth.³

This “shift” has been mirrored in Romanticism’s commentators, and Morton Paley, who has written extensively on English Romantics’ treatment of apocalyptic, millennialism, and millenarianism, attributes much of this to the influence of M. H. Abrams and the “Wordsworthian process of internalization” he convincingly articulated in *Natural*

² John Beer observes: “Historically, there have been several occasions when the biblical Book of Revelation seemed particularly relevant to its readers. In the seventeenth century, when individual lay interpretations became prominent, those who came to it freshly were eager to find in its prophetic books—and especially this one—texts that could be applied to their current world. The mention of Babylon, the great Whore, suited those who were looking for ammunition against the Roman Catholic church, while the various uncomplimentary things said about the ‘kings of the earth,’ including the prophecy that they would hide in the dust, encouraged all who were of a republican frame of mind.” John Beer, “Romantic Apocalypses,” in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. Tim Fulford (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 53–70; p. 54.

³ Christopher Rowland, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. Andrew W. Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 342–62; p. 356.

Supernaturalism (1971) and elsewhere.⁴ The transformation of a theme that could inspire violent conflict and social upheaval to one that was much more abstract and limited in scope (however dramatic for the individual involved) is frequently the starting-point when examining Romantic apocalyptic.

But this was not uniformly *experienced* as an internalized, individual move during the Romantic era. In the final few decades of the eighteenth century, literary representations of millenarianism, the belief that “Christ’s second coming and/or an apocalypse would precede the coming of a millennium,” were underscored by millenarianism’s concomitant understanding of the necessity of human action in order to effect this change.⁵ This contrasted sharply with millennialism, which did not require the apocalypse or Christ’s second coming, and did not generally exhort believers to intervene politically in order to set the process in motion. In sorting through these differences, Tim Fulford notes figures such as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, “‘respectable’ middle-class dissenters,” whose “Millenarianism was not an addition to radical politics but one of the principal discourses in which that politics was formulated.”⁶ Not all who believed in this eschatology were politically radical, but a return to Milton’s millenarian writings troubled a conservative like Burke enough to prompt him to reclaim the earlier writer’s sublime for his own, non-revolutionary political ends.⁷ While apocalypse and millennium

⁴ Morton Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 1.

⁵ Tim Fulford, “Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism,” in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. Tim Fulford (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 1–22; p. 21.

⁶ Fulford, “Millenarianism,” p. 3.

⁷ See Peter J. Kitson, “To Milton’s Trump,” in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, pp. 37–52. For a discussion of Coleridge and Milton’s (temporary) millenarianism, see Peter J. Kitson, “Coleridge, Milton, and the Millennium,” *Wordsworth Circle* 18.2 (1987): 61–66. For a foundational (though not uncontested) account of the relationship between Milton and Romantic writers, see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).

do not necessarily go hand-in-hand,⁸ historical events such as the French Revolution provided a catalyst for those writers committed to making such occurrences reflective of larger, metaphysical movements in the world, as well as those who would assert the credibility of these human activities by explicitly linking them to biblical prophecy. And “although the apocalyptic could be assumed by either side [revolutionary or conservative], in the 1790s the millennial was territory occupied by sympathizers with the Revolution.”⁹

With the anti-Jacobin backlash and incarceration of even moderate activists, texts (and radicals) of a more millenarian stamp became increasingly marginalized by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Steven Goldsmith describes this millenarianism as “political apocalypse,” distinguishing between it and the “formal” apocalypse he describes as “the end of history [that] has often been bound up with the promise of an *aesthetic* space relieved of historical determinants.”¹⁰ Paley and Goldsmith’s descriptions of this kind of apocalyptic change—the shift from external (i.e., historical, political) to internal (i.e., imaginative, cognitive)—are related, and the latter critic makes much of this shift’s potential for conservative, antidemocratic conscription. Paley, on the other hand, identifies a kind of fatalism, prompted by British radicals’ disappointments at the end of the eighteenth century and reflected in the forms of their artistic endeavors:

Paley puts millenarianism at the center of English Romanticism as it has traditionally been conceived, revealing the variety of literary and political uses the New Jerusalem was made to serve. He also shows that it became progressively harder, as the “new dawn” of the early 1790s was followed

⁸ Frank Kermode claims that “...there is no *intrinsic* connection between apocalypse and millennium... However, before one rejoices at this clean separation of the two it is necessary to add that the historical associations of these ideas, apocalypse and millennium, however obviously the products of untutored imaginative activity, have by custom, and the age-long and not yet extinct authority of the Bible, grown quite strong.” *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (With a New Epilogue)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 183–84.

⁹ Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, p. 22.

¹⁰ Steven Goldsmith, *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 2.

by repression, industrialization and war, for writers to imagine the age of peace and happiness that would follow the apocalyptic destruction that seemed all too likely. Romanticism, on this model, becomes a struggle not just to envision a new age but to retain the capacity for vision at all. It is this struggle that gives it its ambivalence, tension and also pathos, and that accounts, in part, for its frequently unfinished and fragmentary nature.¹¹

This suggests another way of viewing the artist's plight—that it is less a retreat *from* history (ala Goldsmith), and more a betrayal *by* history, leaving humanity inconsolable and unredeemed, and artistic form collapsing under this burden.¹²

Although the 1790s were a heady time, Fulford complicates the perhaps overstated assumption that the French Revolution was the sole cause of an aggressive millenarianism during the Romantic period, positing that it was also fueled by an increased need to assert human power and autonomy in an increasingly mechanized, institutionalized, and technological world. Moreover, others have suggested that, while the events in France certainly provided a catalyst for both revolutionary and reactionary energies, the *American* Revolution had a particular resonance for Scottish writers such as Robert Burns. Marilyn Butler observes that the American uprising may have provided a safer alternative for poetic expression as events in France became more threatening to British audiences, but this focus on Britain's former colonies was not exclusively caused by the tumult of European politics.¹³ In the substantial introduction to their controversial edition, *The Canongate Burns*, Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg claim that "late eighteenth-century radicals had a kind of millennial vision of history as an American

¹¹ Fulford, "Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism," p. 14.

¹² Categorizing certain eighteenth-century paintings and Romantic poems as examples of this, Paley diagnoses that "Apocalypse, lacking any relation to the Millennium, has become grotesque." Morton Paley, "Coleridge and the Apocalyptic Grotesque," in *Coleridge's Visionary Languages: Essays in Honour of J. B. Beer*, ed. Tim Fulford and Morton D. Paley (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 15–25; p. 24.

¹³ "Liberal causes which did command wide middle-class support in the later eighteenth century were humanitarianism and the revolt of the American colonies." Marilyn Butler, "Burns and Politics," in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. Robert Crawford (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp. 86–112; p. 89.

initiated domino game of collapsing crowns.”¹⁴ This also marked a departure from the anticlericalism of contemporary France, and in Liam McIlvanney’s work on popular radicalism, he concludes that “[i]t was not only in Lowland Scotland but throughout the late eighteenth-century British Atlantic world that radicalism was informed by religion.”¹⁵

As I have discussed in earlier sections of this project, Scottish Presbyterians did not hesitate to translate their vehement belief in their special role in Christian historiography, as well as their martial obligation to defend it, into political action. In her work on nineteenth-century Scottish and American literature, Susan Manning states that “Calvinism is a theology of crisis” that often responded in extreme ways to political and social realities.¹⁶ One of the most vital methods by which early Protestants regrouped following such crises was to restate their commitment to Covenant theology. This produced texts (or “Covenants”) that reiterated and reinforced a general understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, but more specifically addressed the relationship between God, humanity, and their political leaders, including monarchs. Seventeenth-century Scottish Calvinists insisted upon what is often referred to as the Calvinist “right of resistance” if rulers did not respect the limitations of their respective roles in this dynamic, and the Scots were particularly provoked by interference with their religious practice. It is readily apparent that this practice and civic life were firmly

¹⁴ Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg, Introduction to *The Canongate Burns* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Limited, 2001), p. xliii. For a summary of the controversy surrounding Noble and Scott Hogg’s edition (which devolved into physical threats and slanderous accusations, and centers on the contested legacy of late eighteenth-century radicalism), see Fenella Copplestone, “The Furious Return of Robert Burns,” *PN Review* 155 30.3 (2004): 50–55.

¹⁵ Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2002), p. 6.

¹⁶ Susan Manning, *The Puritan-Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6.

intertwined in the seventeenth century, but even as the connection moderated and, some might argue, weakened in the eighteenth century, the fundamental belief in particular liberties remained, as did—even more important for this argument—the right to defend them. It is this history that challenges aesthetic readings of Scottish texts that are explicitly apocalyptic, even when these texts themselves appear to eschew political intervention in favor of theological transcendence.

In this chapter, I examine the complicated tension between the arguably non-revolutionary ideology and the potentially revolutionary theme of one such apocalyptic work, Robert Pollok's *The Course of Time*. Recognizing the continued legacy of seventeenth-century Presbyterian beliefs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can help us better contextualize such a text. Scotland's seventeenth-century religious "fanatics," while certainly what we would now consider to be socially "conservative," were revolutionary in their insistence upon a more democratically organized church structure and the right to resist monarchical control. While I take Goldsmith's point in challenging "the nearly somnambulant tendency of some literary criticism, especially some romantic criticism, to assume that apocalypse, if it is considered political at all, always implies radical millenarianism," it is important to recognize the differences fueling such debates and their literary counterparts north of the border.¹⁷ When metaphysical destiny is messily bound up in concrete national politics, the line between the abstract and the lived becomes porous.¹⁸ Moreover, I wonder if Goldsmith too abruptly dismisses the sustained revolutionary potential inhering within the structure of

¹⁷ Goldsmith, p. 19.

¹⁸ S. A. Burrell reminds us of the Scots' "peculiar faith in the uniqueness of the *national* religious heritage." "The Apocalyptic Vision of the Early Covenanters," *The Scottish Historical Review* 43.135 (1964): 3, added emphasis.

“formal” apocalypse: if “one cannot resist formal apocalypse simply by chanting the word ‘history’ or by immersing oneself in the density of historical detail,”¹⁹ might not the inverse also offer productive ways of thinking? Can one resist “political” apocalypse simply by immersing oneself in the enormity of the transcendent? And when the language of the transcendent has a long tradition of application to specific moments in revolutionary history, as is clearly the case in Scotland, there is the possibility that it may offer more than merely “the containment of disruptive actions that are based on conviction.”²⁰ Furthermore, Goldsmith’s contention that romantic apocalyptic led to a kind of hegemony does not describe apocalyptic’s function in other times and places; in his work on John Knox, Richard Kyle insists that “Apocalyptic thought thus helped to establish an attitude of mind which stressed differences, not similarities; this made militance likely and acted to accentuate rather than to heal tensions in times of crisis.”²¹ Robert Pollok’s work suggests that both Goldsmith and Kyle’s understandings of how apocalyptic functions are useful in parsing a text that seems to want to have it both ways—in other words, to be political *and* transcendent.

While popular in his own time, Robert Pollok is largely forgotten even by those working within the field of Scottish studies. In his mammoth survey, *Scotland’s Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (running near 800 pages), Robert Crawford only mentions Pollok in two sentences, calling him “the dour sub-Miltonic poet” in the first, and repeating himself in the second when he refers to *The Course of Time* (1827) as

¹⁹ Goldsmith, p. 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹ Richard Kyle, “John Knox and Apocalyptic Thought,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984): 450.

a “dourly sub-Miltonic epic.”²² And when Julie Nall Knowles (author of one of the only works of criticism on Pollok in the past thirty years) refers to “the generally accepted twentieth-century evaluation of Robert Pollok,” the impression that there is a large body of work on the poet is misleading.²³ However, during his brief life, Pollok achieved critical acclaim with his epic poem, which was reprinted in large numbers on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the nineteenth century.

