

James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace

Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author

*To Douglas S. Mack
'Friend of the bard! peace to thy heart,
Long hast thou acted generous part ...'*

Edited by

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ASHGATE

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Chapter 6 James Hogg and the Authority of Tradition

Suzanne Gilbert

appreciated by readers aware of such novels as *The Magic Mountain*, *Ulysses*, and *The Remembrance of Things Past*. The point was extended by A.A. Mendillo in 1952: 'Not till Gide and Proust and James and Joyce and Virginia Woolf is there any comparable picture in fiction of the process of living, of life caught in the very act of being'. In 1981 Inger Christensen published *The Meaning of Metafiction*, in which Sterne's technique is related to that of Nabokov, Barth and Beckett. Meanwhile, D.W. Jefferson had moved in the other direction and, in his important 1951 essay, '*Tristram Shandy* and the Tradition of Learned Wit', had related Sterne to Swift and Pope and, beyond them, to Rabelais.³⁶

If one believes that the central tradition of the novel in English begins with Defoe and then leads either via Richardson and Jane Austen or by way of Fielding and Smollett to the major Victorian writers, Sterne must indeed seem a digression if not a freak. But if one constructs an alternative tradition which would lead from Rabelais and Cervantes, both Englished by Motteux and others, to such twentieth-century works as *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien or *Operation Skylock* by Philip Roth, then Sterne would occupy a central place. Hogg too has his place in that tradition. There are, of course, other ways in which one can (and indeed should) consider his work. There is his realistic account of life in the Borders at the beginning of the nineteenth century; there is his relationship with traditional oral material so ably explored by Penny Fielding;³⁷ there is his relationship to the Gothic and the Fantastic, perhaps especially in relation to the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann,³⁸ but there is also his concern with metafiction and self-referentiality. It is in those areas that the influence of Cervantes and of Sterne can be seen.

³⁶ Benjamin Lehman, 'Of Time, Personality and the Author', first published in 1941 and reprinted in John Traugott (ed.), *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), pp. 21-33; A.A. Mendillo, 'The Revolt of Sterne', first published in 1952 and reprinted in *Laurence Sterne*, Traugott (ed.), pp. 90-107; Inger Christensen, *The Meaning of Metafiction: A Critical Study of Selected Novels by Sterne, Nabokov, Barth and Beckett* (Bergen, 1981); D.W. Jefferson, 'Tristram Shandy and the Tradition of Learned Wit', first published in 1951 and reprinted in *Laurence Sterne*, Traugott (ed.), pp. 148-67. Although the indebtedness of Sterne to Cervantes may have been forgotten by the 1920s, it had been quite clear to John Ferrar more than a century earlier - see his *Illustrations of Sterne* (2 vols in 1, London, 1812).

³⁷ Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford, 1996).

³⁸ On the possible influence of Hoffmann on Hogg, see Reinhard Heinritz and Sylvia Mergenthal, 'Hogg, Hoffmann, and their Diabolical Elixirs', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 7 (1996): 47-58.

Ca't not superstition; wi' reason you'll find it,
Nor laugh at a story attestit sae weel;
For lang ha'e the *facts* in the forest been mindit
O' the ghaist an' the bane o' the pedlar's heel.
From James Hogg, 'The Pedlar'¹

In the 1790s, James Hogg was working as a shepherd in Ettrick Forest while earning a local reputation as a poet and songwriter. By 1802, having read Walter Scott's imitations of traditional ballads, Hogg believed he could do better:

In 1802, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* came into my hands; and, though I was even astonished to find such exact copies of many old songs, which I had heard sung by people who never could read a song, but had them handed down by tradition; and likewise at the conformity of the notes, to the traditions and superstitutions which are, even to this day, far from being eradicated from the minds of the people amongst our mountains, — yet, I confess, that I was not satisfied with many of the imitations of the ancients. I immediately chose a number of traditional facts, and set about imitating the different manners of the ancients myself. (pp. 15-16)

Hogg makes this assertion in his 'Memoir of the Life of James Hogg', which over the course of his career became a major vehicle for his self-presentation; it introduces the 1807 version of *The Mountain Bard* and subsequently was reinvented twice, for the 1821 *Mountain Bard* and for *Altrive Tales* (1832).² Some

¹ James Hogg, 'The Pedlar' (1807 version), *The Mountain Bard*, Suzanne Gilbert (ed.) (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 31. This edition of *The Mountain Bard* includes full texts of both the 1807 version (originally published by John Constable and Co.) and the greatly expanded 1821 version (originally published by Oliver & Boyd). In an appendix, it also includes some pre-1807 versions of poems from manuscript or as they appeared in periodicals, as well as letters related to Hogg that were published in the *Scots Magazine*. All future citations from *The Mountain Bard* are from this edition and will be given in the text.

