

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

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SIR WALTER SCOTT  
THE HEART OF  
MIDLOTHIAN



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*The Heart of Midlothian*

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Heart of Midlothian* first appeared in 1818, under the title *Tales of My Landlord*, second series. It purported to be a tale left in manuscript by a young schoolmaster of Gandercleugh, Peter Pattieson, and edited by his superior, a pedant called Jedediah Cleishbotham. It is unlikely that anyone ever believed that attribution, or had many doubts as to its real author.

Walter Scott, an Edinburgh lawyer born in 1771, had first become famous as a poet. He was the author of a series of verse romances, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). His first novel, *Waverley*, appeared anonymously in 1814. Its success encouraged him to bring forth further novels 'by the Author of *Waverley*', until in 1816, diversifying his disguise with the invention of Cleishbotham, he produced the first series of *Tales of My Landlord*, containing *The Black Dwarf* and *Old Mortality*. Two years later a second series appeared, containing one work, *The Heart of Midlothian*.

Most of Scott's novels before 1818 had been historical novels set largely in Scotland. Their action had taken place at different times in the fairly recent past – from the late seventeenth century to his own day – a past either within the recollection of his grandparents' generation or, at least, whose reverberations were still perceptible in the society in which he grew up. *The Heart of Midlothian* followed this pattern. It differed from its predecessors, however, in its choice of main character. Scott's heroes hitherto had been well-born young men, important for the role they played rather than for their intrinsic character, and the vitality of his presentation of ordinary life, which readers and reviewers admired in his work, was found among the lesser characters. In *The Heart of Midlothian* he put the common life of Scotland at the centre of the book by taking as a heroine a peasant girl, daughter of Davie Deans 'cow-feeder of Saint Leonard's'.

*The Heart of Midlothian* combines two narratives, both of which concern the Edinburgh prison, the Tolbooth, ironically known as 'the Heart of Midlothian'. One is the story of Jeanie Deans, the girl who walked from Edinburgh to London to obtain a pardon for her sister; the other is the story of the Porteous riot. It is instructive to consider how Scott put these elements of his plot together. He had received the story of Helen Walker, the original of Jeanie Deans, in an anonymous letter in 1817. He printed this com-

munication as a preface to the revised edition of the novel which appeared in 1830;<sup>1</sup> by this time he had discovered the name of his correspondent, Mrs Helen Goldie. Mrs Goldie had met Helen Walker, then 'between seventy and eighty years of age', near Dumfries in 1791. As a young woman Helen Walker had refused to tell a lie in court to save her sister who was accused of child-murder. When her sister was condemned to death Helen walked to London to seek a pardon, and obtained it through the good offices of 'the late Duke of Argyle'.

It was this figure, John, 2nd Duke of Argyle (1678-1743), who linked the two main parts of the plot. The Duke of Argyle, a soldier and politician, was remembered as a benefactor to his country. He earned that name in difficult times. The Treaty of Union between the Parliaments of Scotland and England was passed in 1707, and in the years that followed there was much discontent in Scotland. Although he had originally supported the Union, the Duke of Argyle, who became after 1715 the most powerful magnate in Scotland, frequently stood up for Scotland's rights when he saw them overlooked by a British government in London. One instance of his services was the way he resisted the punitive measures proposed against the city of Edinburgh after the Porteous riot in 1736. On this occasion, as in the case of Helen Walker's sister, the Duke of Argyle was involved in asking for clemency in London over a Scottish matter. Scott seems to have been moved by the coincidence; and in his novel he took the story of Helen Walker and set it in Edinburgh at the time of the Porteous riot.<sup>2</sup>

It is with the Porteous riot that the novel begins (after a longish introductory from the fictitious worthies of Gandercleugh). The 'Porteous affair' was a train of events culminating in the lynching of John Porteous, a captain of the Edinburgh City Guard, by a mob in September 1736. The account in the novel is for the most part accurate, although Scott altered some details for effect. It starts with the smuggler Andrew Wilson and his accomplice George Robertson. They had both been condemned to death for robbing a customs officer. On the Sunday before the sentence was due to be carried out they were taken to the Tolbooth Church. After the service Wilson took the opportunity to grapple with the soldiers guarding them, and call to Robertson, 'Run, Geordie, run!' Robertson ran, and escaped. Wilson remained, and was hanged. When hangings were a public spectacle the emotion of the crowd made it plain

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Scott's treatment of his sources has been studied by Mary Lascelles in her *The Story-teller Retrieves the Past*, 1980, pp. 85-102.

