

When I offered to give this short talk, I blithely thought I would look at *The Monastery* and its awareness of the Bible, then look at hatred in *Old Mortality*, then look at the 2 sermons which Scott wrote for a friend and finally at his Journal. This was completely unrealistic and I have stuck with *The Monastery* and hope to show you first, what struck me as an intriguing possibility, and second, the different kind of religious argument between *The Monastery* and *Old Mortality*, and why they differ.

A persistent character in the novel is the Black Book which is the treasured possession of Alice of Avenel and despite being twice removed by monks, on both occasions it was returned to the Tower of Glendearg.

What is this book? We are told that it was a thick black book with silver clasps. Father Philip identifies it as that 'perilous volume', the Holy Scripture rendered into the vulgar tongue. Philip confiscated the book and tucked it into his garment before returning to the monastery. This says something about size – it was tuckable. Dramatically, Philip was confronted by the White Lady, the familiar spirit of the Avenel family, who ducks him in the river, retrieves the Book and gives it to the Glendinning children who return it to Alice.

After Alice's death, Father Eustace makes a second attempt to confiscate the Book. Edward Glendinning objects – the book now belongs to Mary of Avenel. Eustace persuaded Edward to accept an illustrated printed missal in exchange. This tells us that the Black Book was probably not illustrated. It raises a question of whether it was printed or in manuscript. Eustace too tucked the Book into his garment but was in turn confronted by the White Lady, knocked from his mule, and the Book was removed.

Halbert Glendinning now visited the White Lady in her lair and asked to be given safe keeping of the holy book which Mary of Avenel wept for. In a remarkable scene, the White Lady descends with Halbert into a grotto where the Book is kept undamaged in the midst of a living flame. There seems to me to be an allusion to the Burning Bush at which Moses was confronted by The Lord and the motto of the Church of Scotland, *Nec tamen consumebatur*. Halbert secured the Book, took it back to the Tower of Glendearg, lifted one of the floorboards and hid it. This again says something about size.

Halbert has a duel and for a while leaves the Tower of Glendearg. Mary mopes on her own and 'felt the void of mind arising from the narrow and bigoted ignorance in which Rome then educated the children of her church. Their whole religion was a ritual, and their prayers were the formal iteration of unknown words ...which could yield but little consolation to those who from habit resorted to them. Unused to the practice of mental devotion, and of personal approach to the Divine Presence by prayer, she could not help exclaiming in her distress, "There is not aid for me on earth, and I know not how to ask for it from heaven!"'.

The White Lady instantly appeared and indicated the floorboard under which Halbert had hidden the Black Book. 'Maiden attend! Beneath thy foot lies hid The Word, the Law, the Path, which thou dost strive to find...'. Mary consequently began a new course of study.

So, what could this Book be?

The Monastery is loosely set somewhere between the Battle of Pinkie 1547 and about 1562 when James Stewart became Earl of Moray.

Here is a little historical background.

In 1494 a group of some 30 Lollards in Kyle were summoned by the Archbishop of Glasgow to appear before King James IV on a charge of heresy. One of them, Murdoch Nisbet, subsequently fled overseas, taking with him the manuscript he had been working on – a translation into vernacular Scots of Purvey's 1395 revision of Wycliffe's Bible. Nisbet probably returned to Scotland in the 1520s bringing his translation with him.

Patrick Hamilton, the proto-martyr of the Scottish Reformation, as you know, was burned at the stake in St Andrews outside St Salvator's Chapel in 1528 and two Lollards, Jerome Russell and Alexander Kennedy were burned in Glasgow in 1538.

Under James V, an act of parliament of 1525 prohibited the importing and distribution of the works of Luther. Contemporary evidence indicates that, despite the act, large numbers of heretical books were imported to Edinburgh and St Andrews.

William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament was published in Worms in 1526 and quickly imported to England and Scotland. To the best of my knowledge, only three copies are known, thanks to the malice of Henry VIII, but Tyndale produced a second edition in 1534.

It may reasonably be assumed that Coverdale's Bible (1535 and dedicated to Henry VIII), Matthew's Bible (printed in 1537 with the 'Kinges moft gracyous lycece' obtained by Thomas Cromwell at Cranmer's request) and the Great Bible (1539) made their way to Scotland.

It followed that from the 1530s Scotland was not totally bereft of the Bible in the vernacular.