² The 1807 and 1821 versions of Hogg's 'Memoir of the Life of James Hogg' may be found in *The Mountain Bard*, Gilbert (ed.), pp. 7-17 and 195-231. The 1832 version, titled 'Memoir of the Author's Life', appears, followed by 'Reminiscences of Former Days', in James Hogg, *Altrive Tales*, Gillian Hughes (ed.) (Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 11-78. On the

as part of a narrative strategy in his fiction, as anecdotal evidence in annotations to poems, or as support for arguments in essays contributed to periodicals. This technique is a feature of *The Mountain Bard*, Hogg's early collection of ballad imitations and songs conceived as a response to Scott's *Minstrelsy*, for which Hogg provided a substantial number of family ballads. Though his poems had been appearing in the *Scots Magazine* and *The Edinburgh Magazine* for several years, and he had self-published a small volume called *Scottish Pastorals* (1801), *The Mountain Bard* was his first major publication. The techniques inaugurated there persisted and were developed in further writing of all genres, for example providing connections between this early work and later publications such as his breakthrough book *The Queen's Wake* (1813), and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), in which a reliance on folk testimony allows Hogg to question and subvert some Enlightenment assumptions, and to decentre narrative authority.⁵ A striking example of this process is provided by the oral folk-tale about the Devil's preaching in Auchtarmuchty, told by the servant Samuel Scrape in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. This essay will touch on those uses, and then place them in a wider literary and philosophical context: first in comparison to Walter Scott's representation of folk authority in the *Minstrelsy*, and then in the wider frame of the Enlightenment debates about testimony in relation to experience as an expanding category of epistemology.

The idea that a case needed to be made for those whose voice was seldom heard was deeply rooted in Hogg's own life. As a member of the labouring classes whose lives depended on agricultural work, for Hogg time was marked by hiring days and short-term contracts. His move into a literary life was also marked by hand-to-mouth uncertainty, as his new profession offered no guarantee of a stable income. He was well aware of legal procedures and knew through personal experience the adverse effect they can have on the less-powerful in society. Strikingly, the 1807 'Memoir of the Life of James Hogg', the first published account of the memoir that he was to develop throughout his life, begins and ends with narration of traumatic moments related to legal difficulty. The story of his family's eviction from their home forms the bedrock of that memoir, and in the second paragraph he reports his father's devastating financial collapse:

He ... commenced dealing in sheep; brought up great numbers, and drove them both to the English and Scottish markets; when, at length, a great fall in the prices of sheep, and his principal debtor's absconding, quite ruined him. A sequestration took place. Every thing was sold by auction; and my parents were turned out of doors without a farthing in the world. I was then in the sixth year of my age, and remember well the distressed and destitute condition that we were in. (p. 8)

⁵ See Ian Duncan on Hogg's subversion of antiquarian models in 'Scott, Hogg, Orality and the Limits of Culture', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 8 (1997): 56–74.

readers may be inclined to cite Hogg's pronouncement as an illustration of his audacity, but at its heart the assertion that he could out-do Scott at ballad-making reflects Hogg's recognition of what he could bring to the literary table, thanks to his roots in the traditional oral culture of his native Ettrick.

Hogg's Ettrick was a remote sheep-farming community, but before the Union of Crowns in 1603, during the reigns of the Scottish Stuart monarchs James IV, James V, Mary Queen of Scots, and James VI, this area had been a royal hunting forest. The oral tradition of Ettrick Forest had preserved narratives from this period and much earlier, many of them in ballads collected by Scott for the *Minstrelsy*. The eighteenth century had seen burgeoning interest in the oral tradition, which became a contested site in which writers engaged Enlightenment valuations of authenticity. The debate arising from antiquarian efforts to contain and stabilize oral traditions represents a key moment in the shaping of Scottish literature, and within this field James Hogg positioned himself as mediator between the oral culture of the Scottish Borders and the *literati* who had been seeking to collect, classify, and analyse the fragments of 'ancient' tradition, as well as the poets who sought to emulate what they perceived as relics of popular poetry. Before *The Minstrelsy*, Hogg had found his poetic models in the pastoral themes and forms of eighteenth-century literature that had figured highly in his self-education,³ confronted with Scott's literary ballad-making, Hogg became aware that he could model his own writing on what he knew best: the rich store of ballads, songs, and stories of Ettrick and Yarrow.

With Hogg's adoption of traditional forms of expression came the emergence of his mission to represent subaltern Scottish experience rather than to be represented by the *literati*'s constructions of it.⁴ This essay will touch on the various forms his mediation took: in his role as informant for Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–1803), as deliberate re-writer of folk narratives in poetry and fiction, and as plainspoken advocate of Scottish culture. Throughout, Hogg insisted on narrative strategies anchored in community, drawing authority from living tradition rather than acquiescing to the prevalent view of tradition as a collection of fossilized relics. In doing so, he offered an alternative model to the antiquarian grand narrative.

Readers of James Hogg will have encountered his prodigious use of oral testimony, based on what has been called 'folk' culture in his writing, whether

'Memoir', see also Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson, 'James Hogg as Working Class Autobiographer: Tactical Manoeuvres in a "Memoir of the Author's Life"', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 18 (2007): 63–80.

³ For accounts of Hogg's early education and reading, see the 1807 'Memoir' in *The Mountain Bard*, pp. 10–11; Gilbert's introduction to *The Mountain Bard*, pp. xiv–xvii; and Gillian Hughes, *James Hogg: A Life* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 25. Hogg's debt to eighteenth-century pastoral is clear in his collection of poems, *Scottish Pastorals* (1801).

⁴ For a discussion of Scottish 'subaltern classes', based on Ranajit Guha's articulation of 'subaltern' and 'elite', see Douglas S. Mack, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 1–2.

Legal theory and practice were in flux throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, particularly with regard to 'the prevailing customs of evidence'; this period heralded the 'advent of the modern adversarial trial', with its emerging emphasis on plausibility and probability, on evidentiary systems rather than eyewitness testimony based on direct experience.⁹ As sources of authority, systems were replacing individual human voices.