Robert Pollok was born on October 19, 1798, to a farming family just outside of Glasgow, in the west of Scotland.²⁴ A number of his mother’s ancestors were Covenanters persecuted between 1660 and 1688: one was killed, and his great-grandfather sought refuge in Ireland until circumstances allowed him to return to Scotland, albeit without any claim on the land he had left. Both parents were Seceders, and Pollok was raised within this Presbyterian tradition. Educated at home and at a parish school, his reading was “very limited...[and] confined almost entirely to the Bible, the Confession of Faith, and Fisher’s Catechism, Scots Worthies, Bailey’s Dictionary, which he often consulted; Salmond’s Gazetteer, the first volume of the Spectator, some of Burns’ Poems, and Scott’s Lessons.”²⁵ At the end of 1815, both he and his brother David decided to enter into the ministry of the Secession Church, leaving the occupation of farming with their parents’ blessing. Pollok stumbled upon *Paradise Lost* in or around the spring of 1816, which became his near-constant companion (next to the Bible, of course), and matriculated with his brother at Glasgow University in November, 1817, through

²² Robert Crawford, *Scotland’s Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 443, 527.

²³ Julie Nall Knowles, “*The Course of Time: A Calvinistic Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 18 (1983): 191.

²⁴ This biographical information comes from his brother’s book, *The Life of Robert Pollok, Author of “The Course of Time,” By His Brother David Pollok, A. M., with Selections from his Manuscripts* (Edinburgh and London: Wm. Blackwood and Sons, 1843). In addition to a biography that is clearly partial to its subject, D. Pollok includes many letters written by his brother.

²⁵ D. Pollok, p. 13.

1822, undertaking a classical education in preparation for the further study of divinity. When he returned to his home county, he was an avid walker on the moors, and “instituted a yearly summer visit of all the young people in the neighbourhood of Moorhouse” to Lochgoin, “a haunt for the Covenanters during the persecution between 1660 and 1688...[and whose] last possessor, John Howie, a common farmer with a common education, compiled within its walls the ‘Scots Worthies.’”²⁶ Pollok drew on this early exposure to the lives of the martyred Presbyterian “saints” in his novellas, originally published separately but republished together as *Tales of the Covenanters*.

Pollok’s last major work, *The Course of Time*, was published only six months before he died, after having suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis for many years.²⁷ It was generally well-received, reaching twenty-five British editions by 1867, and exceeding twenty editions in the United States.²⁸ Knowles suggests that

For the most part, the public liked *The Course of Time* because it was a long poem filled with personal reminiscences; many read it as an autobiography, for they were especially intrigued by its author. The poem may be said to have value, first, as a narrative poem composed from personal experiences in the life of an extraordinary man.²⁹

If Pollok’s contemporary audiences focused on the personal life of the poet, after his premature death, the poem was readily absorbed into a flourishing British Evangelicalism, and—as in Robert Burns’s works—any potential transmission of a radical politics (whether intended by the poet or not) was nipped in the bud.

An epic poem in ten books, *The Course of Time* moves away from Pollok’s nationalistic stories that focused on Scotland’s Covenanting history, novellas that covered

²⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁷ Knowles, p. 179.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 174.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 173–74.

terrain similar to that of Scott, Hogg, and Galt's Covenanting novels, and have survived obscurity marginally better than his poetry. However, it is this strange, difficult, and disturbing long poem that offers a more promising consideration of Scottish writers' adaptation of Romanticism by way of a problematic Presbyterianism. In it, we see Pollok's attempts to work through questions of a theological, scientific, ethical, and aesthetic nature, and while it is clearly strongly influenced by Milton, it is also reminiscent of other Romantic poets, particularly Blake—if not in style, exactly, then in the evocations of a constant—and often terrible—religious presence.

The Course of Time is also notable for what it is *not*. Its rhetoric is not fanatical like that of Scott's religious extremists, whose screeching, hectoring promises of rage and destruction all but obliterate their credibility. Neither is it insidiously smooth like Hogg's Gil-Martin (or Milton's Satan, for that matter), attempting first to disarm and then damn the text's characters and possibly its readers with a flawed but appealing logic that convinces even against all better judgment. It is surprisingly moderate, bringing a post-Enlightenment tolerance to its subjects of study, but without losing an ominous foreboding of the very real—and very threatening—potential God's judgment holds for all earthly inhabitants. In the poem's reliance on conventional forms and tropes of apocalyptic literature, it is useful to remember Goldsmith's suggestion that "[t]he authority of an apocalyptic text often depends on how effectively it can make its literary form seem separable from, even antithetical to, historical contingencies."³⁰ Despite the text's tendency to offer ultimate solace in the transcendent rather than make an explicit call to revolution (it is more explicitly millennial than millenarian), I will consider how the themes of the poem suggest that "formal" apocalypse and its concomitant subjugation

³⁰ Goldsmith, p. 4.

of history are not so easily accomplished after all, as evidenced by Pollok's attempt to deal with particular social ills. *The Course of Time* may ultimately resort to a place "outside of history," but to what degree this is because it fully defuses the political implications of the issues it raises is a more complicated question. Although there are gestures toward the "internal move" so frequently associated with English Romanticism, that position is relentlessly interrogated by the work's central tension, that between humanity's centrality and individuals' liberty, and the ultimate subordination required by God.

The Course of Time is also not jingoist propaganda, extolling only the virtues of a particular nationality (be it British or Scottish). Within apocalyptic moments in Scotland, particularly in the seventeenth century, "[t]he assumption that a people had a great role to fill in the last drama of history tended to reinforce feelings of national distinctiveness."³¹ This is true in much of Scottish apocalyptic literature, but in Pollok's poem his rhetoric is more notable for its ecumenicalism than its partisanship, an ecumenicalism that did in fact have antecedents in Scottish religious history. For all their "feelings of national distinctiveness," the storied Covenanters of the seventeenth century arguably "had a thoroughly ecumenical outlook... What they hoped for was the establishment of that way which they believed was divinely warranted in scripture and practised in the apostolic and primitive church before parity of ecclesiastical orders had been superseded by an episcopal hierarchy."³² This is reflected in (mostly) moderate terms throughout the poem, in which there is a greater emphasis on bringing a plurality of people together; toward the end of the first book, the narrating bard concludes, "for God gave peace, / Much peace,

³¹ Burrell, p. 6.

³² Burrell, p. 21.

on earth, to *all* who feared his name.”³³ And when Pollok describes chastised groups of people, he typically focuses on individual egregious behaviors rather than relying on the symbolic shorthand that punctuates the religious bigotry common in other works.

The poem opens in a post-apocalyptic, post-millennial heaven. An angel from a distant star arrives on the scene, horrified after having observed the scene of Hell on his journey. The two angels he meets suggest that they appeal to a “bard” (one of the regenerate) for clarification not merely of what the newcomer has seen, but also for a history of earth and humanity’s demise, or, the apocalypse, the millennium, and the final triumph of the Son (Jesus Christ) over Satan and his influence. The bard obliges, and the bulk of the poem’s ten books expounds upon this back-story. Despite the transcendence ostensibly achieved through heaven and its inhabitants’ very post-ness, the bard’s active re-envisioning of human history creates a strange blend of experience and contemplation. The (fictional) listeners may participate in the narrated events at a safe remove, but the occasionally graphic depictions have a different impact on the (all-too-human) readers in their less secure vantage point, and although the bard is not the tricky, untrustworthy narrator of, for example, Hogg’s *Confessions*, there are nonetheless discrepancies and tensions that persist throughout his oration.

He catalogues the many ways in which humanity effectively damned itself on earth, listing both the sins themselves (pride, greed, etc.) as well as the false institutions and religions that failed to correct their human agents. God offers many opportunities for repentance—unsurprisingly, Pollok strongly emphasizes the necessity of individual

³³ I. 14, added emphasis. All citations of Pollok’s *The Course of Time* refer to the 1828 American edition, derived from the third Edinburgh edition, published by Crocker and Brewster (Boston); Jonathan Leavitt (New York); John Grigg (Philadelphia); and Cushing and Jewett (Baltimore). Henceforth, all references will be included parenthetically, referring to book and page number for clarity.

access to and reliance on the Bible—but is rebuffed by too many, leading to terrible sins and suffering. With terrifying vengeance, God prepares to strike the earth’s inhabitants down, but the bard is careful to include ugly and almost Gothic descriptions of humanity’s cruelty and craven indifference to demonstrate the justice of God’s wrath. As a sign of the millennium, the dead rise “to repossess / Their long-neglected bodies” (VII. 152), which is a blessing for the “righteous,” but a curse for the damned. Bodies and nature become inhabited by their true spirit, signaling a collapse of the former disjunction that distinguished the post-lapsarian world. Just as human language, once fallen, failed to articulate perfectly its meaning, the natural world and its inhabiting bodies were damned to experience degeneration. But this is changed in one fell swoop: “The good and evil, in a moment, all / Were changed, corruptible to incorrupt, / And mortal to immortal, ne’er to change” (VII. 152). Language is similarly redeemed through these regenerate souls, “true heroes in the speech / Of heaven, where words express the thoughts of him / Who speaks” (VII. 158).

Following this period (Christians disagree on the exact duration of the millennium, and Pollok is no clearer), there is a decisive war between Satan and his minions and Christ, who is triumphant. God’s final judgment divides the saved and the damned, the latter of whom are now truly without hope and condemned to the “eternal pit.” Time is described as coming to an end, but what remains are images of the infinite: “In long excursion, wandering through the groves / Unfading, and the endless avenues, / That shade the landscape of Eternity” (X. 229–30). This bucolic scene promises endless peace and joy, but the suffering of the damned is equally without end, for “down they sunk, and sunk, / And ever sunk, among the utter dark!” (X. 242). God then nearly destroys “The

guilty Earth, / Inanimate, debased, and stained by sin” (X. 243), but once it has been “purified” by fire, he rebuilds the planet by reinstating its earlier, pre-lapsarian perfection. Pollok concludes his poem with the image of the marriage between Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the presentation of redeemed humanity to God.

Clearly inspired by Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Pollok’s long poem in blank verse is nonetheless very much a product of the Romantic era, and not merely because of its revisions of Enlightenment thinking, depictions of the natural world, use of the sublime, and Gothic imagery. These are all important elements of the work, and are certainly in conversation (if not disagreement) with its peers.³⁴ But it is Pollok’s engagement with contemporary historical problems (however shrouded) and his critique of these social ills that prompts some of his most graphic images and drives the work in a disturbing, albeit compelling, fashion. Although he does rely on the language and symbolism utilized by religious disputation, it is not in the same cynical way that, for example, Scott’s bigoted Covenanters deploy it, and the effect is starkly different. Moreover, his theology is not transparent throughout, and the poem appears to contradict itself at times in its reliance on competing strands found within the Presbyterian and Dissenting positions (e.g., Scottish Calvinism, Arminianism). Claims of Pollok’s “unbending Calvinism” notwithstanding,³⁵ his orthodoxy is strained from early on: in his description of a post-apocalyptic landscape that marks the end of time itself, he refers to “the wicked, who *refused* / To be redeemed” (I. 2, added emphasis). This runs counter to Scottish Calvinism’s precept of predestination, and hints at a choice that was made (or not) by humans themselves to be admitted amongst the ranks of the saved. But on the very next

³⁴ Knowles reductively ascribes Pollok’s “pure romanticism” to autobiography, sentiment, and “a meditative love of nature.” Knowles, p. 190.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

page he refers to the “elect / Of God” (I. 3), the common Calvinist term for predestination’s favored few. Later on, Pollok describes a much more expansive redemption of humanity than one would anticipate from Calvinist theology; although there are lines throughout the poem that acknowledge the selectivity of the elect, there is a more general sense throughout that, by means of repentance, a much larger segment of the population will actually be saved, a more Arminian approach than Calvinist.³⁶ This poem does not provide a doctrinal roadmap, but rather leaps between vignettes that foreground God’s goodness and humanity’s capacity to accept it, and prolonged expositions that reveal a recalcitrant depravity that consistently rejects such mercy.