<sup>3</sup> p. 32.

whether they approved the verdict. In the case of Wilson there was doubt: customs offences were not in general regarded as heinous, and the victim had excited sympathy by his action in freeing his friend. Feelings rose when, in a disturbance which followed the hanging, Captain Porteous and his men fired on the crowd, killing several and injuring more.

The High Court of Justiciary declared Porteous guilty of murder, and the day was fixed for his hanging. The crowd gathered again in the Grassmarket. On this occasion there was no doubt that the public endorsed the verdict: they had come to see justice done. As the appointed hour came without the appearance of the victim, rumour spread of the possibility of a reprieve:

the hitherto silent expectation of the people became changed into that deep and agitating murmur, which is sent forth by the ocean before the tempest begins to howl. The crowded populace, as if their motions had corresponded with the unsettled state of their minds, fluctuated to and fro without any visible cause of impulse, like the agitation of the waters, called by sailors the ground-swell.<sup>4</sup>

By the time Porteous' reprieve was confirmed the situation was indeed ominous. The comparison of the favour shown to Porteous with the fate of Wilson excited the reflection, 'Is this to be borne? - would our fathers have borne it? Are not we, like them, Scotsmen and burghers of Edinburgh?'<sup>5</sup>

The focus of the narrative now shifts from the crowd to a small group of citizens toiling up the steep West Bow from the Grassmarket towards the High Street. Their conversation makes the grievances explicit: it was almost thirty years since the Union of 1707, and strains were showing. New customs laws, causing an influx of 'English gaugers and excisemen', were resented; power was in that far-off place 'Lunnon', and (more to the point for this little group of shop-keepers) wealth and fashion had followed political power and left Edinburgh for the south. The reprieve of Porteous was an insult to the national feeling of the Scots (the verdict of their own court had been overturned by a distant monarch), and it was more particularly an affront to the 'good town' of Edinburgh. The reader fears for public peace when the shop-keeper, Miss Damahoy, supplier of fine fabrics to the nobility, says 'I would claw down the tolbooth door wi' my nails, . . . but I wad be at him.'<sup>6</sup>

That evening the crowd took matters into their own hands. Acting with such deliberation and sense of purpose that, Scott says,

<sup>4</sup> p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> p. 48.

they better deserve the name of conspirators, they seized the old walled city of Edinburgh by taking charge of its gates. When that was achieved the crowd in thousands poured up the narrow wynds and closes which go off from the High Street, to converge on the Tolbooth. They executed their own justice, inexorably, but with the dignity that adheres to shared activity carried out with economy of violence. By the time the crowd had finally dispersed, handing the city back to its intimidated magistrates, the body of Porteous was hanging on a make-shift gibbet in the Grassmarket.

Such a flagrant reversal of official justice by a formidable popular movement could not fail to excite reaction. That of Queen Caroline, acting as regent for her husband, was anger. Her vindictiveness against the perpetrators, the city and the nation was mitigated only by the intervention of the Duke of Argyle. For Scott, considering it from the distance of some eighty years, the Porteous riot illustrated certain aspects of the Scottish character. When he came to write his history of Scotland, *Tales of a Grandfather*, twelve years after *The Heart of Midlothian*, he prefaced his account of the Porteous affair with the comment that it was an episode.

unmingled with politics of Whig and Tory, and must simply be regarded as a strong and powerful display of the cool, stern, and resolved manner in which the Scottish, even of the lower classes, can concert and execute a vindictive purpose.<sup>7</sup>

Scott's view of the Porteous affair offers a clue to his motive in embedding in his account of the riot a second narrative, the one which develops into the main plot of *The Heart of Midlothian*. On the night the Tolbooth was burst open there was, in the novel, another prisoner inside, one who would not take the opportunity to escape. She was Effie Deans, daughter of the Covenanter Davie Deans. Helen Walker's scrupulous refusal 'to swear to a falsehood' in Mrs Goldie's original communication, and the setting in the south-west of Scotland, would reasonably suggest to Scott a Covenanting family. That allegiance remained when in the novel the family was moved to Midlothian. 'Covenanter' was the name given in the seventeenth century to presbyterians who endorsed certain pledges to maintain their religion, the National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643). When Charles II imposed episcopacy on the Scottish church in 1662 Covenanting clergy refused to comply with the observances and were ejected from their parishes. These Covenanters and their followers continued to observe their religion as they could, under increasing persecution,