Sir Walter Scott may have had in mind a printed Bible (or New Testament) like Tyndale's version. That would be the right size to be tucked into a garment or hidden under a floorboard, as Coverdale's Bible, Matthew's Bible, or the Bishops' Bible were too big. It is also possible, though unlikely from the dates, that he had in mind a small Geneva Bible. It was the Geneva Bible of 1560 which became the distinctive biblical artefact of the Scottish Reformation. More of a portal than a single work, the Geneva Bible project is fascinating for the complexity of its editions, its bundling of complementary documents, and its lasting impact. And I'll come to that in a moment.

But there is another possibility which is intriguing.

I referred earlier to Murdoch Nisbet who was one of the Lollards from Kyle who was expelled in 1494. He was a Bible translator and a notary public in the diocese of Glasgow. He translated a revised version of Wycliffe's New Testament into Scots. John Wycliffe was a Roman Catholic priest, a translator, and a dissident. He was a student at Merton College and became Master of Balliol College, Oxford, in 1361. He was born in the mid-1320s and died at

the end of 1384. Nisbet's text was a tidy manuscript in cursive Gothic script written on paper. He completed it in around 1520 and astonishingly, it survived and is now preserved in the British Library where it is listed as Egerton MS 2880. In size it is 270 x 190mm and there are 285 folios. That is 10.63 x 7.48 inches. So, it is of a tuckable size.

There is another aspect, which I mention for your interest but do not lead as an argument. On one occasion Halbert Glendinning challenged the White Lady, 'Who are you?' The White Lady told him that when the Avenel family began, a droplet fell from a star into the spring or fountain which she inhabited, and that a spirit rose from the fountain. The manuscript Egerton 2880 has a watermark, a hand with a **star** on the middle finger. There is a drawing of this watermark on folio 255 recto. That is near the end of the manuscript.

Even more interestingly, the manuscript was owned by Sir Alexander Boswell, who was a friend of Sir Walter Scott's. Boswell died of wounds after a duel in 1822.

It is an absolutely astonishing and almost magical text, the first translation of the New Testament into Scots. The BL gave me a photograph of St John's Gospel, chapter 1, where it says, 'And the licht schynes in mirknessis and mirknessis comprehended nocht it'. **Here are some photos.**

That was the curiosity I wanted to show you.

Now I want to go back to the Geneva Bible and the style and tone of religious dissent at the time of *The Monastery*.

Following the death of her half-brother Edward VI and the short-lived proclamation of Lady Jane Grey, Mary Tudor ascended the throne of England in August 1553. By the end of 1554 the Heresy Acts were revived and around 800 protestants chose exile to persecution, with many finding refuge in Geneva. These included many of the leading intellectuals of the day, and they were now well versed in Hebrew which Tyndale had to learn from scratch.

The first edition of the so-called 'Geneva Version' was published in Geneva in April 1560.

In 1576, Laurence Tomson published separately his revision of the Geneva New Testament. The revisions were based on Beza's Latin New Testament of 1565. The marginal notes were based on Beza's. The edition was dedicated to Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's spymaster, and Walsingham's crest of a tiger's head is used as a decoration in some editions.

In 1568 the bishops in England had published The Bishops' Bible (the successor to The Great Bible of 1539). Their hope had been that this would supersede the imported Geneva version. They supplemented their folio (for use in church) with a quarto for family use. In England, these evolving editions are indicative of the deepening struggle between Puritans and Establishmentarians for the imagination of the Bible reading laity. Bible size mattered as the

quarto editions were for family rather than public use and they answered a demand to have a bible of one's own and for family worship of exactly the kind we see described in *The Monastery* when Mary Avenel read to the household from her book.

In 1578 the London printer Christopher Barker published a folio Geneva Bible which had the Book of Common Prayer printed at the beginning. In this edition, the word 'priest' was always rendered as 'minister' and it omitted the office for the Private Baptism of Infants and that for Confirmation.

Once it began to be published in England, by a rapid succession of editions, especially of a smaller size, the Geneva version gained dominance.

The Geneva Bible had three text forms, so it was unlike the static King James Bible which was published in 1611 and which you can buy unchanged to this day.

(1) There was what may be called a 'pure Geneva' text type. That is, Old and New Testament followed the Geneva text of 1560. This text form continued from 1560 to 1615. This was a bolshie text, a translation of the Bible with attitude, and it contained punchy marginal notes of which I will show you an example in a moment. The Geneva Bible was the Bible of Shakespeare and crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower.