A Christian Enlightenment

The Course of Time’s opening invocation indicates that this will be a different kind of epic than the classical models of antiquity. Separating himself from “debased” inspirations, the opening speaker (it is unclear if this is the main storyteller, the bard, or the poet, Pollok) insists:

The muse, that soft and sickly wooes [sic] the ear
Of love, or chanting loud in windy rhyme
Of fabled hero, raves through gaudy tale
Not overfraught with sense, I ask not: such
A strain befits not argument so high. (I. 1)

Those “soft and sickly” temptations could easily apply to the sensuous poetry of Pollok’s contemporaries, and the “fabled hero” seems to refer to classical examples, but what

³⁶ I strongly disagree with Knowles’s assertion of Pollok’s supposedly hard-line Calvinism when she claims that “Pollok could foresee nothing but eternal damnation for non-Calvinists,” p.177. Although there are certainly moments in the poem that are open to this line of Calvinist thinking, there are others that defy any such “orthodox” interpretation. This contradiction signals a productive tension, and it challenges the capacity of all but the most partisan, propagandistic literature to express or depict orthodoxy undiluted by other influences.

stands out is the insistence that their absence of “sense” eliminates either as fit inspiration for *this* work. It is an early indication of just how central the capacity for rational thinking and the acquisition of knowledge had become in post-Enlightenment Scotland. Following the historian David Allan and others, I have previously argued that Scottish Presbyterianism and enlightened rationalism were not necessarily incompatible, either in the nineteenth century or before, and it would be a mistake to read an emphasis on the latter as irrefutable evidence of a turn away from religiosity. A more provocative line of inquiry is to consider the inclusion of these Enlightenment developments—whether in the fields of science, moral philosophy, or historical development and historiography—within the poem. Do they merely make it more realistic for an audience also familiar with their centrality in nineteenth-century life, or do they suggest (however implicitly) that a secular end-of-history of sorts has already occurred, which makes earlier forms of artistic production out of touch with literary expectations that have evolved? What does this say about modernity’s understanding of its own place in human development, linking it to a more metaphysical conception of apocalypse?

While at Glasgow University, Pollok studied natural philosophy and mathematics, in addition to classics, literature, ethics, and logic, and venerated figures such as Bacon and Newton in his letters to his brother. In a particularly long epistle (dated 1822), he describes a scene that appears to be a scholarly day of judgment, or millennium of sorts: the final examination of Robert and two fellow students. It is witty and amusing, and culminates in a personified (and female) Science bringing revelation to the group, but only after hastening away false prophet-thinkers (David Hume is mentioned by name):

The earth shall not so quake at the Mahometan blast of Consternation, as
at this moment quaked the valley and its gloomy ghosts; nor shall the earth

and all things so pass away at the blast of Annihilation, as passed away the dark goblins from our sight. We turned and looked to Science, falling again on our knees, for we stood upright while we surveyed the valley of darkness: she smiled upon us and our souls were full of her splendour...And she smiled upon us again, and said, "My young sons, be followers of me. Love the truth and ye shall find it; and I will give you a seat among those whom I honour."³⁷

David Pollok notes that this letter and one preceding it offer "the first indication of 'The Course of Time.'"³⁸ He suggests that "on reading the second letter, especially from the place where Science is represented as taking her seat high on a mountain of crystal, though we have no intimation of the poem itself, we discern mental qualities developing themselves for the conception and execution of such a work."³⁹ Of course, there are limits to the kinds of "truth" that Pollok's Science will honor (Spinoza is singled out for condemnation, as well), and those predicated on a rejection of religious faith or resulting in its disparagement are certain to be cast away. Instead, Enlightenment beliefs are framed in such a way that they should actually *lead* to religious acceptance, as opposed to drawing their followers down the rabbit hole of skepticism. According to Pollok, it is the persistence of humanity's unremitting depravity that coincides with this critical capacity to study and learn from the world that dooms so many, which—darkening a more positive "Romantic" interior move—allows culpability to be shifted back onto the individual, rather than the act of learning. However, as its own end the quest for knowledge is no guarantee of one's redemption, and in the fourth book Pollok draws on the common trope of the noble savage versus the learned sophisticate-yet-sinner. This is a departure from the editor in Hogg's *Confessions*, who explicitly conflates learning with aesthetic appreciation, and aesthetic appreciation with spiritual redemption (by means of

³⁷ D. Pollok, pp. 184–85.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

an experience of sublimity). Without rejecting learning's potential, Pollok nonetheless denies its necessary causality insisted upon by Hogg's "rational" editor.

However, if science and learning are *properly* conducted they will lead to a better appreciation of God's greatness, and the natural laws of this post-millennial universe are drawn as ethical imperative. When the newly arrived celestial being first arrives to heaven, he (it?) describes his journey in the following way:

Virtue, I need not tell, when proved, and full
Matured, inclines us up to God and heaven,
By law of sweet compulsion strong and sure;
As gravitation to the larger orb
The less attracts, through matter's whole domain.
Virtue in me was ripe. I speak not this
In boast; for what I am to God I owe,
Entirely owe, and of myself am naught. (I. 5)

Once "mature," the virtuous are magnetically pulled toward God, an end result that may seem passive, but is dependent upon that virtue's cultivation, presumably the responsibility of the individual. Later on, when describing the endless pleasant activities available in Heaven—a veritable cornucopia of genteel interests and pastimes reminiscent of the well-heeled scientific and artistic hobbies of the eighteenth-century—the bard describes a group of would-be flower dissectors, peering "Into its veins, and circulating blood, / And wondrous mimicry of higher life," who then "Admire its colours, fragrance, gentle shape; / And thence admire the God who made it so— / So simple, complex, and so beautiful" (VI. 137). This is God the *ultimate* creator, taking the time to construct elaborate vascular systems even for flowers. Others use "optic tubes, that fetch remotest stars / Near them, the systems circling round immense, / Innumerable," while a fellow "sage, / ...Demonstrates clearly motion, gravity, / Attraction, and repulsion, still opposed" (VI. 138). This is certainly Isaac Newton, whom Pollok describes as, literally,

Science's right-hand man in the same letter to his brother containing the fanciful description of his examination.⁴⁰ Every living thing "Expands with admiration of the skill, / Omnipotence, and boundless love of God," but this is heaven (VI. 138). On earth, such endeavors are often motivated by the wrong kinds of questions, leading their agents upon vain and futile quests:

And him that vexed his brain, and theories built
Of gossamer upon the brittle winds,
Perplexed exceedingly why shells were found
Upon the mountain tops, but wondering not
Why shells were found at all, more wondrous still! (III. 52–53)

This is relatively tame compared to other examples of humanity's wrong-headed investigations, and while the natural world is frequently united with God's love, at other times its imagery is less sanguine:

Fertile was earth in many things, not least
In fools, who mercy both and judgment scorned,
Scorned love, experience scorned, and onward rushed
To swift destruction... (III. 54)

Knowledge and its pursuit are acceptable when modulated by an appropriate respect for and appreciation of the divine power that created the world, signaling a flirtation with deism. However, there are too many moments during which the bard condemns human hubris and earthly detachment from an intimate connection with God to accept a deistic approach as consistently endorsed by the poem. It seems more likely to be evidence of Pollok's university education, which helped to produce certain habits of thinking that then collided with the tenets of his religious upbringing, training, and (mostly unfulfilled) vocation.

⁴⁰ D. Pollok, p. 178.

Pollok expands on the contradictory responses prompted by nature in one of the longest books of the poem, first rejecting then adapting and reclaiming one strand of Romanticism's idealization of nature. Once again, he objects to the wrong question being posed: "Whether in crowds or solitudes, in streets / Or shady groves, dwelt Happiness, it seems / In vain to ask, her nature makes it vain" (V. 94). Happiness is not a location, unless that location is within Christ. This is a blindness perpetuated by other writers, and the bard criticizes them directly: "Though poets much, and hermits talked, and sung / Of brooks, and crystal founts, and weeping dews, / And myrtle bowers, and solitary vales" (V. 94). Instead, he makes the inward turn but bases it upon the internal, God-given capacity within each person to *respond* to nature, which, arguably, does not differentiate him as much from English Romantic poets as it does from the fetishization of nature they helped to inspire. Moreover, the bard does not advocate an abstemious approach to the beauty of the world, acknowledging

True, these were of themselves exceeding fair:
 How fair at morn and even! worthy the walk
 Of loftiest mind, and gave, when all within
 Was right, a feast of overflowing bliss;
 But were the occasion, not the cause of joy.
 They waked the native fountains of the soul,
 Which slept before; and stirred the holy tides
 Of feeling up, giving the heart to drink
 From its own treasures draughts of perfect sweet. (V. 94)

These experiences are merely the trigger of an experience Pollok likens to that of the sublime, but Pollok's most powerful version of sublimity occurs not on cliff tops or gazing from the vantage-point of stars (although those locations do make a number of appearances throughout the poem), but within "those who deepest dive / Into themselves, and know themselves the most" (IV. 76). But before this recovery of subjectivity can

become an unmitigated triumph of the individual (for the “deepest dive” is not without its own perils), the bard reminds us that “No being, unassisted, e’er could rise, / Or sanctify the sin-polluted soul” (IV. 76). For Pollok, real knowledge inevitably leads to the acceptance that one is in fact depraved; moreover, it is impossible to escape this depravity with subjectivity intact without the mercy and assistance of God.

Pollok paradoxically transforms this into an achievement of sublimity-through-negation, evacuating sensory perception and cognitive purpose from the endeavor in order to create an empty vessel for God:

Most fit was such a place for musing men,
 Happiest sometimes when musing without aim.
 It was, indeed, a wondrous sort of bliss
 The lonely bard enjoyed, when forth he walked,
 Unpurposed; stood, and knew not why; sat down,
 And knew not where; arose, and knew not when;
 Had eyes, and saw not; ears, and nothing heard;
 And sought—sought neither heaven nor earth—sought naught,
 Nor meant to think... (V. 101)

This meditative state leads one to unbelievable heights: “vast / Of visionary things, fairer than aught / That was,” as well as

the distant tops of thoughts,
 Which men of common stature never saw,
 Greater than aught that largest words could hold,
 Or give idea of, to those who read. (V. 101)

Pollok seems to be grasping at a way of articulating in (fallen) language that which cannot be articulated, and frequently employs this method of negation when referring to God, who is most often described as “uncreated.” When the time of judgment arrives, when all of humanity is found to be either redeemed or damned, Pollok once again draws on the language of undoing, but humanity’s features (rank, nationality, religion, etc.) are now unraveled in order to reach the essence of each individual. And yet, when redeemed,

humanity is reconstituted, and Pollok closes the seventh book with a repudiation of earthly death's powers:

Wherever slept one grain of human dust,
Essential organ of a human soul,
Wherever tossed, obedient to the call
Of God's omnipotence, it hurried on
To meet its fellow particles, revived,
Rebuilt, in union indestructible.
No atom of his spoils remained to Death.
From his strong arm, by stronger arm released,
Immortal now in soul and body both,
Beyond his reach, stood all the sons of men,
And saw, behind, his valley lie, unfeared. (VII. 163)

Paradoxically, Pollok personifies death, along with a host of additional evils (ambition, vanity, fame), giving them bodily form even as their annihilation is figured as a disembodiment. He consigns such creatures to "caves," and "solitudes / Of dark and dismal emptiness," blindly "[r]olling thy hollow eyes" while "on thy maw eternal Hunger seized" (VII. 166). This is certainly not the productive emptiness of God's vessel.

