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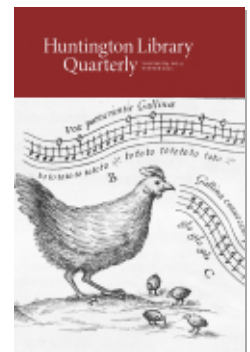
## Contesting Reformation: Truth-Telling, the Female Voice, and the Gendering of Political Polemic in Early Modern Scotland

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# Contesting Reformation: Truth-Telling, the Female Voice, and the Gendering of Political Polemic in Early Modern Scotland

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Laura A. M. Stewart

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**ABSTRACT** Complaining women overheard in conversation was a trope deployed in Renaissance literature to criticize public figures and hold them to account. This essay discusses why, and with what effect, an anonymous author used a female persona known to readers of the popular sixteenth-century satirist Robert Sempill in order to comment on the political crisis generated in Scotland by demonstrations against the imposition of the Prayer Book in 1637 and the signing of the 1638 National Covenant. Drawing on interdisciplinary studies of the polemical battle over the reputation of Mary, Queen of Scots, the essay will show how presbyterians appropriated the figure of the lowborn female truth-teller to propagate a partisan narrative about the meaning and interpretation of Scotland's Reformation. **KEYWORDS:** Covenanters; gender; Mary, Queen of Scots; presbyterians; Robert Sempill; Scottish Reformation

☞ **THIS ESSAY FOCUSES ON A POLITICAL POEM** composed by an anonymous Scottish writer in 1639. Entitled “The Kealwyves Comoning” (The Kalewives’ Communing),<sup>1</sup> it has been known since the mid-nineteenth century, when it was published by James Maidment. He transcribed it from collections belonging to Sir James Balfour of Denmilne (d. 1658), the Lord Lyon King-at-Arms and a noted antiquarian. Among these manuscripts is a quarto volume containing political satires, and “The Kealwyves Comoning” is among them. Only one scribal copy of the poem appears to have survived. Most of the material around it dates from the later 1630s and early 1640s. Although it is impossible to know where “The Kealwyves Comoning” came from or how widely it might have been read, there are indications that Balfour used his volume to record material in public circulation rather than compositions for sharing

1. *Dictionaries of the Scots Language* (hereafter *DSL*), s.v. “commoning, *vbl. n.*,” sense 1, “talking together,” <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/commoning>. For *kale*, see below, note 3.

among a select group of friends. Several items, according to Balfour's notes, had been "vented," a word that implies they were being produced for sale. Copies of some pieces have been located in other collections, and at least one exists in print form.<sup>2</sup>

Internal evidence shows that "The Kealwyves Comoning," subtitled "Curant Newes from ye parlaiment housse in Aguste 1639," was almost certainly composed around that time. It refers directly to the political crisis that engulfed the British monarchy at the end of the 1630s. When a new Prayer Book was read for the first time in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, on July 23, 1637, it was greeted with organized disturbances and a petitioning campaign that King Charles I's government proved unable to contain. When the king refused to offer meaningful concessions, the supplicants upped the stakes by issuing the National Covenant, to be sworn and signed throughout the country by people of all ranks. The king permitted a general assembly of the church to convene in Glasgow at the end of 1638. In defiance of the royal commissioner, James, third Marquis of Hamilton, the assembly deposed the Scottish bishops. Charles sought to subdue the Covenanters by force in what became known as the First Bishops' War, but he was unsuccessful. In the summer of 1639, Charles accepted a pacification that included a promise to summon a general assembly and parliament. A general assembly met in Edinburgh in August 1639 and proceeded to declare the episcopal office "unlawful." Parliament convened at the end of the month, but the king's commissioner, the Lord Treasurer, John Stewart, first Earl of Traquair, prorogued it on November 14 before the house could be presented with any legislation.