Concepts related to legal theory and practice – argument, advocacy, evidence, proof, testimony – recur throughout Hogg's work; and his privileging of testimony from oral tradition is crucial to *The Mountain Bard*. The legendary ballad imitations in this volume provide ample illustration of Hogg's advocacy of subaltern culture, and nowhere is this more evident than in 'The Pedlar'. Like many other poems in *The Mountain Bard*, 'The Pedlar' appeared in print three times: in the *Scots Magazine* in 1804, in the 1807 *Mountain Bard*, and with further revisions in the 1821 *Mountain Bard*.¹⁰

'The Pedlar' (1804) opens late on a Saturday night, when the Lady Thirlestane awakens from a nightmare; a pedlar that she had turned away from her door appears to her as a mangled revenant. She begs her servant to ask after the pedlar at the mill where he has gone for the night, but the girl is too afraid to go out. The next day it is discovered that the pedlar has disappeared, and on a subsequent Saturday night, the laird encounters a man with a 'muckle green pack on his shoulders' (p. 144), the colour green being a clue to the reader that this pedlar is supernatural. The laird asks where the Pedlar is going, but the figure vanishes: 'Then quick, wi' a sound, he sank i' the ground, / A knock was heard, an' the fire did flee' (p. 144). Every Saturday night the revenant appears near the mill, terrifying the community; the miller's business fails, and he flees to a 'far country' (p. 144). Finally a brave minister seeks out the Pedlar and charges him to explain why he is terrorizing the country. The revenant reveals that he was murdered, that his bones lie under the mill-wheel, and that he cannot rest until he has confessed to having stolen some money. He asks the minister to return it for him, then suddenly disappears and 'The ghost o' the Pedlar was never mair seen' (p. 145).

The 1804 narrative ends here, somewhat ambiguously with regard to the miller's punishment. He is not brought to justice; we are left only with this declaration: 'certain it is, from that day to this, / The millars o' Thirlestane ne'er hae done weel' (p. 146). This version of 'the Pedlar' is paced like a traditional ballad, moving quickly, with emphasis on action rather than reflection, employing strategies

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–6.

¹⁰ The three versions of 'The Pedlar' appear on the following pages in *The Mountain Bard*, Gilbert (ed.): the *Scots Magazine* version (published November 1804), pp. 142–6; the 1807 version, pp. 26–36; and the 1821 version, pp. 241–51. The 1804 version is introduced simply as 'A Scottish Ballad in Imitation of the Ancients', echoing the title of a section of Scott's *Minstrelsy*. The second volume of the *Minstrelsy* (1802) contained several imitations by Scott himself, and the third volume (1803) contained imitations by himself and other contemporaries such as John Leyden, Anna Seward, and Matthew Gregory Lewis.

Notable is Hogg's emphasis on the term 'sequestration', which he glosses as 'Legal distress'; this is one of only two points in the 1807 version of the memoir singled out for explanation.⁶ Hogg goes on to report the immediate effects on his own life, as young James had to leave school after only a few months to help support the family: 'At the next Whitsunday after our expulsion, I was obliged to go to service; and, being only seven years of age, was hired to a farmer in the neighbourhood to herd a few cows' (p. 8). The 1807 'Memoir' concludes with yet another evocation of 'legal distress'. He first describes his impending move to the Highlands optimistically: 'I have always had a great partiality for the Highlands of Scotland, and now intend going to settle in one of its most distant corners' (p. 16). This is followed, however, by an abrupt change. In a paragraph added later, Hogg reports on events since writing the three letters to Scott which form the bulk of the memoir: 'I have experienced a very unexpected reverse of fortune. ... [S]uffice it to say, that my scheme was absolutely frustrated' (p. 16). He does not give details of the breakdown in negotiations which led to his loss of the lease of Luskenyire on the island of Harris, but ends this version of the memoir with the aftermath of it, during which time he suffered devastating financial loss and great humiliation (pp. 16–17).⁷

Hogg was closely acquainted with some members of the legal profession, including his lifelong friend Walter Scott, with whom he frequently engaged in spirited debate, directly in conversation and indirectly through his work. As an avid reader, Hogg would have encountered developments in philosophy and law in the pages of the *Scots Magazine* and other periodicals. His legal awareness reflects and was shaped by shifting philosophical and legal thinking about experience and testimony in the eighteenth century. In *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's "Romantic" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness*, Matthew Wickman describes a new emphasis on experience during this period and explores 'the Enlightenment paradox from which the problem of experience emerges':

It may be stated most succinctly as the injunction to contextualize – to bracket off – direct perception. In other words, to know an object, one must experience it both directly and indirectly at the same time. This dynamic displays itself most vividly in modern evidentiary systems, which call witnesses to testify to facts on whose truthfulness disinterested juries decide.⁸

⁶ The other footnote also concerns the family's eviction. In the body of the text Hogg writes, 'At length, the late worthy Mr Bryden, of Crosslee, took compassion upon us, and taking a short lease of the farm of Ettrickhouse, placed my father there as his shepherd, and thus afforded us the means of supporting life for a time'. The footnote adds, 'This worthy man was killed by the fall of a tree' (p. 8).

⁷ See also Hughes, *James Hogg*, pp. 52–7.

⁸ Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's "Romantic" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia, 2007), p. 6.

adds, 'but some, yet alive, have heard John Corry, who was his servant, tell the ... story' – which Hogg goes on to do. Here the written memoir contains gaps that *must* be filled by the oral tradition, in voices not usually heard: the written account is not an adequate representation. Hogg's witnesses are the folk of Etrick, such as Andrew Moore, who in Hogg's note to 'Mess John' has reported an encounter with the 'Water-Cow', a dangerous shape-shifting inhabitant of St Mary's loch with connections to the 'Water-Horse' from Highland tradition (p. 66). This reference to local witnesses may be found throughout *The Mountain Bard*. A note to another legendary ballad, 'Willie Wilkin', recalls a 'neighbouring farmer' who 'not many years ago' was 'riding home at night upon a mare' and repeatedly, mysteriously, 'found himself at the door of the old church of Dumgree, and farther from home than when he first set out' (pp. 75–6).