Imaginative Horrors, Social Realities

Much of my analysis of Pollok's poem thus far has supported a reading of *The Course of Time* through the lens of Goldsmith's "formal" apocalypse. One cannot imagine a more decisive escape from history than the redemption to heaven (or damnation to hell) and the end of time as we know it. However, does the "undoing" of

humanity, of human history, necessarily produce a conservative effect? Can the destruction of old biases, hatreds, and cruelties constitutive of the millennial transformation take on a more millenarian cast if the poem also includes substantial examinations of current states of misery within the world, and outspokenly deplores them? And how is this potentially subversive if presented against the backdrop of a nation with a long history of armed rebellion based on radical Protestant beliefs, however moderated by Pollok's time?

Before continuing, I should be clear that I do *not* believe *The Course of Time* to be a violently radical book capable of provoking a fierce, potentially dangerous response. Firstly, it is too long and too obscure ever to qualify as effective, straightforward political propaganda. Secondly, Pollok is generally cautious and typically retreats whenever his subject matter (at least when dealing with contemporaneous issues) becomes too inflammatory. And finally, the appeal of the individual and move toward internalization is strong, and his philosophical musings frequently head in that direction. Nonetheless, there are enough scenes throughout that call attention to the work's political concerns to warrant closer examination.

Throughout the third book, the bard lists the many sins that tempt humanity away from proper veneration of God and good behavior. Too many are distracted by the pleasure principle, seeking only to secure an earthly (and, therefore, empty) happiness that inevitably leads them to sin. Greed, discontent, lust, fame, reputation, pride: all lead to ruin, and their manifestations run the gamut from the seemingly innocuous (Pollok's surprising jab at archeology and antiquarianism) to the obviously transgressive (murder, despotism, theft). Unsurprisingly, skepticism is singled out as one of the worst, leading to

a “forlorn, / Undeclared” fate (III. 53). These rather generic offenses receive graphic, ugly punishment:

At every step, adders, in pleasure’s form,
 Stung mortally; and Joys,—whose bloomy cheeks
 Seemed glowing high with immortality,
 Whose bosoms prophesied superfluous bliss,—
 While in the arms received, and locked in close
 And riotous embrace, turned pale, and cold,
 And died, and smelled of putrefaction rank;
 Turned, in the very moment of delight,
 A loathsome, heavy corpse, that with the clear
 And hollow eyes of death, stared horribly. (III. 57)

Pollok’s imagery is visceral, but given the lack of specificity with which these crimes are presented, the affective reach of both the imagery and the crimes is limited to each reader’s personal reaction.

The Course of Time becomes more political in the following section (book four), when the bard targets an underlying will-to-power that animates human action on the earthly plane. The assessment of both monarchical excess and popular revolution is pessimistic, although an anti-Jacobin rant receives a more graphic (and violent) depiction, and “the lust / Of power” is relentless:

It bore the stamp and designation, then,
 Of popular fury, anarchy, rebellion;
 And honest men bewailed all order void;
 All laws annulled; all property destroyed;
 The venerable, murdered in the streets;
 The wise, despised; streams, red with human blood;
 Harvests, beneath the frantic foot trod down;
 Lands, desolate; and famine at the door. (IV. 69–70)

Despite this patently reactionary stance, the bard qualifies his remarks by suggesting that a valuable tension exists between both ends of the political spectrum, a necessary dialectic that can help to prevent tyranny. This is the only possible way—given

humanity's depravity and limitations—to keep such domination in check, and even Britain is only exceptional for its liberty insofar as any country can be on earth, a distant second to heaven's example. Immediately thereafter, the bard abandons his compromising stance, attacking the scourge of slavery in a passage that I quote at length:

This was earth's liberty, its nature this,
 However named, in whomsoever found,—
 And found it was in all of woman born,—
 Each man to make all subject to his will;
 To make them do, undo, eat, drink, stand, move,
 Talk, think, and feel, exactly as he chose.

...

Then wonder not,
 That long the nations from it richly reaped
 Oppression, slavery, tyranny, and war;
 Confusion, desolation, trouble, shame.
 And, marvelous though it seem, this monster, when
 It took the name of slavery, as oft
 It did, had advocates to plead its cause;
 Beings that walked erect, and spoke like men;
 Of Christian parentage descended, too,
 And dipped in the baptismal font, as sign
 Of dedication to the Prince who bowed
 To death, to set the sin-bound prisoner free.

Unchristian thought! on what pretence soe'er
 Of right, inherited, or else acquired;
 Of loss, or profit, or what plea you name,
 To buy and sell, to barter, whip, and hold
 In chains, a being of celestial make;
 Of kindred form, of kindred faculties,
 Of kindred feelings, passions, thoughts, desires;
 Born free, and heir of an immortal hope;
 Thought villanous [sic], absurd, detestable!
 Unworthy to be harboured in a fiend!
 And only overreached in wickedness
 By that, birth, too, of earthly liberty,
 Which aimed to make a reasonable man
 By legislation think, and by the sword
 Believe. (IV. 70–71)

The last five lines complicate what had seemed up until this point an impassioned plea to end the slave trade—by whatever means—given its central role in creating a hell on earth. This unsatisfactory conclusion is illuminated somewhat by remarks made by David Pollok in his biography of his brother, as well as commentary by Pollok himself in a talk given to a Bible society (reprinted in the same text). David Pollok suggests that this talk is “strongly expressive of his [Robert Pollok’s] abhorrence of slavery, and of his confidence in the gospel as the means, and the only means, of destroying it.”⁴¹ It is a pathos-laden appeal, employing a number of abolitionist clichés and vividly pictorial “scenes” (which are no less horrifying for their familiarity), yet Pollok is clear that he hopes to provoke more than an affective response: “Tears and sighs and words of pity are very humane things; but as far as they regard a mother on the shores of Africa, or a chain-laden mortal in the islands of slavery, who can neither see nor hear them, they may be said, like Job’s friends, to be ‘miserable comforters.’”⁴² He insists that “something further must be done,” but his recommendation comes as a deflating let-down for secular readers: “Nothing but sending the Bible and the Gospel to Africa will ever deliver its sons from bondage... Let the vigorous and life-giving spirit of the Bible once enter their hearts, and the sable sons of Africa will soon be stronger than their oppressors.”⁴³

Although most secular readers would balk at such advice, it is worth pausing a moment to consider Pollok’s suggestion within the context of his religious epistemology. Toward the beginning of *The Course of Time*, the bard argues that the Bible is the *sole* purveyor of absolute Truth on earth—all other communication is fallen and thus rife with misunderstanding. Of course, the Bible can be twisted and perverted, but, at least within

⁴¹ D. Pollok, p. 186.

⁴² Ibid., p. 188.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 189.

the logic of both the poem and Pollok's religion, it is the only true pathway to God, and a genuine (again, according to Pollok's beliefs) means of conquering one's captors.

Moreover, within the Covenanting tradition that permeated Pollok's early life, the Bible was a source of inspiration for the very violence he appears to eschew. Even if only Christians had a right to resist under this schema, if African peoples were to convert, would they not logically have the same defense used by seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterians?

Additionally, Pollok excoriates the inaction of historians, politicians, philosophers, and poets to challenge this long history of human enslavement. Pointedly scornful of the veneration of antiquity's supposed ideals, he instead sneers at this

liberty renowned,
 Those equal rights of Greece and Rome, where men,
 All, but a few, were bought, and sold, and scourged,
 And killed, as interest or caprice enjoined;
 In after times talked of, written of, so much,
 That most, by sound and custom led away,
 Believed the essence answered to the name.
 Historians on this theme were long and warm.
 Statesmen, drunk with the fumes of vain debate,
 In lofty swelling phrase, called it perfection.
 Philosophers its rise, advance, and fall,
 Traced carefully: and poets kindled still,
 As memory brought it up; their lips were touched
 With fire, and uttered words that men adored. (IV. 71–72)

If Pollok's ultimate reluctance toward physical or political intervention in the slave trade seems to confine him to the realm of "formal" apocalypse, his reasoning for this is nonetheless ambivalent, given Scottish Christians' martial history: "True liberty was Christian, sanctified, / Baptized, and found in Christian hearts alone" (IV. 72). And while this trace of more militant and political Protestant resistance lingers around the edges of Pollok's work, by its conclusion, it does seem to be reabsorbed within a more resigned

approach. When the final judgment occurs (books nine and ten), examples of virtuous and sinful humanity are mostly props; their descriptions are touching, their punishments jarring, but they do not do much more than encourage individual readers to emulate the good and disavow the bad, but at the personal level—not as a group seeking redress on this earthly plane.

This movement away from active, political engagement with apocalyptic themes increased as the century wore on. The Rev. Edward Irving, a Scottish preacher who became Coleridge's "protégé" and was initially well-received in 1820s London, had a complete reversal of fortune within a decade:

Ironically enough, it was [Rev. Edward] Irving's assumption of spiritual power, his attempt to be a prophet in person rather than just, like Frere and Faber, an interpreter of prophecy, that brought about his downfall. By 1831 he was presiding over church services in which those who came to hear his oratory began to writhe in ecstasy. The London air was thick with unknown languages as his followers found themselves, like the apostles, speaking in tongues, 'prophesying,' and performing miracles of spiritual healing. Irving believed that the Holy Spirit was making itself manifest in their bodies; the renewal of the human by the spiritual that was promised at the millennium materialized in his congregation's flesh. It was all too literal and untrammled for the church authorities. Irving was deprived of his ministry and condemned for heretical doctrine.⁴⁴

Religion and poetry continued to wield transformative power over the individual, but the ability to effect social change had undergone its own transformation. As Scotland continued to become more religiously moderate and economically integrated into Great Britain, poets such as Robert Pollok became more content to rely on the promise of the millennium than to participate in an increasingly marginalized millenarianism. If *The Course of Time* does not ultimately satisfy such revolutionary impulses, its use of the apocalypse indicates that the moderation of its period was still complicated by a history

⁴⁴ Fulford, "Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism," p. 9.

that did not hesitate to take up the sword (or pitchfork, given Scotland's regular disarmaments) to assert a sanctified right of resistance. In the end, Pollok's poem does not fully translate this power into a challenge of the status quo, and his work was a commercial success. When writers did *not* resolve the threat of apocalypse via a more palliating millennialism, though, there were serious professional consequences, which I will explore in the next section.

Chapter 4

Penitents, Priests, and Dark Ladies: Liminal Possibilities in Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*

In the three previous chapters, I examined literary works that positioned religion as an explicit force in the logic of their narratives. Scott and Hogg's novels deal with a relatively recent historical past, using specific, central moments in which religion, history, and politics collided (the second Covenanters' Uprising and the incipient Union between British nations, respectively) to explore Scotland's place in the modern world. Pollok's epic poem attempts to move *beyond* history, charting an inevitable post-apocalyptic future mandated by Christian eschatology, and yet it too relies on the invocation of events and individuals easily recognizable to contemporary readers. Although these texts have many differences, they all experiment with historical mediation's potential to affect and tamp down the volatility associated with radical religious practice. Even if attempts to manage religious fervor were not always successful, or, in the case of *Confessions*, ironically commented on such a project, this was an approach that gained traction in a post-Enlightenment world.