The constitutional crisis of 1639 was the context in which "The Kealwyves Comoning" was produced. Although neither a major literary work nor a notably original contribution to early modern political thought, the poem deserves attention. Why did the anonymous author, unusually if by no means uniquely, put political opinions into the mouths of two lowborn women? A kalewife was a seller of cabbage or greens, someone considered to be stationed near the bottom of the regular urban economy.<sup>3</sup> Edinburgh's kalewives appear to have been regarded as sources of popular news

2. "Collection of Scottish Pasquils in the Hand of Sir James Balfour of Denmilne," Adv.MS.19.3.8, fols. 22r–26v, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS); *A Book of Scottish Pasquils, 1568–1715*, ed. James Maidment (Edinburgh, 1868), 80–88, as "The Kail-Wyfe's Communing" (cited hereafter in the text by line number). The poem "Change Places Charles" can also be found in "Copies, in a Seventeenth-Century Hand, of the National Covenant and Letters, Petitions, Poems, etc., Connected with it, circa 1637–circa 1641," MS.1939, NLS; "Civil War and Protectorate Papers," JC38/8, National Records of Scotland, where it is noted as being listed in the *First-Line Index of English Poetry, 1500–1800, in Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library*, Oxford, ed. Margaret Crum, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1969); and Mickelton and Spearman Manuscripts, MSP 9, Durham University Library. "Englishe Challenge" and "Scots Reply" existed in print as *An English Challenge and a Reply from Scotland* (London, 1640?). Balfour appears to have kept the print copy also: "Collection of State Papers of the Reigns of James VI and Charles I made by Sir James Balfour of Denmilne, Lord Lyon King of Arms," Adv.MS.33.1.1, vol. 13, NLS.

3. *DSL*, s.v. "kale, *n*," sense 3. The term does not appear to have possessed overtly sexual connotations, although Maidment thought it a byword for a scold, on the basis of a comment by a later seventeenth-century poet, William Cleland; *Scottish Pasquils*, ed. Maidment, 79. Scolding

and rumor: James VI and I reputedly complained that the “wives of the Kaill Mercat” knew before he did of an instance when some of his subjects had convened together “without his warrant.”<sup>4</sup> What were readers expected to understand by the use of such a device? In Renaissance literature, ventriloquizing the female was commonly done by male authors to denote literary lament and complaint. While the ventriloquizing deployed in the 1639 dialogue undoubtedly uses the female voice to reference male textual forms,<sup>5</sup> it will be argued here that the rhetorical power of the kalewives is derived in part from the interplay between well-known fictional tropes and the political assertiveness of real women. This will allow us to assess the significance of the dialogue’s eschewal of the more conventional misogynistic tropes common to the genre.

There is another reason why the kalewives deserve attention: one of the characters is named. She is called Maddie, and she would already have been known to readers of presbyterian satire. This poem gives voice to a female character who had last “spoken” nearly seven decades earlier, in a series of works produced between 1568 and 1571. “Maddie of the kale market” is best known to literary scholars as a favored pseudonym of the satirist Robert Sempill. It is possible that Maddie was not Sempill’s creation; she was sufficiently well-known as a purveyor of “newes” for John Knox to reference her in a letter of 1564, slightly earlier than the first text thought to have been produced by Sempill.<sup>6</sup> The upheavals of the 1560s generated a rich satirical literature, to which Sempill, about whom we know almost nothing, was a notable contributor.<sup>7</sup>

might imply wantonness; see M. C. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England: Speaking as a Woman* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2011), 22–30.

4. David Calderwood, *History of the Kirk of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomson and David Laing, 8 vols. (Edinburgh, 1842–49), 5:216.

5. Theo van Heijnsbergen, “Masks of Revelation and The ‘Female’ Tongues of Men: Montgomerie, Christian Lyndsay, and the Writing Game at the Scottish Renaissance Court,” in *Literature, Letters and the Canonical in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Theo van Heijnsbergen and Nicola Royan (East Linton, U.K., 2002), 73–83. See also Anne M. McKim, “‘Makand Hir Mone’: Masculine Constructions of the Feminine Voice in Middle Scots Complaints,” *Scotlands* 2 (1994): 32–46. For a fuller assessment of the co-opting of female voices in sixteenth-century Scottish complaint literature, see Tricia A. McElroy, “‘Ane Wyfis Quarrel’: Complaining Women in Scottish Reformation Satire,” in *Early Modern Women’s Complaint: Gender, Form, and Politics*, ed. Sarah C. E. Ross and Rosalind Smith (London, 2020), 67–88 at 68.

6. Steven W. May and Alan Bryson, *Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland* (Oxford, 2016), 62, quoting *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, vol. 6 (Edinburgh, 1864), 541.