<sup>7</sup> *Tales of a Grandfather*, 3rd series, 1830, II, 156.

until the Revolution of 1688-9. Scott's novel *Old Mortality* (1816) had been set at the time of the persecution, and it describes the defeat of an army of Covenanters from the south-west of Scotland (where they were always strong) at Bothwell Bridge in 1679. *The Heart of Midlothian* is set in 1736, some distance in time from that world. But it does not seem long to Davie Deans, who is in his seventies at the time of the novel. He had borne arms at Bothwell Bridge, and participated in the struggles of the 1680s. Since the re-establishment of presbyterianism in Scotland in 1690 oppression of Covenanters was over; but Davie Deans was a purist for whom that settlement had not been sufficient, and for whom measures taken since only confirmed that the narrow path had been lost. Davie Deans makes no concession to changed times, and spends his life vigilant against 'right hand defections and left hand extremes'. His language expresses the contentiousness and sublimity of his religion. It is full of allusions to the martyrs of the Covenant, and quotations from the Old Testament. The former show him dignified by a heritage, although an intolerant one; the latter, when the comparison is not out of proportion to the occasion, put the life of ordinary beings in a magnificent perspective.

The story of Effie Deans is the sad tale of the puritan's daughter. Unable to take part in youthful amusements with her family's protection she does so illicitly; and she is found in the Tolbooth, charged under an oppressive law of child-murder. The law, which sought to reduce undetected infanticide, stated that a woman who brought forth a child without seeking help should in the case of its being dead or missing be deemed guilty of its murder. Effie is exposed to the rigour of this law by an unlucky combination of circumstances. Her seducer is George Robertson, the smuggler, and leader of the conspirators who killed Porteous. His treatment of Porteous shows the extent to which he would go to intervene in a legal process which did not express his sense of justice. It was, comparatively, a small matter to do for Effie what Wilson had done for him. In storming the Tolbooth Robertson had two objectives: one was to rescue Effie. In the uproar he rushes in to the place where Effie was confined and whispers to her 'Flee, Effie, flee!' But he had reckoned without the Covenanter's daughter. Effie is sitting bowed down in misery; she does not stir and makes one utterance, 'Better tyne life, since tint is gude fame.'<sup>8</sup> The cause of Effie Deans is not going to be fought by the strong arm.

Mrs Goldie's communication had outlined, with some confusion, the circumstances of Helen Walker's sister's trial. Scott took this

<sup>8</sup> p. 68. tyne, tint - lose, lost.



hint, and from his professional knowledge of Scottish criminal procedure presented the trial of Effie Deans in detail. We are given the 'interlocutor of relevancy', the prisoner's declaration, and the interrogation of witnesses. We are in the toils of the law, and much of the time our expositor is the presumptuous legal amateur, Mr Saddletree, who is just sufficiently lucid to ensure that we have a commentary on the proceedings. While the law is running its course Effie fluctuates between despair at the loss of her 'gude fame', that quality which her sister explains gives dignity to the meanest born,<sup>9</sup> and pathetic grasping at any chance of life. Scott's friend Lady Louisa Stuart wrote him an astute letter of appreciation on the first appearance of *The Heart of Midlothian*. One point she made is that if this tale had been 'conducted by a common hand' all our sympathy would have been with Effie, the pretty younger sister, passionate and erring. Instead it is with Jeanie:

Jeanie, without youth, beauty, genius, warm passions, or any other novel-perfection, is here our object from beginning to end.<sup>10</sup>

On Jeanie, as matters become clearer, is to fall the whole responsibility for saving her sister. Robertson disappears, after adjuring her to do what he could more easily have done himself, had he not been wanted for his part in the murder of Porteous. As the day of the trial approaches Jeanie becomes increasingly alone with her burden of responsibility, and never more so than when she mistakenly thinks that her father's scruples about her appearing in court at all show some equivocation as to what she should say under oath.<sup>11</sup> In the court, after a solemn promise to tell the truth as she 'should answer to God at the great day of judgment',<sup>12</sup> she denies that her sister had breathed a word to her about her forthcoming confinement.