But what of texts that did not explicitly enter into religious critiques or historical debates? What of styles and genres more cagey about their relationship to secularization and its discontents? How might they provide a more expansive yet nuanced

understanding of the ways in which religion and rationalism were developing and being challenged in this particular time and place? I ask these questions not merely because one of the goals of this project is to broaden our understanding of the canon of Romantic Scottish literature (although this goal is certainly in play). I ask because the influences of religious ways of thinking as well as sites of resistance were not always as patently obvious as Scott's Covenanters; moreover, Scottish writers working outside traditional hierarchies of power (the Kirk, the General Assembly, the universities, Edinburgh's intellectual elite) challenged, resisted, and rejected both religion and rationalism in ways that have yet to be fully accounted. In this chapter, I argue that Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* is just such an endeavor, one that uses a frame of Romantic medievalism and antiquarianism to address issues on which her status as a working-class, woman writer might have otherwise deprived her of the authority to comment. The tropes of her Gothic romance ballads—replete with the expected trappings of a superstitious Catholicism, magical creatures, and a constant, ominous foreboding—channel an unusual response to a range of patriarchal institutions. More devastating is how Bannerman's work challenges the very premises of how rational and religious traditions order and foreclose both narrative progression and history. Her return to the more elusive style of an archaic past rebukes the will to knowledge, serving up scene after scene in which this insight could only be gained through the exertion of mastery over another. Bannerman's actors embody the tension of radical Protestantism: to seek God's will without presuming to know it, and to be open to God's grace without any confidence that one deserves it. The poems may not explicitly reference these goals, but the impulses motivating them are analogous, and the "victims" of these poems are continually thwarted by both the limits

of human understanding and divine unknowability. When these unfortunate figures approach too closely, they experience a kind of terrible grace, but assurances of salvation are anything but clear in the *Tales*.

Furthermore, Bannerman ultimately implicates her readers in the act of meaning-making, as well, exposing the “revelation” it supposedly brings as nothing more than pathological story-telling. Her poems deconstruct the delusion of order—beginnings, middles, and endings—and the assumptions on which it is predicated. Moreover, they indict an aesthetic taste for blood, violence, and control that are the necessary attendants of these tales and the institutions they represent. Diane Long Hoeveler claims that, through the genre of the Gothic,

the majority of British citizens were content to flirt with the idea of revolution, settling for the vicarious and sublimated experience of reading about revolution in place of experiencing it. So the subject who is created in British gothic texts is a surrogate for the reader, a hero or heroine who undergoes what bourgeois Britons did not want to subject themselves to—real action, real blood, real guillotines.¹

But Bannerman’s work denies the reader this catharsis, refusing to provide a roadmap to determine which characters it is acceptable to cheer on and which we are happy to see suffer. This also prevents a stable politics or ethics from emerging, and the only way to read *Tales* without falling into the same trap as its unwitting characters is to recognize the likelihood of inherent contradictions. On the one hand, Bannerman appears to criticize the superstition associated with Catholicism, but on the other, she does not hesitate to harness and use its affective capacity. At some times, she appears to derogate reason’s

¹ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780–1820* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), p. 25. See also Diane Long Hoeveler, “The Secularization of Suffering: Toward a Theory of Gothic Subjectivity,” *Wordsworth Circle* 35.3 (2004): 113–17.

potential to lead to truth, but at others, it seems more likely that it is the *way* it is being used (and by whom) that is the real target of her ire. As the reader struggles to make sense of these poems, it becomes increasingly clear that the temptation to succumb to a human insistence to make fragments into wholes, to bring clarity to opacity, beckons to the audience even as it damns the actors.

Although she is beginning to receive renewed attention, Anne Bannerman is still a relatively minor figure in Romantic studies. The daughter of a street balladeer, she authored three collections of poetry, plus a number of pseudonymous, anonymous, and claimed periodical pieces. Bannerman's first publication, *Poems* (1800), enjoyed a mostly positive reception, receiving favorable reviews from both periodicals and members of the influential group of writers and reviewers headed by Robert Anderson.² This reception and Bannerman's association with Edinburgh literary circles that encouraged "provincial" Scottish writers (such as Thomas Campbell and John Leyden) were an auspicious beginning to her attempt to forge an independent literary career.³ However, she was ultimately unable to succeed for two key reasons: the generally negative responses elicited by her second publication, *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* (1802; hereafter referred to as *Tales*), and the deaths of her mother and brother, thereby ending the annuity on which she was wholly reliant.

² Andrew Elfenbein, "Lesbianism and Romantic Genius: The Poetry of Anne Bannerman," *ELH* 63 (1996): 936.

³ Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 188.

These deaths had an immediate and disastrous effect on Bannerman's literary ambitions. Unlike her male counterparts, whose careers enjoyed more sustained artistic and financial patronage, Bannerman was encouraged (at times exhorted) to pursue a more acceptable profession for a woman of her social status, that of governess.⁴ She ultimately did so, putting an end to her writing for commercial publication, and she died in poverty in 1829. But if her material and social conditions can be blamed for thwarting her career aspirations, the style and subject matter of *Tales* share at least equal culpability, and are perhaps more responsible for Bannerman's continued neglect and exclusion from many collections of Romantic writing.

Initially, Bannerman's *Tales* seemed like a promising undertaking. The poet was encouraged by Robert Anderson, "a leading figure of provincial Romanticism," and whose friend Thomas Park was instrumental in bringing *Tales* to publication with the London-based Vernor and Hood.⁵ Decades later, Walter Scott praised the collection in his "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad," in which he wrote that

"Miss Anne Bannerman likewise should not be forgotten, whose *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* appeared about 1802. They were perhaps too mystical and too abrupt; yet if it be the purpose of this kind of ballad poetry powerfully to excite the imagination, without pretending to satisfy it, few persons have succeeded better than this gifted lady, whose volume is peculiarly fit to be read in a lonely house by a decaying lamp."⁶

But such support was atypical, and where Scott may have found some merit in

Bannerman's "mystical" abruptness, others consistently found fault with her refusal to

⁴ Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 158.

⁵ Elfenbein, pp. 935, 936.

⁶ Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, vol. 4, ed. T. F. Henderson (1830; Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1902), pp. 16–17. This is an often-repeated citation by Bannerman's few critics; see, for example, Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 163, and "Romantic Spinstrelsy: Anne Bannerman and the Sexual Politics of the Ballad," in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 204–24, p. 208; Elfenbein, p. 950; Diane Long Hoeveler, "Gendering the Scottish Ballad: The Case of Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition*," *Wordsworth Circle* 31.2 (2000): 97.

“satisfy” an “excited imagination.” Even a conciliatory reviewer concluded that “[o]ne fault...runs nearly through the whole of the volume. It is obscurity. The author solicitous, as it would appear, to produce a striking effect, has often left so much to be imagined by the reader that he is turned aside from the general beauty of the poem to discover the connexion or the meaning of particular parts.”⁷ Although male poets were also charged with “obscurity” (Coleridge in particular), reviewers did not stop there, and there is a vicious edge to much of the criticism of the *Tales*: Anna Seward referred to them as “stilted abortions” in a letter to Walter Scott, and *The Annual Review* concluded that “[i]t is not one of the least objections against these fashionable fictions, that the imagery of them is essentially monstrous.”⁸ Lumped together with Matthew “Monk” Lewis’s ill-fated collection, *Tales of Wonder*, Bannerman’s *Tales* was paradoxically dismissed as characteristic of the Gothic genre’s substantive thinness *and* forcefully rejected for the supposed danger of its violent depictions.

These responses were compounded by a minor scandal involving the inclusion of a plate illustration containing a female nude, further damaging the poet’s reputation despite the likelihood that it was Bannerman’s publisher who made the fateful decision; it is unclear if the writer, herself, was even aware of it until after the manuscript went to press.⁹ This plate accompanied the final poem, “The Prophecy of Merlin,” and although

⁷ Anon. “Rev. of *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*,” *The Poetical Register and Repository of Fugitive Poetry for 1802* (1803): 431–2. For an extended discussion of critical responses to Bannerman’s obscurity, see Ashley Miller, “Obscurity and Affect in Anne Bannerman’s ‘The Dark Ladie,’” *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 3.2 (2007): n.p.

⁸ Qtd. in Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 160; Anon. “Rev. of *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*,” *The Annual Review; and History of Literature; for 1802*, ed. Arthur Aiken 1 (1803): 720-1 (Art. IV).

⁹ Thomas Park likely made the decision to include “The Prophecy of Merlin.” See Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 184.

Park asked the publishers to pull it from the text, this “offensive” plate remains in a number of copies of the *Tales* extant today.¹⁰

This frustrated and disappointing publishing and reception history suggests that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, there was a growing skepticism toward certain kinds of irrational belief. The general Enlightenment emphasis on humanity’s ability to progress along a firmly upward trajectory, guided by ethics and morals that would mirror the scientific developments occurring simultaneously, signaled a move away from a world-view dependent upon the supernatural qualities of religion or superstition for explanation and meaning-making in everyday life. Charles Taylor diagnoses the resulting division between an “immanent” natural world and a “transcendent” divinity beyond it as “[t]he great invention of the West,” and charts the concomitant effect on the individual—“the buffered self.”¹¹ This “buffered self” is juxtaposed against an earlier “porous” self, one that was “vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces”; in other words, the “porous self” was subject to all kinds of what we now refer to as magical thinking. Conversely, “[f]or the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind.”¹²

And yet those bugbears of superstition and the fantastic continued to return, all but haunting the reasonable forces that sought (and continue to seek) to purge them from experience. Terry Castle notes that “[e]ver since the publication of Max Horkheimer and

¹⁰ According to Craciun, “[a]n examination of 16 copies of *Tales* reveals that in fact only five copies are missing the final engraving, whereas 10 copies include all four. One copy lacks both ‘The Dark Ladie’ and ‘The Prophecy of Merlin,’ an important reminder that perhaps the missing engravings were removed because they were desirable, not because they were offensive.” *Fatal Women*, p. 184. The copy of *Tales* I have examined (located at the Newberry Library in Chicago, IL) contains all four engravings.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 15 and passim.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38. For a longer discussion of this distinction between “porous” and “buffered” selves, see *ibid.*, pp. 37–41ff.

Theodor Adorno's magisterial *Dialectic of Enlightenment* over forty years ago, it has been difficult to maintain—without a devastating infusion of Swiftian irony—the once-conventional view of the eighteenth century as an era of unexampled social, political, and philosophical progress.”¹³ Further challenging this view of “progress”—and building on Taylor's work—Diane Long Hoeveler recasts the Gothic as a necessary component of secularization and modernity; she insists “that the gothic needs to be understood, not as a reaction against the rise of secularism, but as part of the ambivalent secularizing process itself.”¹⁴ What is important in Hoeveler's analysis is, first of all, a reconsideration of “progress” as an overarching rational movement distinct from those that were less so (for Hoeveler, the Gothic, but one could imagine this claim extending to other movements or trends, as well). Moreover, the very elements that have been for too long viewed as a *response* to secularization were actually constitutive features *of* it.

On first glance, it would seem that that this suggestion conflicts with Terry Castle's ascription of “the uncanny” to that most rational and enlightened of epochs, the eighteenth century:

The assumption (tacitly Freudian)...is not simply that the eighteenth century is ‘uncanny’—though that may be true—but that the eighteenth century in a sense ‘invented the uncanny’: that the very psychic and cultural transformations that led to the subsequent glorification of the period as an age of reason or enlightenment—the aggressively rationalist imperatives of the epoch—also produced, like a kind of toxic side effect, a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse.¹⁵

Although Castle's suggestion (“tacitly Freudian”) that rationalism *caused* the uncanny initially seems to reinforce the Gothic-as-reaction model, it does seem reasonable to

¹³ Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 6.