For the 1807 text of 'The Pedlar', Hogg also extended the narrative from 29 to 43 stanzas.¹⁴ He takes up the story of a mason who appropriates the heel-bone from the pedlar's skeleton and goes 'Away to the border' in search of the miller to confront him with the bone (p. 30). When the miller touches the bone, suddenly it streams with blood. This is reminiscent of the ballad of 'The Twa Sisters', in which the breastbone of the murdered sister is fashioned into a harp, which 'sings' the story of her murder.¹⁵ In Hogg's narrative, the miller is confronted by the physical (albeit supernatural) evidence of the heel-bone, and he confesses to murdering the pedlar. He is summarily hanged, after which it is agreed that he deserved to die. The closing stanza departs abruptly from ballad narrative mode to address the reader directly:

Ca't not superstition; wi' reason you'll find it,

Nor laugh at a story attestit sae weel;

For lang ha'e the facts in the forest been mindit

O' the ghaist an' the bane o' the pedlar's heel. (p. 31)

Invoking the authority of a well-attested story, Hogg connects the folk beliefs directly to contemporary Borders tradition. He locates agency in traditional voices and insists that they be heard.

The notes to 'The Pedlar' develop a progressive pattern of argument on which Hogg would draw in later writing. Narrating events following the minister's expulsion of the pedlar's ghost, he writes,

[I]n May following the mill was repaired, when the remains of the pedlar and his pack were actually found, and the hearts of the poor people set at ease: for it is a received opinion, that, if the body, or bones, or any part of a murdered person is found, the ghost is then at rest, and that it leaves mankind to find out the rest.

¹⁴ For the 1821 version of 'The Pedlar', Hogg added another three stanzas for a total of 46.

¹⁵ See ballad 10 in vol. 1 of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Francis James Child (ed.) (5 vols, Boston, 1882–98; repr. New York, 1957).

typical to oral traditions, such as 'incremental repetition' turning on the phrase 'the Pedlar in life was never mair seen'. In traditional fashion, the narrative begins *in medias res*, and in a 'leaping and lingering' move common in ballad narratives the murder itself is elided: we have only the representation of its outcome in the lady's dream and in the revenant's two-line account of his death and burial.¹¹

For the 1807 *Mountain Bard*, brought to fruition and publication with Scott's support and at times intrusive editorial guidance, Hogg constructed an editorial apparatus for 'The Pedlar', including a headline and copious endnotes giving background and explaining folkloric references. The headline creates a remove that undercuts the urgency of a traditional ballad opening; instead, the editorial voice foregrounds the narrative's veracity and the source of its authority:

This Ballad is founded on a fact, which has been magnified by popular credulity and superstition into the terrible story which follows. It is here related, according to the *best informed* old people about Etrick, as nearly as is consistent with the method pursued in telling it. I need not inform the reader, that every part of it is believed by them to be absolute truth. (p. 26)¹²

In the 1807 headline, Hogg emphasizes the words 'best informed' to describe the 'old people about Etrick' who know the story, and this feature is carried into the 1821 edition of *The Mountain Bard*, the printing of which Hogg supervised closely (pp. 26, 241). The addition of nine pages of detailed endnotes (as paginated in the 1807 edition) furthers the sense of 'The Pedlar' as a hybrid of traditional narrative, original ballad-making, and editorial project, all in the service of explaining the culture and advocating for its value. In the notes, Hogg locates the narrative's source in the folklore and tradition-bearers of Etrick and Yarrow, where 'the belief in wraiths, ghaists, and bogles, is little or nothing abated' (p. 32); and as he puts it in the notes to another legendary ballad, 'Thirlestane', the stories persist because 'the old people tell us' (p. 79). He uses anecdotal accounts of supernatural events and locates them in space and time. The name of the 'real' pedlar, he reports, was said to be 'John Waters'. He names the heroic minister as 'The great and worthy Mr Boston', remarking that 'the people of Etrick are much disappointed at finding no mention made' in his memoirs of the pedlar's story (p. 34).¹³ Significantly, he

¹¹ The terms 'incremental repetition' and 'leaping and lingering', now standard in ballad criticism, were coined by Francis B. Gummere in *The Popular Ballad* (Boston, 1907; repr. New York, 1959).

¹² In the 1804 version this information had been relegated to a simple footnote: 'Thirlestane, on the banks of the Etrick. The ballad being founded on a fact; and every circumstance of it the tradition of the country' (p. 143)

¹³ See also the editorial note in *The Mountain Bard*, Gilbert (ed.), p. 408. The Rev. Thomas Boston (1677–1732) was minister of Etrick from 1707 to 1732. Regarding his 'memoirs', see *Memoirs of the Life, Time, and Writings, of the Reverend and Learned Thomas Boston*. A.M. (Edinburgh, 1776).