This high point in the novel has aroused much controversy. Should Jeanie have told the truth, when to lie would have saved her sister? Bernard Shaw cited her action as an example of the mischief caused in the world by 'religious and moral ideals'.<sup>13</sup> Setting aside discreditable accusations against Jeanie, that she was motivated by selfishness, hypocrisy or jealousy, there are other reasons why readers have protested. The law under which Effie was condemned was harsh, and was tending towards injustice; a false answer to the question asked would have preserved the fundamental truth,

<sup>9</sup> p. 268.

<sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> August, 1818. National Library of Scotland MS. 3889 f. 167, (quoted by permission of the Trustees).

<sup>11</sup> pp. 198-9.

<sup>12</sup> pp. 229-31.

<sup>13</sup> *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, in *The Works of Bernard Shaw*, 1930, XIX, 125.

for Effie did not murder her child. Moreover, is not truthfulness, although desirable as an ideal, in some situations simply too risky? Do not love and humanity sometimes dictate a small manoeuvre to ensure the right outcome? That is one problem. It leads to a further difficulty: the happy ending. The most forthright of the novel's critics completed his accusation against Scott by complaining that after all he did not allow Effie to be hanged for Jeanie's ideals, and that

the *deus ex machina* expedient by which Scott makes the end of his story agreeable is no solution of the ethical problem raised, but only a puerile evasion of it.<sup>14</sup>

There are two problems here: Jeanie's refusal to tell a lie, and the relation to it of her journey to London to obtain a pardon. Many critics have followed Shaw in isolating the two, regarding Jeanie's refusal to perjure herself as the central moral problem in the novel, and her obtaining of the pardon as a lucky, but evasive, solution to it. Yet no-one who recalls the communication that Scott had from Mrs Goldie could regard Jeanie's walk to London as an 'expedient'; it was in the story from the beginning. The two problems, if they are such, must be taken together as they come from the same source. The original story forms the imaginative skeleton of the novel; and if questions are raised about the novel's coherence it will help to answer them if we consider the nature of its source story. The account that Scott had from Mrs Goldie consisted of two parts: the heroine's refusal to lie, and her walk to London to obtain a pardon. This story, despite its localized Dumfriesshire setting, has the flavour of romance: after an apparently insoluble confrontation between truth and mercy the conclusion invites one to delight in the scarcely-to-be-believed outcome where both are achieved. What brings this about? If the happy outcome is not simply the result of chance, the power that brings it about must be vested in the heroine, who links the two parts. Is there a sense in which that quality which makes her adhere to truth in the first part, makes her capable of obtaining mercy in the second? In the story we may simply respond to this mysterious apprehension. In a realistic novel, and one which has a specific historical setting which influences the way characters think, we have to ask more clearly if this is so, and how.

First let us consider Jeanie's story from her own point of view. If Effie Deans shows one result of a Covenanting upbringing, her sister shows another. In difficulty Jeanie turns at once to her faith. When she has to decide whether to obey Robertson's injunction

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Shaw, *op. cit.*

that she meet him at moon-rise at Muschat's Cairn she prays for guidance. The narrator comments:

It was the belief of the time and sect to which she belonged, that special answers to prayer, differing little in their character from divine inspiration, were, as they expressed it, 'borne in upon their minds' in answer to their earnest petitions in a crisis of difficulty.<sup>15</sup>

She goes to meet Robertson, and on her expedition is assailed by supernatural fears, intimidation and threats of violence. On finally returning home she overhears her father praying for his daughters. She went to bed

comforted, that while she was exposed to danger, her head had been covered by the prayers of the just as by an helmet, . . .<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after that she

could not help being strongly persuaded that, by some means or other, she would be called upon, and directed, to work out her sister's deliverance.

Jeanie's religion influences her language, though not in the way that religious controversy supplies her father's favourite phrases. She uses the language of spiritual inspiration: truths are 'borne in upon her'; she becomes 'strongly persuaded' in answer to prayer. One reason why Jeanie is so much alone is in the nature of her religion: 'ilk Christian's conscience suld be his ain guide.'<sup>17</sup> She does the utmost for her sister by opening herself to divine guidance. To have lied in court would have rendered her unworthy of the protection she sought; it would have been taking into her own hands a matter which she should have entrusted to God.