¹⁴ Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Castle, p. 8.

allow that rationalism's ascendancy in the eighteenth century may have resulted in a *greater* sense of anxiety, since it limited the space formerly available to explore the unknowable. In other words, previously accepted, routine opportunities in which to acknowledge, celebrate, or deplore the irrational became less and less available. However, Castle's insistence that there are consequences when ways of thinking that were once a part of everyday life are relegated to the transcendent is relevant—when an unseen world once lively with supernatural influences supposedly becomes (based on faith?) a disenchanted, material space. The resulting anxiety of such segmentation emerged perhaps most obviously in genres such as the Gothic, but also beyond; writing in 2010, David Collings insists that, although Wordsworth's natural supernaturalism is for many a given, “at moments he exposes the costs of this process [of secularization], especially when he contrasts older certainties with a modern anxiety.”¹⁶

However, the writers who contributed to the Gothic found a place in which these very anxieties *could* be quite explicitly parsed and examined, and, if we view their existence as embedded in a larger cultural project, the older, Weberian model of enchantment versus disenchantment becomes more complicated. What ultimately constituted a “Gothic” text was (and is) a matter of continued debate. Ellen Moers observes

what I mean—or anyone else means—by ‘the Gothic’ is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear. In Gothic writings fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare... At the time when literary Gothic was born, religious fears were on

¹⁶ David Collings, “After the Covenant: Romanticism, Secularization, and Disastrous Transcendence.” *European Romantic Review* 21 (2010): 346.

the wane, giving way to that vague paranoia of the modern spirit for which Gothic mechanisms seem to have provided welcome therapy.”¹⁷

Although I agree with Moers that fear is a uniting factor of these works, I want to challenge this assumption—that “religious fears were on the wane”—and instead consider to what degree these very fears and their lack of resolution emerge in Bannerman’s use of the Gothic, focusing particularly on the near universal experience of both earthly and existential punishment represented in the collection. Moreover, I move away from what has become a truism of sorts—that “literature like the gothic arises as an alternative theology, attempting to explain, soothe, and eradicate the pain of change by making sense of the wound.”¹⁸ In other words, I disagree that Gothic texts necessarily or universally offer a means of palliating the fear that attends (as Hoeveler sees it) the process of secularization. Instead, this chapter is my attempt to think more critically about how texts like Bannerman’s *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* pick at that wound, demanding that we recognize that those disembodied, “Gothic” impulses can reveal that there is just as much to fear from the stable, rational institutions that have most benefited from the process of modernization.

That Bannerman cloaks her tales in the fabric of Romantic medievalism, using the stock tropes of Arthurian myth and (possibly) anti-Catholicism, is more than a necessary feint. There were limits that even a writer with Mary Shelley’s political pedigree had to observe when taking on certain subjects—“Shelley [who] aligns this image of military coercion with the abuse of masculine sexual power...Describing these exceptional circumstances, she can represent indirectly what must remain silenced elsewhere: the

¹⁷ Ellen Moers, “Female Gothic,” in *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Fred Botting and Dale Townshend (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 123–44; pp. 123–24.

¹⁸ Hoeveler, “The Secularization of Suffering,” p. 114.

violence done to women under peacetime conditions the patriarchy deems normative.”¹⁹ But is there more to Bannerman’s layers and deferrals than mere self-preservation? She adapts elements of a genre that is, at the turn of the century, most famous for flirting with before debunking superstition and imagined depravity, both of which were often attributed to Catholicism. Instead of making the “rational turn” (best exemplified in Anne Radcliffe’s romances), though, Bannerman insists upon carrying out grim consequences that defy the more rational model. Given the unsparing nature of each tale—even the Rousseau-like “wild” boy of the poem “Basil” cannot escape supernatural torment—this might seem to convey a particularly harsh worldview. And yet, due to the very obscurity her critics loathed, we are left uncertain of what exactly it is that is punished, by whom, and for what reason—or if there is in fact no punishment at all save that elicited by guilt, regret, or other manifestations of these characters’ individual pathologies.

Bannerman’s much-hated “obscurity” is all the more jarring when contrasted with her work’s deceptively simple formal qualities. Often relying on a sing-songy ballad style, the poems in *Tales* demand to be read aloud, gathering speed as rhyme and meter join together to produce an experience in which the visceral effect of the poem is more readily apparent than its supposed meaning. They echo the inscrutability of the medieval romances that are clearly an influence, but Bannerman’s poems lack the internal logic that seems to justify the violent excesses of works such as *The Tale of Gamelyn* or *Havelok the Dane*. Although early poems like “The Dark Ladie” suggest that

¹⁹ Steven Goldsmith, *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 292–93.

Bannerman's second volume is a simple revenge fantasy, with the victimized woman appropriately punishing predatory men,²⁰ the poems as a collection resist this narrow, vengeance-based logic. Violence coupled with "obscurity" produces a necessarily ambivalent reading experience, and Bannerman's text makes use of a violent sublime without, I argue, subscribing to its aspirational promise. Instead, her work demands that we consider our own fascination with "the violence of representation itself and with the sublimity of this violence, two quintessentially masculine preoccupations."²¹

Bannerman's foray into such "masculinist" territory elicited an ambivalent fascination that continues to dominate much of what little criticism is written on her today. While some of her contemporaries praised the energy of her verse (a masculine identification), "[r]eactions to the perceived masculinity of Bannerman's writings were not always positive. After reading the *Tales*, [William] Preston complained that she had deserted feminine beauty for masculine sublimity...Another member of the Anderson circle, Thomas Brown, wrote to her as if she threatened manhood itself."²² The hyperbolic responses and vitriolic reviews levied at Bannerman's text exposed the tenuousness of such a construct of manhood. That this threatened masculinity was tied to a particular way of conceptualizing aesthetic experience (masculine sublimity vs. feminine beauty) suggests a degree of professional territorialism that ensured a gendered means of challenging unwanted competition.

Moreover, a system of patronage and support in concert with political and economic realities effectively barred most self-supporting women from achieving

²⁰ See Hoeveler, "Gendering the Scottish Ballad," passim.

²¹ Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 180.

²² Elfenbein, p. 938. Elfenbein also argues that Bannerman's masculinist tendencies reflect "the link between female genius and homoeroticism [that] was the center of her writing"—that her performance of genius was inextricably tied to presentations of sexual orientation. Elfenbein, p. 934

financial success in the poisonously competitive world of letters. This was exacerbated when women writers dealt with “masculine” subjects like violence, and Craciun argues recuperative projects that define these texts as mere responses to patriarchal victimization replicate this exclusion, for “[t]he true value of Romantic women poets such as Bannerman and Charlotte Smith... will remain obscured by such projections of current critical needs onto their work, projections which reify the gendered limits they rightly set out to challenge.”²³ Craciun’s own project seems to open more possibilities, particularly her understanding of Bannerman’s “violent sublime,” and she makes the case for contextualizing the violence of *Tales* by turning to a group of literary women who defy conventional classification. She challenges what she sees as the limitations of the guiding principle of “feminist literary criticism on British women writers [which] is the usually unspoken aim to demonstrate that women as a class (that is, as a sex outside of class) eschew violence, destructiveness, and cruelty, except in self-defense or rebellion.”²⁴

Bannerman’s poetry does evoke the apocalyptic energy that fueled a broad cross-section of literature from the end of the eighteenth century into the early 1800s. Unlike radical writers’ “political” apocalypse, the jeremiads of religious fanatics, or the “Last Man” poems of the 1810s and 1820s,²⁵ though, Bannerman’s coupling of ballad romances with a violent, often gendered sublime is not part of a generally recognized tradition. Craciun’s *Fatal Women* is an important first step in establishing the existence of these often neglected works, although she is wary of the interpretive impulses that can result from such a genealogy. She offers the following warning:

²³ Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 278n59.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁵ See Goldsmith, ch. 5, “Apocalypse and Gender: Mary Shelley’s *Last Man*,” for a sustained discussion of Mary Shelley’s novel and its relation to the contemporary “Last Man” poetic genre, the latter of which appear to have been written almost exclusively by men.

It is then, perhaps, tempting to focus on the feminist use value of Bannerman's violent sublime, so that the violence of her imagination can be contained by a larger, socially productive goal of ending patriarchal injustice in all its guises. But such a harmonizing and anachronizing (and Romantic) interpretation would rob Bannerman of the most dangerous qualities of her imagination: a fascination with the sublimity of destruction, and of poetry's relationship to this destruction. Her poet/destroyers are social figures, but they are fundamentally asocial at the same time, because of the ease with which they sweep away the innocent and the guilty alike. And even the social dimensions of Bannerman's violent sublime (like Dacre's) do not consistently conform to modern liberal or feminist politics...²⁶

Repressing this violence, denying its central role in Bannerman's poetry, can effectively become yet another rejection of her work. Instead, it seems more interesting to consider how the text refuses to justify this violence explicitly, and how such a withholding sets it apart from versions of violence discussed in earlier sections of this project—examples that the authors clearly felt some anxiety to explain or set at a remove. However, this is Bannerman's one constant throughout the work; the theme of punishment—for both the deserving and the undeserving—dominates each poem and it comes often without clear reason or any coherent description of its form. Although interpretive certainty is elusive with this text, this dynamic of punitive violence seems central, and I find it helpfully illuminated through the lens of Scottish Presbyterianism and an indecipherable and often cruel God.

My reading of Bannerman's works owes much to Craciun's thoughtful and persuasive account. If violence and disjunction are a recurrent hallmark of a certain strand of men's literary works, the positioning of women's contributions as more peaceful, palliating alternatives is an assumption that deserves to be challenged.²⁷

²⁶ Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 180.

²⁷ Craciun claims that "[r]escuing women writers and their female protagonists from charges of wanton cruelty, and capitulation to 'masculinist' behavior such as exploitation and objectification, seems to be

However, one of the main goals of this project is to reevaluate the narrative of modernity—a narrative of moderation and enlightenment—and Bannerman’s poetry helps us reflect on these issues in ways that Craciun’s study does not address. The ostensibly archaic institutional forms Bannerman references (church and military, most prominently) hold up a mirror to their turn-of-the-century counterparts, but what becomes of them reflects the troubling assumptions on which such institutions (and their beliefs) are founded. If the inscrutable and potentially all-destroying (mostly) female figures do indeed “sweep away the innocent and the guilty alike,” they share much in common with the more unforgiving tenets of Calvinism: total depravity, unconditional election, and limited atonement. Bannerman’s characters (outside these “poet/destroyers”) are universally on the losing end of all three. But just as damning—damning of Bannerman’s readers, characters, and what was used to effectively dam/n her writing—is the way *Tales* refuses to reveal its secrets by means of rational explanation. Unlike Scott’s last minstrel or Coleridge’s ancient mariner, men who keep on talking long after their audience desires to hear any more, Bannerman’s *Tales* instead jump abruptly (to echo Scott) from one to the next, tantalizing their readers with dramatic happenings, but moving on without offering much in the way of resolution.²⁸ Juxtaposed against the destruction hinted at by most of the poems, it is not surprising readers were unsettled. Bannerman makes explicit the violence these patriarchal systems always seem to produce but are loathe to acknowledge, yet her poems offer none of the comforts of either exegesis or rational understanding. Under the cloak of clichéd enactments of “superstition” and “chivalry,”

more the goal of modern gender-complementary criticism than of the writers in question. Aggression, murderousness, sadism, and destructiveness have no room to surface in such accounts of women and women writers, except as responses to masculine injustice and violence.” *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

²⁸ There are, however, figures *within* these poems that resemble Scott’s minstrel and Coleridge’s ancient mariner.

these poems ask us to experience the awesome terror of a religious perspective quickly falling out of favor amongst Scotland's powerful elites. However, the poems never explicitly reveal whether they represent this terror in order to critique the theology itself, or if they use it to expose the logical consequences of human encounter in the context of patriarchy.