Hogg's defence of oral culture depends on a view of tradition that had undergone revision as a result of Enlightenment scrutiny; ideas about antiquity, authenticity, and the reliability of direct experience had been challenged and found too unscientific. Taking an alternative view, for evidence Hogg calls upon witnesses whose culture has been sustained by direct personal experience and common local experience transmitted through oral tradition over long periods of time. This reflects one means by which oral traditions remain stable over time: community understanding validates, stabilizes, and perpetuates traditional narratives. This concept is described by John Miles Foley as 'traditional referentiality', which invokes 'a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text'.¹⁹

At the heart of the discrepancy between Scott's and Hogg's approaches are two very different conceptions of tradition. According to one formulation, tradition is firmly located in the past; it is a fixed set of practices which our ancestors understood but which has slipped away as later generations have devalued it. Folklore, then, is a collection of artifacts from this cultural past: texts of old ballads, transcriptions of stories, documented practices, relics. Even before 'folklore' (a contested term) was coined in 1846, the methodology of collectors such as Thomas Percy and Walter Scott epitomized this approach. According to another construction of tradition, however, one privileged by folklorists today, tradition is not a fossilised collection of ancient rituals; it is alive, atemporal and evolving, constantly being referred to, and altered, by changes in cultural practice. In *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, Ruth Finnegan marks the recent trend to view tradition 'not as a piece of dead baggage from the past but as something constantly in change and continually needing to be actively renewed'.²⁰ In similar language opposing stasis and movement, Foley calls tradition 'not a static and unreactive monolith' but 'a dynamic and processual force':

I assume tradition to be a dynamic, multivalent body of meaning that preserves much that a group has invented and transmitted but that also includes as necessary defining features both an inherent indeterminacy and a predisposition to various kinds of changes or modifications. I assume, in short, a living and vital entity with synchronic and diachronic aspects that, over time and space, will experience (and partially constitute) a unified variety of receptions.²¹

the Hogg Family Ballads', in Edward J. Cowan (ed.), *The Ballad in Scottish History* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 116–41.

¹⁹ John Miles Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, 1991), p. 7.

²⁰ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (London and New York, 1992), p. 115.

²¹ John Miles Foley, 'Word-Power, Performance, and Tradition', *Journal of American Folklore*, 105 (1992): 275–301 (295, 277).

I shall only mention another instance of this: There is a place below Yarrow Kirk, called Bell's Lakes, which was for a great number of years the terror of the whole neighbourhood, from a supposition that it was haunted by a ghost: I believe the *Bogle of Bell's Lakes* has been heard of through a great part of the south of Scotland. It happened at length, that a man and his wife were casting peats at Craighope-head, a full mile from the lakes; and coming to a loose place in the morass, his spade slipped lightly down, and stuck fast in something below; but judge of their surprise, when, on pulling it out, a man's head stuck on it, with long auburn hair, and so fresh that every feature was distinguishable. This happened in the author's remembrance; and it was supposed that it was the head of one Adam Hyslop, who had vanished about forty years before, and was always supposed to have left the country; since that discovery, however, Bell's Lakes has been as free of bogles as any other place. (pp. 34–5)

Piling on the evidence through a series of reality factors – giving specific places and names – he first locates the narrative in an 'actual' event, the finding of the pedlar's body.¹⁶ Then he articulates the 'received opinion' or folk belief of the Bogle of Bell's Lakes, anchors it with the contemporary analogy of discovering Adam Hyslop's body, and interjects his own direct experience: he becomes a local witness qualified to represent the folk belief that Bell's Lakes is now bogle-free.

In making his case for oral culture, Hogg repeatedly casts Walter Scott as representing the opposition, though this thirty-year relationship is too complex for a short essay. Like other Scottish collectors and imitators of traditional material, Hogg had a culturally nationalist agenda: he was concerned with preserving what remained of an oral culture believed to be on the brink of extinction.¹⁷ He was determined to make a case for its preservation, but though he, his mother Margaret Laidlaw Hogg, and his uncle William Laidlaw had all been informants for the *Minstrelsy*, Hogg was profoundly ambivalent about antiquarian pursuits, increasingly so as time passed. This uneasiness may be seen by juxtaposing Hogg's role as an informant for Scott with his report of Scott collecting 'Auld Maitland' ballads for publication, asserting that there had never been one of her songs printed until the *Minstrelsy* and that he had 'spoil them awthegither'.¹⁸

¹⁶ On 'reality factors' in legend formation, see Linda Dégh, 'Folk Narrative', in Richard M. Dorson (ed.), *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago and London, 1972), pp. 53–83 (p. 74). See also Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 25–8.

¹⁷ See Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford, 1996), p. 5, regarding the 'often-mentioned "death of orality" [as] an ever-moving point marking off our own present (whenever that might be) from a lost past'.

¹⁸ James Hogg, *Anecdotes of Scott*, Jill Rubenstein (ed.) (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 38. See also Valentina Bold, "'Nouther right spelled nor right setten down": Scott, Child and

The title of the second section of Hogg's *Mountain Bard*, 'Songs, Adapted to the Times', perhaps reflects this attitude.

The relationship between an individual narrative and the wider traditional context is key to understanding Hogg's reference to tradition and his own use of it. An approach grounded in oral culture runs contrary to the literary-historical conception of oral traditions as disembodied fragments of antiquity, as characterized by ballad-collectors such as Thomas Percy and Walter Scott. Like the narratives preserved and transmitted by oral tradition, Hogg's characters and cultural attitudes refuse to stay buried in the past, and their embodiment is a constant challenge to the narrative authority of Enlightenment voices. In *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, the corpse of Robert Wringhim clutches a manuscript, physical evidence that may 'reveal some mystery that mankind disna ken naething about yet',²² his testimony to the present world, significantly still attached to his body. 'The Pedlar' presents a decidedly corporeal revenant who attests to the circumstances of his death and who, ultimately, provides physical evidence to support his story: his own heel-bone. That text, or performance, is then given support by Hogg's paratextual apparatus, reported testimony from that 'larger and more echoic' context: ostensibly real voices from the community.²³ Hogg's claim to authenticity is located in the testimony of local people, based on the concrete locations and features on which their 'evidence' is based.