(2) As already noted in 1576, Laurence Tomson published a new translation of the New Testament. He claimed to translate from the Latin of Beza.

There were significant changes to the marginal notes in Tomson's New Testament with the Calvinist slant being much more pronounced. The Tomson-Geneva form became extremely popular and in 1577 was reprinted in octavo form. All of the separate Tomson New Testaments (with 2 exceptions) were in Roman font.

(3) In 1592 Robert Dextar published in London a small book, *Apocalypsis. A Briefe and learned commentarie vpon the Revelation of Sainte John the Apostle and Euangelist, applied vnto the historie of the Catholike and Christian Church*. This had been written in Latin by M. Francis Junius (i.e. Francois de Jon [1545-1602], a Huguenot divine) who was a professor in Heidelberg. The 1592 edition was an English translation.

In 1599 Junius' Revelation was reprinted and substituted for Tomson's Revelation and (somewhat meagre) notes and added to Tomson's translation of the rest of the New Testament (and in complete Bibles, of course added to the standard Genevan Old Testament, 'breeches' and all). This was first published by Barker in London in 1599.

This gave a third text type: so there were (1) pure Genevas, (2) Geneva Tomsons (Tomson's New Testament added to the Geneva Old Testament) and now (3) Geneva Tomson Junius editions (in which Junius' Revelation replaced Tomson's).

The Junius text of Revelation was of an altogether different genre. It was obviously an insertion, and far lengthier than the text of Revelation itself, the annotation moved from the

genre of commentary to being a thesis in its own right. It became the attempt to drink from Niagara Falls. The commentary is overwhelming and I'll show you an example in a moment.

There was a strategy behind the different versions.

We have seen that 'the Geneva Bible' far from being a single version, was a publishing phenomenon of 3 textual types in 150 or so editions, printed in roman or black letter font, with complex annotation using numbers and letters in roman and italic script. In modern terms, it was a portal.

Using the British Library's holding of 80 of the editions and 110 complete bibles, the librarian Femke Molekamp took stock of the output as a whole (Molekamp 2006).

Her object was to look at the material features of the collection, including their differing paratextual elements. She notes that England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had a partially literate society. Level of literacy related to gender and class. In material terms, the Geneva Bible was most printed in smaller formats, quarto and octavo. This made it highly portable. She notes how the entry of Bible reading into oral culture provoked various anxieties and on the basis of the British Library collection she suggests that the publishers organised a 'vast array of reading aids and supplements across the various editions' to target different editions at different kinds of readers, and 'to supervise their reading act'.

She notes that the Geneva Bible was renowned for its quartos editions in roman font: a portable bible with a modern typeface. However, from 1578 the Geneva Bible was also printed in the older typeface, black letter. She suggests that black letter (which was used for children's reading aids, the ABC, the Lord's Prayer and Psalter) was found to be easier to read by the semi-literate and that its use was a deliberate decision by the printer to appeal to the less educated.

Further, she suggests that there is a difference in the paratexts or 'reading aids' bundled with black letter editions as opposed to those in roman type. Some aids only appear in black letter editions and she suggests that these are of a more instructive kind than those appearing only in roman editions. For example, **only** black letter editions have the short insert, 'Certain questions and answers concerning predestination', the 'Summe of the whole scripture' and the 'Glossary of strange names'. In contrast, certain aids which appeal to people of better education (on the Golden Number, the change of the moon which might be more typical of almanacs) occur only in roman editions.

How did this apply to Scotland?

Though there is evidence that William Tyndale's translations of the New Testament were secretly shipped to Scotland, individuals were prosecuted for possessing it. In March or April 1533 Alexander Alesius published an open letter to James V appealing that the king annul a recent decree by the Scottish bishops prohibiting possession and distribution of the New Testament in the vernacular (*Alexandri Alesii epistola contra decretum quoddam episcoporum in Scotia, quod prohibet legere Novi Testamenti Libros lingua vernacula*). Sir David Lyndsay's 'Dialog of the Miserabill Estait of this World' (1553) wrote, 'I wuld prelatis,

and doctouris of the law / With us lawid pepill wer nocht discontent; / Thocht we into our
vulgare tounge did knaw, / Of Christ Jesus the lyfe and testament’.