Tales of Superstition and Chivalry

Bannerman's prologue announces itself with an unapologetic warning to the reader: "Turn from the path, if search of gay delight, / Lead thy vain footsteps back to ages past."²⁹ We should heed the multiple meanings of the Prologue's warning: "vain footsteps" may refer to the character of the gay pleasure-seeker of the first line (i.e., vanity), or it may instead be a caution that the mere possibility of a return "to ages past" is a vain and pointless endeavor. As I argue throughout this project, stories of both past and future have a way of becoming distorted through literary mediation, and Bannerman's tales effectively dismantle the distant, imagined past as either a place of refuge from the modern world or a well-spring of origin myths, instead revealing the willful illusions on which both of these perspectives necessarily rely. Seven out of the ten *Tales* are ballads (a case could, in fact, be made for an eighth), and the remaining works share similarities with the ballads' content if not their formal features. This form was not consigned to an ossified tradition, and still had currency in Bannerman's lifetime; the

²⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* are from the Vernor and Hood, James Swan edition (1802) available on the Scottish Women Poets of the Romantic Period database (<http://lit.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/swrp>), ed. Nancy Kushigan and Stephen Behrendt. The above quotation is from the Prologue on p. v; henceforth, all quotations will be cited parenthetically by page number.

daughter of a street balladeer, she would have been well-aware of this. And yet the ballad was self-consciously used to evoke antiquity, frequently for expressly ideological ends. Romantic medievalism, the Gothic, and antiquarian projects participated in attempts to establish historical and/or national identity by drawing on a particular set of aesthetic concerns. Bannerman explicitly invokes these traditions, only then to deny them the power of explication.

The opening poem, “The Dark Ladie,” exemplifies the kind of violence Craciun and Hoeveler note, and is arguably one of the most interesting and illuminating contributions to the collection. Bannerman’s debts to Coleridge are well-documented,³⁰ but her version quickly moves away from “the covert misogyny of the Romantic idealization of women”³¹ substituting a veiled and inscrutable figure who defies both internal characters and external readers to make sense of her.

The premise of the poem is not particularly unique: Christian Crusaders invade the Holy Land, and, returning victorious, one Sir Guyon brings a war “bride” back with him. She descends upon her captor-husband and his fellow knights while they are at dinner together, offers them some kind of threatening toast, and then disappears from view. Consequently, the knights have a sleepless night, unable to rid themselves of her image. But it is not merely the sight of her that haunts them; it is also “the voice, the tone, that stopt / Thro’ all their limbs, the rushing blood” (8). This is a figure who has infected their very senses with confused and conflicting emotions, and reminds us of “the period’s concomitant tendency to characterize feelings as transpersonal, as autonomous entities

³⁰ See Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 164. She notes “The Dark Ladie” is a “sister tale” to Coleridge’s “Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie,” but is quite distinct from the follow-up (“The Ballad of the Dark Ladie”) Coleridge finally published in 1834.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

that do not always belong to individuals but rather wander extravagantly from one person to another.”³² The effect the next morning is not merely confusion, but, for many of them, the compulsion to relate the story of the Ladie over and over again. An adolescent melee ensues, with each knight shouting over the other in the attempt to discern some meaning behind both the bizarre behavior of the Ladie and the lack of clarification from their host, Sir Guyon, the only person in the poem who seems unable to speak.³³ One of them, Huart, adopts the role of storyteller, describing how a “hoary-headed man” visited his chamber in the night and would not leave, rendering Huart a captive audience. He announces “[t]his morn I hear!...I hear it still, / The lamentable tale!” (11, original ellipsis), before repeating

I hear the hoary-headed man,
I kept him till the morning dawn,
For five unbroken hours he talk’d,
With me they were as one! (11)

The identity of “the hoary-headed man” remains a mystery (an anonymous inhabitant of the castle? Sir Guyon? A delusion?), but he supposedly relates the hazy history of how, after fighting in the Holy Land, Guyon brings the Ladie back with him to his (presumably European) castle.

This back story does not clarify what actually transpired between the Ladie and Guyon,³⁴ but the compulsive chain of conversation that this tale spawns is illuminating. Instead of depicting history as unmediated—as something that just *happens*—“The Dark

³² Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 3.

³³ Sir Guyon suffers from his own set of compulsions, and cannot control his gaze:

And often to the banner’d door
His straining eyes, unbidden, turn’d;
Above, around, they glanced wild,
But ever there return’d. (4)

³⁴ It seems likely that his attempt to unveil her is a stand-in for sexual assault.

Ladie” enacts the experience of being taken over, of being consumed, by history’s very mediation. In other words, Bannerman calls attention to the practice of narrative, to how tales of history are formed, under what circumstances, and who gets to tell the tale—typically, the victors, but in this case it is no welcome reward. Although “the hoary-headed man” initiated the storytelling, it is now Huart who repeats this seemingly never-ending tale, which acts as a contagion, infecting all who hear it. It becomes an unshakeable curse, disquieting listeners’ internal and external states: “peace, O Heaven! he never had, / Since he saw the Dark Ladie!” (11). Like Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* (a comparison most readers cannot help but make³⁵), these are men caught in an inescapable web of telling and retelling. They embody “[a] theory of emotional occupation—of feelings transmitted not through empirical intersubjective encounter but secretly, through the repetition of words without energy.”³⁶ *The Annual Review* may have damned Bannerman’s images as “monstrous,” but, as Goldsmith argues, “[i]n terms of gender, monstrosity might simply be the patriarchy’s word for those threatening values projected onto metonymy, not the least of which is the opening up of language to the competing claims of differently located speakers.”³⁷ In the case of “The Dark Ladie,” all of these different voices produce nothing but an unproductive echo chamber—instead of reaching any definitive conclusion, of reaching any form of enlightenment, they are trapped in a purgatory reinforced by their grasping attempts to understand what is happening to them.

³⁵ See, for example, Craciun, *Fatal Women*, p. 163.

³⁶ Pinch, p. 33. Craciun makes a related observation, claiming that “this deferral and repetition, while negating poetry’s power to speak the truth, simultaneously affirms the power of poetry to curse. Curses, or more generally incantations, are of course popular Romantic enactments of poetry’s performative power, yet they are rarely discussed in relation to women’s writing.” *Fatal Women*, p. 172.

³⁷ Goldsmith, p. 308.

If the cloistered speaker of “The Nun” in Bannerman’s first collection, *Poems*, insists on the necessity of an audience to confirm one’s existence—“as I sit and weep, unheard, unknown,” she despairs—the knights of “The Dark Ladie” suggest that not all company is good company—not every listener necessarily guarantees this kind of subjective confirmation.³⁸ Like Hogg’s Robert Wringhim, their attempts at sympathetic identification are stunted—they cannot effectively relate to Guyon’s position (a necessity given his aphasiac turn), nor are they able (or willing?) to identify with the lady, whether due to her veiling (a marker of religious and racial difference),³⁹ or because of the power she has exerted over them. But the reader cannot easily achieve this identification, either, as concrete knowledge of Bannerman’s ostensible anti-heroine, the Dark Ladie, is just as unavailable to the poet’s audience as it is to the knights. She withholds from this figure any fully fleshed subjectivity; in fact, she moves toward the other end, transforming the Ladie from an outraged woman (if you believe her to have been alive at the earlier stage of the poem—not all critics do) to inhuman other. By the last stanza, even the feminine pronoun has disappeared, and the Ladie has been substituted by the veil:

But where Sir Guyon took her then,
 Ah! none could ever hear or know,
 Or, why, beneath that long black veil,
 Her wild eyes sparkle so.

Or whence those deep unearthly tones,
 That human bosom never own’d;
 Or why, it cannot be remov’d,
 That folded veil that sweeps the ground? (15)

³⁸ Anne Bannerman, *Poems* (Edinburgh: Mundell & Son, 1800; Scottish Women Poets of the Romantic Period), p. 46, <http://lit.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/swrp>.

³⁹ See Craciun, *Fatal Women*, pp. 167–69, for further discussion on the Dark Ladie’s veiling.

What happens when there is no character with which to identify? When the dynamic of sympathetic identification between readers and writers is thwarted?⁴⁰ Bannerman avoids any simple shift of the locus of sympathy from the white, European male to the possibly Muslim, foreign woman, a move made by Scott and other contemporary writers.⁴¹ Instead, she calls attention to the troubling nature of the sympathetic exchange itself—a transaction that requires the same commitment to an imposed, rationalized order of narrative that is fundamentally narcissistic and limited in producing real insight outside of one’s own narrow purview.

Instead, in Bannerman’s poems, these moments of human interaction bring dire consequences. In disturbing and often unfathomable ways, they expose how gender, institutions, religion, relationships, and even Nature itself allow individuals to exert a terrible power over each other, but those inflicting punishment are just as often the conduits for an unworldly, inhuman force, complicating any certainty of just who (or what) is the object of critique. The Penitent of “The Penitent’s Confession” ignores the warning of the bell ringing “for the newly dead” (55) (namely: his beloved, Ellinor), instead charging into the woods in which he finds her ghost. But *she* is now an *it*, and its effect is toxic. He insists that “that weight of death / Will never leave my brain!” (58), but it is not just his mind that is affected: her/its grasp transforms his arm so that “living flesh, / Was a dry and wither’d bone” (59). Moreover, it’s catching. When the priest who receives this confession is exposed to the Penitent’s cursed flesh, he retreats back into the veil, seeking solace under the covering of the unknown and unknowable:

He has drawn aside a velvet shroud,

⁴⁰ See Hoeveler, “The Secularization of Suffering,” esp. p. 116, for a discussion of Gothic literature’s negotiation of sympathy.

⁴¹ Scott’s Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* is an example of this, substituting Judaism for Islam.

That hung from the marble wall;
 He has kneeled down within the veil,
 He spoke not once at all! (60)

Like the knights in “The Dark Ladie” this priest is infected by an ambiguous horror, but the means of transmission are as unclear as their cause. In the first poem, the knights are exposed both to the Dark Ladie’s glare as well as her back story, resulting in Babel-like incoherence. In “The Penitent’s Confession,” the priest hears of the story first; he does not see Ellinor, himself, but when the Penitent reveals his affliction, the priest “quak’d to think that arm had / The touch of Ellinor” (60). If touching the wraith strips the Penitent’s arm of its flesh, merely looking at the remaining bone strips the priest of his peace: the “deep, deep groans of that kneeling wretch” plague him “for evermore” (60), and regardless of whether the priest cannot or will not leave his quarters from that point on (Bannerman is not clear on this point), he is now stuck in this particular moment—frozen in time and space.

We have seen other Scottish writers utilize this momentary pause from temporality, and in Bannerman I want to consider the way it functions as a kind of anti-grace. If the experience of Calvinist grace was the one assurance believers had of their salvation, it was a profoundly important and moving moment, necessary to document and ruminate over. Literary examples once abounded, but by the Romantic period, the communion one felt with nature was quickly replacing this experience for many. In this project, the closest we come to an explicit version of this religious awakening is in Hogg’s *Confessions*, and it is the satirical episode in which Robert’s elevation is based upon the reassurance of a likely adulterer and fraud, and his moment of “grace” therefore actually experienced second-hand. But for Bannerman, the possibility that these “frozen”

moments indicate not one's status as a member of the elect but instead one's impending damnation offers another way of reading the lack of explanation or clarification offered by the poems, and would suggest that any firm line between Taylor's "porous" and "buffered" selves may have a few cracks in it yet. If, according to Calvinist tenets, saving grace came by the mercy of God alone, are these moments merely the demonic mirror-image of grace, or are they sanctified punishments, a supernatural rendering of the depraved condition to which humanity had always succumbed?