The trial comes on and Effie is condemned to death. The situation is bleakest when the judge discourages any hope of a pardon. As often, it is Mrs Saddletree who expresses the ordinary person's response:

It was a burning shame to see sae mony o' them set up yonder in their red gowns and black gowns, and a' to take the life o' a bit senseless lassie.<sup>18</sup>

And as to the pardon, Mrs Saddletree is not so easily convinced that the way was closed: 'there was Jock Porteous the other day - I'se warrant there's a mercy, an folk could win at it.' From that moment Jeanie knows what she has to do, go to London and seek the pardon: 'I will see the king's face that gies grace.'<sup>19</sup> The appeal is the more difficult because of the hostility of the monarch to any

<sup>15</sup> p. 144.

<sup>18</sup> p. 243.

<sup>16</sup> p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> p. 246.

<sup>17</sup> p. 198.

mention of Scottish pardons after the Porteous affair. Jeanie is not deterred, and even sees in her mission a hope of reconciliation: 'they shall pardon her – and they will win a thousand hearts by it.'

Jeanie is certain that she must sue for mercy for her sister in person. When Reuben Butler suggests that they make the appeal by letter Jeanie dismisses the proposal:

writing winna do it – a letter canna look, and pray, and beg, and beseech, as the human voice can do to the human heart.<sup>20</sup>

She sets forth for London, her idea of the sovereign suggested by the Old Testament, to the extent of expecting George II to look like 'the great King Ahasuerus when he sate upon his royal throne'.<sup>21</sup> She arrives at an ordinary, rather cynical court, absorbed in political manoeuvres. She finds a champion, however, in the Duke of Argyle and meets Queen Caroline. (Scott contrived this because it was the Queen who had pardoned Porteous. Helen Walker had met only the Duke of Argyle.) Jeanie's task is to overcome the Queen's hostility, and engage her interest with the King on behalf of Effie. On the way to Richmond Jeanie momentarily loses her nerve and asks the Duke of Argyle what she should say, so that she could memorize it and repeat it. The Duke replies

No, Jeanie, that would not have the same effect – that would be like reading a sermon, you know, which we good presbyterians think has less unction than when spoken without book.<sup>22</sup>

Jeanie's appeal is to be like the sermons of her religious tradition, not composed in advance, but the spontaneous vehicle of inspiration. In the event she has the eloquence which makes the Queen act in the highest manner of her station, as a source of mercy. The story of Jeanie Deans can, then, be seen as an episode in a Covenanting biography, the account of someone defeating difficulties through faith.

Jeanie's story can be read as a tale of divine inspiration; but does the novel as a whole endorse that interpretation? Scott is usually critical of enthusiastic religion; he approves of unobtrusive Christianity, and commends clergymen who, like the Rector of Willingham, inculcate its 'practical doctrines'. Also, in so far as Jeanie's inspiration partakes of the supernatural we might expect Scott to offer a possible rational explanation. It is usual in Scott's novels that supernatural events allow of a rational cause, such that the reader may choose which he prefers. What is offered in *The Heart of Midlothian* to modify Jeanie's belief in divine guidance?

The most obvious is a psychological explanation of events. Scott

<sup>20</sup> p. 267.

<sup>21</sup> p. 266.

<sup>22</sup> p. 357.

allows for this possibility from the first moment when he describes the Covenanters' reliance on special answers to prayer. After describing their beliefs he adds this comment:

Without entering into an abstruse point of divinity, one thing is plain; namely, that the person who lays open his doubts and distresses in prayer, with feeling and sincerity, must necessarily, in the act of doing so, purify his mind from the dross of worldly passions and interests, and bring it into that state, when the resolutions adopted are likely to be selected rather from a sense of duty, than from any inferior motive.<sup>23</sup>

By this explanation Jeanie succeeds by single-minded strength of purpose. Jeanie is described as strong, even in childhood. When she is called upon to act on behalf of her sister the strength to tell the truth when a whole court expects her to lie is followed by the strength to make the journey to London. It is a story of restraint followed by action; the force that was held back in the court of law by the question put to her, emerges freely in the higher court where she is allowed to speak fully.

Another explanation has been offered for Jeanie's successful interview with the Queen: that the Queen listened to her for political reasons. She wanted to be reconciled with the Duke of Argyle, and it was Jeanie's good fortune to be there at the very moment when acceding to her request was of political advantage to the Queen.<sup>24</sup> This explanation may account for the beginning of the interview, but, once Jeanie starts to speak, it fails to allow for her insistent removal of her plea from the political sphere. She places Effie's cause in the larger perspective of life and death, not only of the prisoner but of the Queen too.<sup>25</sup> The Queen acquiesces, if only momentarily, in her response, 'This is eloquence,'<sup>26</sup> – the comment of a politician reluctantly admitting to being moved on another level. Whatever the Queen's intention at the outset Jeanie takes over the direction of her thoughts, speaking so powerfully that afterwards she is emotionally exhausted.<sup>27</sup>

Explanations of Jeanie's conduct other than the religious are

<sup>23</sup> p. 144.