For Scott, tradition is 'a sort of perverted alchemy which converts gold into lead'.²⁴ Comparing his paratextual apparatus in the *Minstrelsy* to Hogg's in *The Mountain Bard* reveals striking differences in their location of authority.²⁵ In Scott's prefacing essay, he mediates between Enlightenment culture and his subject, describing ballads as degraded relics of antiquity which had originally been composed by an ancient, courtly race of poets. He is dismayed by what he calls the 'ignorance' of his informants and laments encountering so many 'variations in the mode of telling the same story'.²⁶ Most often, he employs historical documentation from print sources, and his introduction is structured as a lengthy, genealogically-oriented history of the Borders, filled with references to historians and legal documents related to the Border reivers. Ballad narratives are compared closely to historical accounts. The presentation of popular tradition is often depersonalized, related in passive voice and with anthropological detachment, depleting any

²² James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, P.D. Garside (ed.) (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 174.

²³ Foley, *Immanent Art*, p. 7.

²⁴ Walter Scott, review of *Reliques of Robert Burns*, R.H. Cromek (ed.), in *Quarterly Review*, 1 (1809): 30.

²⁵ *The Mountain Bard* forms part of Hogg's ongoing exchange with Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This subject is considered more in depth in the introduction to *The Mountain Bard*, Gilbert (ed.), pp. xi–lxix.

²⁶ Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Kelso and Edinburgh, 1802–03), vol. 1, p. ciii. Future citations are from this edition and will be given in the text.

authority it might have held. Hence, the belief in 'Irish earth' as a cure for adders' venom is described, 'This virtue is extended by popular credulity to the natives, and even to the animals of Hibernia' (vol. 1, pp. lxxvii–lxxviii). In this case, Scott follows it by relating an actual report, but in such a way that the reader is invited to chuckle: 'A gentleman, bitten by some reptile, so as to occasion a great swelling, seriously assured the editor, that he ascribed his cure to putting the affected finger into the mouth of an Irish mare!' (vol. 1, p. lxxviii). In another case 'tradition' may stand in for its bearers: 'A dangerous morass, still called the *Queen's Mire*, is pointed out by tradition as the spot where the lovely MARY, and her white palfrey, were in danger of perishing'. Such a method effectively relieves the tradition-bearers of agency. The following excerpt from the introduction to the *Minstrelsy* exemplifies Scott's representation of folklore and his paratextual style:

Of all these classes of spirits it may be in general observed, that their attachment was supposed to be local, and not personal. They haunted the rock, the stream, the ruined castle, without regard to the persons or families to whom the property belonged. Hence, they differed entirely from that species of spirits, to whom, in the Highlands, is ascribed the guardianship or superintendance of a particular clan, or family of distinction; and who, perhaps, yet more than the Brownie, resemble the classic household gods. Thus, in a MS. history of Moray, we are informed, that the family of GURLINBEG is haunted by a spirit called *Garlin Bodachar*; that of the baron of KINCHARDIN, by *Lamhdearg*, or Red-hand, a spectre, one of whose hands is as red as blood; that of TULLOCHGORM, by *May Moulach*, a female figure, whose left hand and arm were covered with hair, who is also mentioned in AUBREY'S *Miscellanies*, pages 211, 212, as a familiar attendant upon the clan GRANT. These superstitions were so ingrafted in the popular creed, that the clerical synods and presbyteries were wont to take cognizance of them. (vol. 1, p. lxxxvi)²⁷

The assumptions that underlie Hogg's paratextual material are very different. Revisiting Scott's alchemy metaphor, for Hogg the gold may still be found in the oral traditions of Borders culture. Tradition is not a collection of relics, fixed in the past; rather, it continues into the present. Thus, Hogg's explanatory notes to the material are anchored in the contemporary experience of Borders people, and his presentation of supernatural narrative is grounded in oral tradition, in which supernatural beings are treated matter-of-factly. His note to 'The Pedlar' takes on an immediate, storytelling air:

²⁷ In *Waverley*, Highland chieftain Fergus Vich Ian Vohr tells Edward that he will soon be killed or captured on the authority of having seen the 'Bodach Glas', the 'Grey Spectre' that has haunted his family 'when any great disaster was impending, but especially before approaching death': it has 'never failed a person of my house' (Walter Scott, *Waverley*, Claire Lamont (ed.) [Oxford, 1986], pp. 276–7).

To such a height did the horror of this apparition arrive in Eitrick, that it is certain there were few in the parish who durst go to, or by the mill, after sunset; but, unlike many of the country bogles, who assume a variety of fantastical shapes, this never appeared otherwise than in the shape of a pedlar, with a green pack on his back: and so simple and natural was his whole deportment, that few ever suspected him for the spirit, until he vanished away. He once came so near two men in the twilight, that they familiarly offered him snuff, when he instantly sunk into the earth, and left his companions in a state of insensibility. (p. 34)

The difference in approach may be discerned in a comparison of Scott's and Hogg's notes on exactly the same subject: 'Jeddart Justice'.