What I am suggesting is not necessarily the same thing as damnation; if a Calvinist is not reassured of God's grace, then damnation may be their future eternal state, but it would be recognizable by an absence, *not* the experience that the *Tales* recount. Instead, this indicates a more active situation—an experience of *damning* rather than the more passive damnation. There is a Gothic sublimity to this, but if, "in the Kantian formulation, the vital powers are momentarily checked so that their quick recovery registers an increase in cognitive confidence," ultimately vouchsafing the supremacy of the subject, in *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*, we see quite the opposite.⁴² Bannerman offers no such promise, and Burke's emphasis on *terror* seems more to the point, for these poems underscore the potential (and, for most of the ill-fated characters, achieved) *loss* of self within this particular experience.

These moments are not just the fate of men, either. The unnamed queen of "The Murcian Cavalier" is left in a state of suspended animation after having fled her home with a lover who may in fact be undead. What befalls her is less clearly triggered by the definitive act or gestures we see in other poems, such as Guyon's attempt to unveil the Ladie, the Penitent touching his dead beloved, or the unveiling of the unnatural arm to the

⁴² Goldsmith, p. 268.

priest. Perhaps it is her lack of fidelity, but this does not seem to be the case, as loyal lovers are just as likely to be punished in Bannerman's world as feckless. Once the queen recognizes that the Murcian Cavalier is not quite what he seems—"The eye alone was glaz'd and dead, / As the sleeper's in the grave!" (107)—she begins to spin ("Around and round her gaz'd the Queen"), succumbing to a dizzying disorientation that slips into full-fledged terror until at last a crash bears down around her and she collapses (107).⁴³ Its effect is apocalyptic—one can imagine a crash of thunder and lightning issuing judgment, and in the two remaining stanzas, the queen has become the stuff of legend, isolated in a tower, "wild" in demeanor, and referred to by the locals as "The Ladie of the Wood" (108). She is now consigned to the same static destiny suffered by the men of "The Dark Ladie" and "The Penitent's Confession," and once individuals "fall" in *Tales*, it seems extremely unlikely that they will be regenerate—there is certainly nothing in the poetry that would encourage such optimism.

These occurrences often take place within the context of the masculine enterprises of national and interpersonal conquest. When Huart tells the story of how Guyon brought the Dark Ladie from the Holy Land, he does not include any conclusive information about the circumstances surrounding her abduction (if abduction it was). All the text reveals is that "she clasp'd her little son, / Before she tore herself away" (15); but that *she* is the one who tears herself away (as opposed to a cut-and-dried depiction of coercion) only heightens the Ladie's ambivalence. If we can assume from Guyon, Huart, and the other knights' responses that profound guilt motivates their fear and behavior (indicating their culpability), why does Bannerman deny her readers a portrait of an *unambivalently*

⁴³ Just what, exactly, causes the ruckus is difficult to say; it seems as though it is her revenant-lover's arm hitting the stone floor, but the poem is unclear.

sympathetic, victimized woman? If social critique were the goal, then that would have been a more effective strategy. But we cannot assume that such a critique is necessarily Bannerman's end, and once we move away from that interpretive frame, we are left with a predominant sense of ambivalence. For many Presbyterians in Scotland at the turn of the nineteenth century, the imperious, seemingly mercurial God of Calvinist tradition remained an existential threat. By using women as the central figures of the typically senseless destruction, Bannerman challenges our expectations vis-à-vis how an experience with a god-like, impersonal force might be artistically represented. But by denying her reader a clear understanding of the origins of this experience, or a consistent roadmap of its consequences, she refuses the upside of both Christian revelation and enlightened rationalism: a new beginning. Instead, these moments of anti-grace reject all forward historical momentum, and instead we are left with a cast of characters in various states of paralysis at the end of their poems. The knights of "The Dark Ladie" are still droning on at the conclusion of the tale; the priest of "The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seam" remains "still" (36) at the altar; the wild boy, Basil, is expelled from his home and forced to "gaze" upon it (87).

This chapter is necessarily speculative, given Bannerman's limited corpus and the dearth of biographical information available, particularly once she retired from professional publication. However, it has been a goal of this project to complicate the still persistent tendency toward a biographical shorthand that reads texts through the supposed alignment of their writers with a particular religious or political persuasion. In this vein, I disagree with Diane Hoeveler, who sees in *Tales* "[Bannerman's] anti-Catholicism and her attempt to put forward a form of rational Protestantism as a superior and unifying

force for the country.”⁴⁴ To view *Tales* in this light, one would have to interpret its studied *lack* of rationalism as intended merely to critique (and perhaps parody) the genre’s typical absence of such an approach. This wholly ignores the text’s much-noted obscurity, and flattens the very real risks and challenges it poses to its representations of church and military. Moreover, although Bannerman does use some of the stock Catholic characters common in Gothic texts, their institutional framework (i.e., the Catholic Church and Catholicism in general) is not attacked with the bigoted zealotry common in other anti-Catholic works. But even if these hopes for a “unifying force” were founded, the way *Tales* refuses to countenance rational explication enacts and invokes a totally different reading experience. In other words, by emphasizing the same kind of mystery and superstition Hoeveler believes her to be challenging, Bannerman, like Hogg, leaves her reader unmoored. The only hint of a possible return from the experience of freezing or paralysis—a respite from what I have been calling “anti-grace”—comes in the final poem, “The Prophecy of Merlin,” which draws on Arthurian legend and Merlin’s Prophecy that Arthur will defeat death and return. But even this concludes unhelpfully, as Arthur’s body, rather than resting peacefully, “was not found, / Nor ever laid in holy grave... / And nought has reach’d his burial-place” (139). Ending her volume with an Arthurian myth certainly seems to hint at sympathy with the project of the nation (Britain), but, given the tone of the poems leading up to “The Prophecy of Merlin,” Arthur does not have very good odds. Despite its lack of clarity, *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* has been too effective in representing punishment and its inevitability, evoking an arbitrary, angry Calvinist God as the ruling logic and power, not the modern nation-state.

⁴⁴ Hoeveler, “Gendering the Scottish Ballad,” p. 100.

Conclusion

It is a common theme that, as the nineteenth century progressed, Scotland's distinctiveness—exemplified by its once enviable literary flourishing, but also tied to a religious, philosophical, nationalistic, and martial sense of identity—lost much of its defining power as “North Britain's” place in the kingdom became ever more irrevocable.¹ Scots became increasingly implicated in colonialism, helping to expand British reach of countries and commercial prospects far and wide, and, according to this account, they became more Anglicized (or, at the very least, subdued by Anglo superiority). By the end of the nineteenth century, the “Kailyard” school of literature had emerged, and epitomized for many the insipid “coziness” of a mostly rural domesticity by largely glossing over the harsh, lived realities of Victorian Scotland.² This movement was later rejected by the twentieth-century “Scottish Renaissance” and its renewed sense of nationalism, and the later twentieth-century, post-Renaissance focus on gritty realism,

¹ See Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London: Croom Helm; Totawa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), esp. ch. 8 (pp. 238–54), for an account of the causes of the “end” of the Scottish Enlightenment. Chitnis grounds this “decline” in politicization and industrialization, both of which functioned to undermine the institutions that had fostered intellectual progress. For a philosophy-centered take on this development, see Gordon Graham, “The Nineteenth-Century Aftermath” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 338–50. In his book-length study of Scottish Whig historians, Colin Kidd approaches this “decline” through the lens of a “capitulation of mid- and late nineteenth-century Scots to an Anglo-British interpretation of history.” Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 4.

² T. M. Devine argues that “the descent of Scottish culture into the abyss of the sentimental parochialism of the Kailyard has been grossly exaggerated by modern critics.” T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700–2007*, rev. ed. (1999; repr., London: Penguin, 2006), p. 296.

urban landscapes and continued economic woes contributed to the view of the nineteenth century as a cloying cultural wasteland.

By the end of the twentieth century, though, T. M. Devine and other historians began to interrogate this understanding of “decline,” noting Walter Scott’s role as an early interlocutor of such a perspective.³ Instead, Devine points to the strong local control Scots still exerted over their own affairs, asserting the formation of “a new and powerful *local state* run by the Scottish bourgeoisie and reflecting their political and religious values,” and firmly rejects that “because the basis for a strong *political nationalism* did not exist in the Victorian era, Scottish national identity was therefore in itself inevitably emasculated.”⁴ And although the tensions that fueled past uprisings became more inwardly focused, helping to contribute to the Disruption of 1843, Scottish Presbyterianism spread across the globe by means of missionaries now able to capitalize on Britain’s colonial expansion.⁵

But if institutional religion generally continued to lean in the direction of ever-increasing moderation, moving toward a hegemony that allowed for dissenters to be pushed to the fringes (a hegemony that was difficult if not impossible to achieve in earlier periods), what impact would that have on imaginative literature? More work needs to be done to reconsider the consensus of this period’s supposed literary blandness; this is beginning to happen with renewed interest in Robert Louis Stevenson, and the strange and esoteric novels of George MacDonald may provide another point of departure. But it is the return of the religious fanatics in Scotland’s twentieth-century literature that

³ According to Scott, “what makes Scotland Scotland is fast disappearing.” Qtd. in Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, p. 286.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 289, original emphasis.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

strongly suggests that such radicalism, though fallen into dormancy, maintains a powerful potential. John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927), considered by the author to be his most accomplished work (if not his most popular),⁶ echoes both Scott's *Old Mortality* and Hogg's *Confessions*, and opens by challenging the permanence of "the studied moderation" of a landscape that soon reveals it has not entirely forgotten its violent past, after all.⁷ Emma Tennant, a British writer of Scottish descent, published *The Bad Sister* in 1978, revising *Confessions* from the perspective of a young woman.⁸ James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) is another adaptation of Hogg's *Confessions*, and his first novel, *The Fanatic* (2000), explores the connections between the attempted assassination of Archbishop Sharp in the seventeenth century and the overwhelming victory of "New" Labour over the Conservatives in May 1997, opening with a radical preacher whose previous torture with "the boot" evokes Scott's Covenanter Ephraim Macbriar.⁹

Claims that we are now in a "post-secular" world do not adequately account for the way these themes continue to be recycled; such interest in the religious only seems sudden to those who were not paying attention to the simmering potential that was always there.¹⁰ The persistence of such attachments has also become clearer in the political realm in the recent Referendum movement, although if Scotland does move toward independence in 2014, it will be at the hands of a democratic vote instead of a Covenanters' rebellion or Jacobite insurrection. In this regard, the much-vaunted

⁶ Allan Massie, Introduction to *Witch Wood*, by John Buchan (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008), p. xiv.

⁷ John Buchan, *Witch Wood* (1927; repr., Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008), p. 3, added emphasis.

⁸ Emma Tennant, *The Bad Sister* (New York: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, 1978).

⁹ James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006); James Robertson, *The Fanatic* (2000; repr., London: Fourth Estate, 2001).

¹⁰ For a succinct and convincing summary of the limitations of the term "post-secular," see Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, Editors' Introduction, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 21–23.

moderation of the eighteenth century appears to have had a lasting effect. But, as all of the literary works discussed in this project suggest, even in times of apparent peace and increased temperateness there is a wellspring of belief that is not far below the surface, shaping individuals and institutions in unexpected and sometimes shocking ways.

The Romantic period offers a window into this process, producing literary works that struggled to address the need to represent Scotland's place in the modern world while still grappling with a past that would not be put to bed. Rethinking the role of Scottish Presbyterianism encourages us to expand the types of literature we read from this era, and this project only scratches the surface of materials now made available through the ever-expanding digital humanities. Moreover, such an approach can also challenge longstanding assumptions of progress and modernization that distort history and contribute to the canonizing and ghettoizing of literary texts and periods. Finally, by recognizing continuities as well as differences between the rational and irrational—secular and religious—approaches of the past, we prepare ourselves to better grasp how these issues continue to manifest themselves today, whether politically, socially, or through imaginative literature.

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