<sup>24</sup> This suggestion has been explored by William J. Hyde in 'Jeanie Deans and the Queen: Appearance and Reality,' *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, XXVIII, 1973, pp. 86–92.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Lascelles asks if the reader is expected to recall that Caroline was to die in 1737, the year after her interview with Jeanie is supposed to have taken place. (*The Story-teller Retrieves the Past*, p. 101n.)

<sup>26</sup> p. 370.

<sup>27</sup> This was pointed out by Thomas Crawford in his *Scott (Writers and Critics series)*, 1965, p. 93.

there, but they do not form a consistent alternative interpretation. The religious and the psychological cannot be entirely separated; it is not in their nature. Nor was it in Scott's nature to separate them. Scott had grown up in a presbyterian family. He had found it irksome and in adult life he abandoned presbyterianism for a moderate episcopalianism. He could not, however, detach himself from it to the extent of treating Jeanie's beliefs as simply another kind of supernatural. Her faith was still too close to his own for that. The result is that *The Heart of Midlothian* presents human motivation in all its mysterious complexity.

The story of Effie and Jeanie Deans is a puritan tale. It deals with two aspects of morality particularly abhorrent to puritans, sexual weakness and perjury.<sup>28</sup> Jeanie's decision to tell the truth in court may be seen as an example of a 'historical conscience', a conscience conditioned by its period; but her predicament has not lost its power to disturb. It is, however, when the two parts of her story are taken together that the novel particularly touches our contemporary preoccupations. In the movement from the refusal to tell the lie to the winning of the pardon we see Scott's study of the springs of human effectiveness, of the access to strength in a time of crisis, of the tapping of the full resources of the personality.

*The Heart of Midlothian* has always been regarded as one of the best of Scott's novels. It has a profound and coherent theme, and runs most of its course strongly. Its evocation of a city, and the study of the psychology of a crowd in the early chapters were new in the novel tradition, and were not rivalled until the work of Dickens in the 1840s. The novel is not, however, without blemishes. There is some awkwardness in the contrivance of the plot, and the ending is poor. As for the plot: it came largely, as we have seen, from two sources, and in dovetailing them together Scott had to add and elaborate in ways that proved less satisfactory. One of the flaws is the character of George Robertson. He is an unconvincing mixture of courage and cowardice, brutality and tenderness, and the contradictions are exacerbated rather than resolved when he turns out, implausibly, to be the heir of a rich family in Leicestershire. He and his acquaintances provide the novel with a dark and melodramatic underworld. That is the world of Meg Murdockson and her daughter, the low resorts at the back of the Canongate, and the highwayman's lurking-place on Gunnerby Hill. These are where

<sup>28</sup> A fastidious respect for truth was particularly associated with puritans. In literature it is sometimes treated as a source of mockery, as, for instance, in the puritans in Ben Jonson's plays. Serious treatment of the puritan tempted to lie may be found in the characters of Elizabeth and John Proctor in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1952).

Effie falls, and the dark places through which Jeanie takes her pilgrimage to save her.

The most interesting of these characters is Meg's daughter, Madge Wildfire. She is a character of a sort that occurs elsewhere in Scott's work, someone on the edge of sanity who expresses insights and warnings by means of song. She had a forerunner in Blanche in Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake*, and in Davie Gellatly in *Waverley*. Madge is a character parallel to Effie; both had borne babies to Robertson. Both had lost them; Madge had been deserted also, and had been driven to a pathetic, vain madness. She is also compared with Jeanie. She has been led astray by others, but in her confusion there is some searching for a better path. She is the only imaginative, musical character in the novel, and Scott wrote some beautiful songs for her. Madge's spiritual journey shows up the narrow range within which the Covenanters' religion operates; she is weak where Jeanie is strong, and is groping unaided for a spiritual haven.