The first bible printed in Scotland was by Alexander Arbuthnot, printer to the King, at Kirk o’
Field in Edinburgh in 1579. This was a reprint of the 1562 second edition. It was a pure
Geneva version, though Tomson’s New Testament had been printed in London in 1576. It is a
beautiful edition with a full display of the royal arms of James VI (with 2 unicorns) on the
title page and is dedicated ‘To the Richt Excellent Richt Heich and Michtie Prince James the
Sext King of Scottis’. It is in roman font, and after the opening epistle contains tables
explaining the Roman and Hebrew calendars and the cycle of the moon and times of the full
tide at Leith (the principal port in Scotland). The title page for the New Testament also shows
a full display of the royal arms, and is printed by Thomas Bassandyne, in Edinburgh 1576. I’ll
show this to you in a moment.

In 1610 a second Geneva Bible was printed in Scotland by Andro Hart and offered for sale ‘at
his Buith, on the North-fide of the gate, a little beneath the Croffe’. This was of the Geneva-
Tomson-Junius text and was in folio and with roman font. Like the Arbuthnot-Bassandyne
edition of 1579 it was beautifully done and for many years it was counted a
recommendation for editions elsewhere to ‘conform to the edition printed by Andro
Hart’ (see the Amsterdam edition of 1640).

The Authorised or King James Version, printed without notes was published in 1611.

Despite this, until about 1640, the Geneva Bible seems to have been used in Scotland by
supporters of the king as much as the Authorised Version. The Geneva version lives on in the
painted ceilings at Crathes Castle in Aberdeenshire and at Traquair House, Innerleithen,
Peeblesshire. And between 1642 and 1715 eight editions of the King James Bible were
published with Geneva notes, an intriguing hybrid form. The presence of these ‘mixed’
texts showed the enormous power of the marginal notes and the ideology they imported. It
is this ideology which lies behind the sectarianism and hatred which is so vividly described in
Old Mortality. It is quite different from the rather gentle early Reformed study of the Bible,
which is characteristic of *The Monastery*.

Here are some photos.

Finally, I want to make the case that the gentle argumentation of *The Monastery* was
different, and I’ll do that by looking at two arguments, (1) that between the Reformed
preacher Henry Warden and Julian Avenel, and (2) that between Henry Warden and Father
Eustace.

You will remember that Halbert Glendinning and Sir Piercie Shafton fall out and a duel takes
place. Halbert sort of kills Sir Piercie and, horrified at what he has done, seeks someone to
give first aid. He meets the Reformed preacher, Henry Warden, and together they go to the

Castle of Avenel. There they are given a meat only supper – no vegetables at Julian Avenel's table – and Henry Warden notices a pregnant young woman.

'Is she thy house-dame?' he tactlessly asks Julian Avenel. The young woman blushes and Julian bristles, 'She is not my wife, but she is handfasted with me, and that makes her as honest a woman'.

The pitch and tone of Henry Warden's reply is very interesting.

'I tell thee, noble Baron, in brotherly love ...it is a custom licentious, gross and corrupted, and, if persisted in, dangerous, yea damnable. It binds thee to the frailer being while she is the object of desire; it relieves thee when she is most the subject of pity; it gives all to brutal sense, and nothing to generous and gentle affection. (H)e who can meditate the breach of such an engagement, abandoning the deluded woman and the helpless offspring, is worse than the birds of prey, for of them the males remain with their mates until the nestlings can take wing. [I]t is contrary to the pure Christian doctrine, which assigns woman to man as the partner of his labour, the soother of his evil, his helpmate in peril, his friend in affliction; not as the toy of his looser hours, or as a flower which, once cropped, he may throw aside at pleasure'.

This is a remarkable speech. It is remarkable because, though it is placed in the mouth of Henry Warden, a preacher who, we are told, surpasses John Knox, strictly speaking, **it is only marginally a Reformed speech**. It is a natural law argument through and through. It could have been said by Erasmus, but not, I think, Calvin and certainly not Calvin's more polemical followers. Henry Warden refers to the evident asymmetry of power between the Baron and the heavily pregnant woman. He points to the natural world – even birds of prey don't act like this. The woman is not a toy of his pleasure, a flower to be tossed aside, but the partner of his labour, the soother of his evil, his helpmate and friend.