Scott: The memory of DUNBAR's legal proceedings at Jedburgh, are preserved in the proverbial phrase, *Jeddart Justice*, which signifies trial after execution. By this rigour, though sternly and unconsciously exercised, the border marauders were, in the course of years, either reclaimed or exterminated; though nearly a century elapsed e'er their manners were altogether assimilated to those of their countrymen. [Scott's footnote to this observation reads, See the acts 18 Cha. 2. 6. 3. and 30 Cha. 2, ch. 2, against the border moss-troopers.] (vol. 1, p. 1)

Hogg: And afterwards they in full council agreed, / That Rob Riddle he richly deserved to dee. ... This alludes to an old and very common proverb, 'That such a one will get Jeddart justice': which is, first to hang a man, and then judge whether he was guilty or not. (p. 36)

While Scott attaches the proverb firmly to the historical outlaws of the Scottish Borders, Hogg detaches the phrase from its historical mooring. The proverb achieves its level of proof through age but also commonality: the knowledge is retained in living tradition.

As deliberately as Hogg often contrasted his method to Scott's, a simple binary opposition does not do justice to Hogg's complex representations of subaltern culture. At times in his annotation, while taking a position far closer to Borders culture than Scott, he adopts a clearly editorial voice to explain 'folk' traditions to an Edinburgh or London audience; and in these moments he may sound more like Scott-the-editor. Even when he seems to hold himself apart from that culture, however, he mounts a defence:

Many are apt to despise their poor illiterate countrymen for these weak and superstitious notions; but I am still of opinion, that, in the circumstance of their attaching credit to them, there is as much to praise as to blame. Let it be considered, that their means of information have not been adequate to the removal of these; while, on the other hand, they have been used to hear them related, and attested as truths, by the very persons whom they were bound, by all the laws of nature and gratitude, to reverence and believe. (p. 33)

Hogg's self-fashioning as a champion of oral tradition was, inevitably, influenced by massive social and economic changes to the countryside, initiated by systematic 'agricultural improvement' in the eighteenth century. As David Buchan demonstrates in *The Ballad and the Folk*, these changes had irrevocable implications for rural life and work, with knock-on effects for traditional forms of expression.²⁸ The ballad imitations then in vogue occupied a space between the oral ballad and literary culture. As Elaine Petrie has observed, Hogg was a member of the community and an advocate for it, but he was also an observer of it, with aspirations to literary society. The resulting tensions contribute to ambiguity in his presentation of folk beliefs.²⁹ In *The Mountain Bard*, however, authority ultimately rests with testimony from oral voices, representing tradition, rather than with printed historical accounts.

Hogg's views did change over time, affected to a degree by Scott's and others' opinions, but it may be observed that Hogg showed more interest in asserting the right of subaltern cultures to exist than in promoting individual folk beliefs, of which he was at times critical. He laments cultural loss, as in his essay 'On the Changes in the Habits, Amusements, and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', which was published in the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture* in the early 1830s:

On looking back, the first great falling off is in SONG. This, to me, is not only astonishing, but unaccountable. They have ten times more opportunities of learning songs, yet song-singing is at an end, or only kept up by a few migratory tailors. ... Where are those melting strains now? Gone, and for ever! ... The publication of the Border Minstrelsy had a singular and unexpected effect in this respect. These songs had floated down on the stream of oral tradition, from generation to generation, and were regarded as a precious treasure belonging to the country; but when Mr Scott's work appeared their areanum was laid open, and a deadering blow was inflicted on our rural literature and principal enjoyment by the very means adopted for their preservation.³⁰

Between the time he assisted Scott with collecting ballads for the *Minstrelsy* and this essay of 1830, Hogg had learned much about the antiquarian endeavour that was profoundly disturbing. His interest seems not to have been in the object of perceived antiquity, the tar pot excavated from a churchyard that, in Hogg's playfully satirical anecdote, Scott tried to raise to the status of ancient 'consecrated' helmet.³¹ Instead, Hogg focuses on the way of life that produces folk beliefs. This

²⁸ See David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London and Boston, 1972).

²⁹ See Elaine Petrie, 'James Hogg: A Study in the Transition from Folk Tradition to Literature' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 1980).

³⁰ James Hogg, 'On the Changes in the Habits, Amusements, and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, reprinted in *A Shepherd's Delight: A James Hogg Anthology*, Judy Steel (ed.) (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 40-51 (pp. 41, 42).

³¹ James Hogg, 'Reminiscences of Former Days', *Altrive Tales*, Hughes (ed.), p. 62.

attitude is evident in his passionate defence of subaltern cultures as different as the Highland Jacobites and radical Presbyterian covenanters.

Indeed, *The Mountain Bard* responds in complex ways to the antiquarian wars of the previous century. Hogg's reliance on oral testimony for presentation of cultural history destabilizes the categories of knowledge and belief that Enlightenment philosophers had tried so hard to distinguish. It engages the topic of 'testimony' which those philosophers, following Locke's lead, had taken up and developed into an important aspect of epistemology. Forming the major statement on 'testimony', on which reactions from others such as George Campbell and Thomas Reid were based, was David Hume's influential 'Of Miracles' from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748):

[T]here is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators. This species of reasoning, perhaps, one may deny to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. I shall not dispute about a word. It will be sufficient to observe that our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses.³²

Hume and other philosophers clearly established 'testimony' as a 'species of reasoning' whereby knowledge is gained through experience and through exposure to reports from others. But Hume was not fully comfortable with the subjectivity and ambiguity of human testimony, and he also identified factors that work against credibility, qualifiers such as contradictory testimony, the character and number of witnesses, their manner of delivery, and their own interest in the case.³³ Hume's distrust of testimony reflects the contemporary legal debate regarding legal-evidentiary codes that Wickman describes in *The Ruins of Experience*. With an emerging preference for plausibility and probability over witness testimony came a devaluing of direct experience:

The authority that had once been attached to witnesses' perception and testimonial oath-taking metamorphosed into, in one sense, an objective gaze of judge and jury, and, in another, a redirected faith onto the forensic system and its methods of factual inquiry. Testimonial authority thus came to reside with the system rather than its witnesses per se.³⁴

The result was 'implicit splitting of private experience from reliable knowledge'. Wickman quotes Steven Shapin on modernity's production of 'a highly complex array of social information while reducing the familiarity with people ... that was

³² David Hume, 'Of Miracles', *Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), 2nd edn (Oxford, 1961), p. 111.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.