The concluding part of the novel, that is after Effie's pardon has been obtained, and Jeanie is reunited with her father and prospective husband, has always been criticized as too long. It is the part of the novel for which the source material supplied no hints. Helen Walker had survived, unmarried, in great poverty; Scott knew nothing in 1818 of the subsequent life of her sister. The end of the novel was to do two things: reward Jeanie with a husband and happiness, and celebrate the patriarchal generosity of the Duke of Argyle. But Scott had the problem of what to do with Effie, and the need for a quantity of material to fill a four-volume novel. His invention was unfortunate: whether or not we agree that Effie might turn out as she did, we are unprepared for the murder of Robertson by his half-savage son, the Whistler. For most readers these scenes, in so far as they have any credibility at all, belong to another work. The careful presentation of Effie, who in the first part of the novel never entirely loses the habits of thought and expression which make her Davie Deans' daughter, turns into a terrible tale of moral retribution and the return to primitive instincts towards the end. Many would agree with Lady Louisa Stuart who commented to Scott on the fate of the Whistler:

it is a lame huddled conclusion. I know you so well in it by the by! - You grow tired yourself, want to get rid of the story, and hardly care how.<sup>29</sup>

Another awkwardness about the last part of the novel is the move to Argyleshire. It introduces us to Highland society at the

end of a book that had been set exclusively (apart from Jeanie's journey to London) in Edinburgh. When douce Davie Deans, the epitome of a certain type of Lowland Scot, experiences the semi-feudal power of a Highland Chief we know we are in another world. The theme of the clash of cultures between Highland and Lowland Scotland was a fruitful one for Scott – he had already used it in *Waverley* and *Rob Roy* – but it was not appropriate to introduce it here.

What is appropriate, however, about the conclusion of the novel is the way in which the religious themes are resolved. Davie Deans, after much heart-searching, is reconciled to his son-in-law's position as minister of Knocktarlitie and joins the congregation. The old Covenanter is absorbed into the parish church, whose minister, Reuben Butler, represents the new, moderate, practical clergyman whom Scott admired. Jeanie plays the chief part in smoothing her father's path. She pointed out to him that Reuben Butler had not had

his experience of the auld and wrastling times, when folk were gifted wi' a far look into eternity, to make up for the oppressions whilk they suffered here below in time. She freely allowed that many devout ministers and professors in times past had enjoyed downright revelation, . . . But though these things might be true in these needful times, she contended that those ministers who had not seen such vouchsafed and especial mercies, were to seek their rule in the records of ancient times; and therefore Reuben was carefu' both to search the Scriptures and the books written by wise and good men of old;<sup>30</sup>

What is described here is the change from the oppressed Covenanting clergyman preaching on the hill-sides to the modern clergyman in his study. The days of direct inspiration were over as more peaceful times were established, and we are left to reflect whether Jeanie's obtaining her sister's pardon was one of the last experiences of 'wonderful assistance' vouchsafed to the Covenanters.

*The Heart of Midlothian* is a historical novel, but, as Scott said of the Porteous affair, not a tale of Whig and Tory. It shows the movement of presbyterian religion from the days of the Covenanters into the eighteenth century; it also highlights certain aspects of the Scottish character at a time when the recent passing of the Treaty of Union might call forth the question of what was particularly Scottish. The Porteous affair and the story of Jeanie Deans have a certain symmetry: both concern the refusal to assent to a legal decision, one a public concern, one a private. In the working out of what the characters did to redress their grievance Scott reveals different aspects of what he saw as his compatriots' characteristic



behaviour. What is common to both the Porteous rioters and Jeanie Deans is prodigious determination. In one case the determination is vindictive and murderous, demonstrating the *perfidum ingenium Scotorum*. In the other it is harnessed to a plea for mercy. It is Jeanie Deans' task to sue for the mercy which had been such an affront to the Porteous rioters, and her suit is rendered the more difficult by their peremptory action. She is assisted, on the other hand, by the way in which the Scots stick together, especially in London. The Duke of Argyle is won over by his family's obligation to the Butler family; the little community of Scots in London, from the Duke to the snuff-seller at the sign of the Thistle, welcome their countrywoman and forward her cause. Jeanie is a simple peasant girl, who, as Scott said of her prototype, Helen Walker, demonstrated 'high principle and steady affection'.<sup>81</sup> She gets her strength by keeping faith with the old ways. Scott regarded the Porteous affair as 'peculiarly characteristic of the Scottish people';<sup>82</sup> generations of readers have agreed with him in finding in Jeanie Deans a fitting symbol of a different side of the Scottish character.

<sup>81</sup> See below, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> p. 522.