Halbert Glendinning watches all this. On the way to the castle, he had resisted the arguments of Henry Warden. Now he thought the conduct of the preacher to be 'uncompromising, firm, manly, and obviously grounded upon the deepest conviction which duty and principle could afford....'.

This is what I wanted to illustrate for you. The marginal apparatus in the text of the Bible changed dramatically in a sixty-year period. And so did religious disagreement and preaching. By the 1620s, religious speech became polemical, intolerant, inflexible and too often filled with hate. Walter Scott, I think, beautifully captures dialogue which was passionate but not yet polemical and could only occur in a narrow early Reformation timespan.

My second example is what happens when Henry Warden is handed over by Julian Avenel to Brother Eustace who has the ability to have him returned to the monastery and hanged. Before the encounter between the two men, there is some careful description.

It had been widely held, the narrator tells us, that Henry Warden had, with the animation proper to the Reformers, **transgressed the bounds of the discretionary liberty allowed to his**

sect to such an extent that the Queen's personal dignity required that he be brought to justice. I'll come back to 'transgressing the bounds of discretional liberty'.

Just a little earlier, the narrator had reflected on the sorry state of religious affairs. The ancient system of the Roman Church had, since the art of printing, lain floating like some huge leviathan, into which **ten thousand reforming harpooners** were darting their harpoons.

Leviathan is used here in the Biblical sense of a sea monster, probably a whale, not Thomas Hobbes' use in 1651. The whale is not necessarily bad, but it is just big, surrounded and vulnerable to the new weapon of printing which can multiply the number of harpoons.

Both the many harpoons image and the reference to discretional liberty give us a sense that both sides in the religious debate should understand that **unconstrained individualism** is destructive of any body of tradition, whether old or new.

Evidently, there is a reference here to the fact that the new technology of printing (William Caxton in 1476 and the Gutenberg Bible in the 1450s) changed the landscape. We have already had a sneer from Halbert at a printed breviary. Were it not for Murdoch Nisbet, the argument that the Black Book was printed rather than manuscript would be very strong.

When they meet, Eustace and Henry circle each other watchfully like wrestlers. In both, a sense of rectitude rather than hate was enthroned. They suddenly recognise each other as friends from their student days, Henry Wellwood and William Allen. In other words, they are portrayed as branches from the same root. I tend to think the root was Erasmus.

Eustace says, '[I]s this ... the end of that restless activity of mind, that bold and indefatigable love of truth, that urged investigation to its utmost limits and seemed to take Heaven itself by storm.....?'

Warden replies, '[A]re these the harvest of the rich hopes excited by the classical learning, acute logical powers, and varied knowledge of William Allen, that he should sink to be the solitary drone of a cell....?'

The Sub-Prior comes back: 'This is the mere cant of ignorant enthusiasm ... a rash, self-willed, and arbitrary interpretation of the Scriptures, wrested according to the private opinion of a speculating heretic'.

This is the harpoon argument played out in dramatic dialogue. Ten thousand harpoons will mangle any creature, no matter how noble. Arbitrary, rash, speculative handling of scripture is the opposite of careful scholarship. Yet, on the other hand, Warden replied, 'The issue is whether we will be judged by the Holy Scriptures, or by the devices ... of men not less subject to error than ourselves'. He is saying that without a passion **ad fontes** you remain stuck within the existing church bubble or echo chamber. There has to be movement forward.

The Sub-Prior comes back, 'It is an arm such as thine that should defend the bulwarks of the church, and it is now directing the battering ram against them, and rendering practical the breach through which all that is greedy, and all that is base, and all that is mutable and hot-headed in this innovating age already hope to advance to destruction and to spoil'.

What is at stake is fundamentalism, whether of the tradition – this was the partially false accusation laid at the Roman tradition – or fundamentalism of the text – which was the undoubtedly true accusation which could shortly be laid to the Protestant side, and which you have seen in Junius' Revelation.

It was anxiety about the ten thousand harpoons which all too swiftly led to all-encompassing definitive interpretations, Junius' marginal notes to the Book of Revelation, which most certainly, within thirty years, emerged as persecuting religious sectarianism in Scotland and provides the hate-filled religious context for *Old Mortality*.

The Monastery is a remarkable book. It may tease us with its references to a very special early Bible, but it certainly, in my view, **exactly** pinpoints the struggle the earliest Scottish reformers faced about how to contain the energies they had allowed into the room.

Iain Torrance, 5 March 2022

Notes:

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