³⁴ Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience*, pp. 32–3.

the basis of traditional trust. In the past, we made judgments of other people; now we are obliged to trust in impersonal systems'.³⁵

Further contextualizing Hogg's position regarding experience and human testimony, in Hume's argument against the credibility of 'all supernatural and miraculous relations' may be discerned the stadialist model of social development so prevalent in Enlightenment thought:

It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend received opinions. . . . [A]s we advance nearer the enlightened ages, we soon learn, that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural . . . , but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvellous, and that, though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature.³⁶

Hume is compelled to acknowledge the importance of testimony but concludes that 'no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof'.³⁷ Scott's introduction to the *Minstrelsy* shows a debt to these Enlightenment explorations of testimony, as related to 'miracles' or 'prodigies', in effect superstition:

Such tales, the foundation of which is an argument from our present feelings to those of the spiritual world, form the broad and universal basis of the popular superstition regarding departed spirits; against which reason has striven in vain, and universal experience has offered a disregarded testimony. — These legends are peculiarly acceptable to barbarous tribes: and, on the borders, they were received with most unbounded faith. (vol. 1, p. lxxix)

With Hogg's advocacy of oral tradition, his alternatives to Scott's constructions of subaltern Scottish culture, and his engagement of Enlightenment epistemology, the closing stanza of 'The Pedlar' takes on more precise — and paradoxically multiple — meanings: it may be seen as playing with contemporary constructs of evidence and proof. The first line of the 1807 version of 'The Pedlar', 'Ca't not superstition; wi' reason you'll find it', is a direct address to the reader, as well as an injunction to break down the clear-cut division between reason and superstition: 'w' reason', suggesting alongside reason, in the category of reason, or perhaps

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33; Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago and London, 1995), p. 15.

³⁶ Hume, 'Of Miracles', p. 119.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Hogg making his debut on a wider literary stage, but it may also be seen as Hogg's rigorous defence of oral culture and the authority of tradition, against the backdrop of philosophical narrative that marginalized the people with whom he so closely identified.

using one's own reason. The second line, 'Nor laugh at a story attestit sae weel', insists that the story is well attested – vouched-for, borne witness to, supported by testimony, that so-called 'species of reason'. The third line, 'For lang ha'e the facts in the forest been mindit', emphasizes certainty and cultural authority, located in the community of Ettrick Forest; the facts long *have been* both observed and remembered (taking two meanings of the Scots word), the tense of 'have been' suggesting continuity from the past into the present. The fourth line names the 'facts': 'O' the ghaist an' the bane o' the pedlar's heel', of the supernatural miracle and its physical proof, the bone which corroborates the revenant's testimony. The same stanza in the 1821 version of 'The Pedlar' makes two interesting revisions. In the first line, 'Ca't not superstition, if reason you find it' [emphasis added], the change from 'with' to 'if' removes the insistence on reason being associated with acceptance of the story of the Pedlar, perhaps because in 1821 Hogg is further removed from the initial debate with Scott. The third line, 'For lang will the facts i' the Forest be mindit', moves the narrative into a different tense. Not only *have* the facts of this story been remembered in Ettrick Forest, but they *will* be long observed and remembered (p. 246). The tradition is borne into the future.

For Hogg, folk beliefs are validated by the narratives themselves and their social functions rather than by philosophical notions of veracity. Hogg makes clear his scepticism about philosophers in the opening of his piece 'Dreams and Apparitions'. Containing George Dobson's Expedition to Hell, and The Souters of Selkirk', published in 1827 as part of Hogg's series of *Shepherd's Calendar* contributions to *Blackwood's*. Though the specific subject is dreams, the attitude speaks more widely:

I firmly believe that no philosopher that ever wrote knows a particle more about it than I do, however elaborate and subtle the theories he may advance concerning it ... [T]he philosopher knows nothing about either [sleep or dreaming]; and if he says he does, I entreat you not to believe him. He does not know what mind is; even his own mind, to which one would think he has the most direct access; far less can he estimate the operations and powers of that of any other intelligent being. He does not even know, with all his subtlety, whether it be a power distinct from his body, or essentially the same, and only incidentally and temporarily endowed with different qualities.³⁸

Writing to Scott in February 1805, Hogg asserts that an impetus for *The Mountain Bard* was the repute of his 'Ballads in imitation of the Antients' among the people of Ettrick 'whose feelings I have great confidence in'.³⁹ *The Mountain Bard* shows

³⁸ James Hogg, 'Dreams and Apparitions. Containing George Dobson's Expedition to Hell, and The Souters of Selkirk', *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Douglas S. Mack (ed.) (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 118–41 (p. 118).

³⁹ *The Collected Letters of James Hogg*, Gillian Hughes (ed.), associate editors Douglas S. Mack, Robin MacLachlan and Elaine Petrie (3 vols, Edinburgh, 2004–08), vol. 1, p. 48.