7. For what is known of Sempill’s life, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*), s.v. “Sempill, Robert (d. 1595?), poet and protestant controversialist,” by Patricia J. Bawcutt, last modified September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25075>. He should not be confused with Robert Sempill of Beltrees, also a poet; *The Poems of the Sempills of Beltrees*, ed. James Paterson (Edinburgh, 1849), xii. Sempill’s work can most readily be accessed in *Satirical Poems of the Time of the Reformation*, ed. James Cranstoun, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1891–93). Tricia A. McElroy is preparing a new edition for the Scottish Text Society. For the literary impact of the Marian civil wars, see A. A. MacDonald, “Scottish Poetry of the Reign of Mary Stewart,” in *The European Sun*, ed. Graham Caie, Roderick J. Lyall, Sally Mapstone, and Kenneth Simpson (East Linton, U.K., 2001), 57–58.

In 1567, the queen of Scots, Mary Stuart, was forcibly deposed by a group of Protestant lords. They crowned her infant son in her stead and put government into the hands of a regent, Mary's illegitimate half-brother, James Stewart, first Earl of Moray. Scotland was plunged into civil war when Mary escaped from her deponents, but she was unable to prevail in battle and instead sought refuge in England, where she would remain for the rest of her life. Sempill's corpus was produced in support of the King's Party, which claimed to rule in the name of James VI.<sup>8</sup>

This essay seeks to show how and why a female persona with partisan historical significance was deployed by a Scottish presbyterian polemicist in 1639. Maddie's pedigree must surely have influenced how the author wanted her to be read: what would have been the point of resurrecting Maddie nearly seven decades later if the intended audience did not recognize her? An appreciation of the gendering of political action and discourse at this particular moment, hitherto barely considered in studies of early Stuart and civil war Scotland,<sup>9</sup> will deepen our understanding of how contemporaries sought to make sense of the highly controversial events unfolding around them. Drawing on the interdisciplinary scholarship that considers Maddie's origins in the transnational polemical conflict surrounding Queen Mary's deposition, and the English regime's internal struggles over how to deal with a foreign queen who posed a threat to its survival, the next section of this essay will examine how the ambiguities of the female voice were deployed to interrogate partisan claims to truth and trust. In so doing, the essay shows how subversion of the literary conventions of gender stereotyping could be used by writers to make nuanced polemical points that readers were expected to appreciate.

Although it is not possible to identify the author of "The Kealwyves Comon-inge," the form and content of this piece suggest it can be understood as parapropaganda, produced by a "freelance" figure sympathetic to the agenda of the Covenanter

8. Mark Loughlin, "'The Dialogue of the Twa Wyfeis': Maitland, Machiavelli and the Propaganda of the Scottish Civil War," in *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History, and Culture Offered to John Durkan*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, Michael Lynch, and Ian B. Cowan (Leiden, Netherlands, 1994), 226–45; Roger A. Mason, "George Buchanan's Vernacular Polemics, 1570–1572," *Innes Review* 54, no. 1 (2003): 47–68; Amy Blakeway, "A Scottish Anti-Catholic Satire Crossing the Border," *English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (2014): 1346–70; Sebastiaan Verweij, *The Literary Culture of Early Modern Scotland: Manuscript Production and Transmission, 1560–1625* (Oxford, 2016), esp. 119–20.

9. Natalie Zemon Davis's influential interpretation of the role of women in the Scottish Prayer Book disturbances, as an example of the "complex licence" permitted, under certain circumstances, to unruly women, has not prompted scholars researching seventeenth-century Scotland to attend to gender; as references throughout this essay show, it is scholars of sixteenth-century Scottish literature who have led the field. Neither the groundbreaking studies of the Scottish Revolution nor the research that became known as "New British History" has considered either gendered political discourse or women's political roles. See Laura A. M. Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution: Covenanted Scotland, 1637–1651* (Oxford, 2016), 56–62, quoting Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London, 1975), 146.

leadership. It is likely that the author intended it to be circulated, like other surviving scribal productions from this period, around the godly networks through which resistance to royal religious policy had been sustained in the preceding decades.<sup>10</sup> As a defense of the actions of those who had resisted royal policy since 1637, and as a call for unity in support of “our cause,” the poem relies on a plain and immediate style of writing. Its directness reinforces the sense that “The Kealwyves Comoning” was intended to signal a claim to public pitch-making. Later in this essay, the dialogue’s immediate polemical purpose will be set out. In its attempt to expose the “real” motives of politicians at a moment of uncertainty, the poem places emphasis “on unmasking hidden (often nefarious or avaricious) motives,” which Brian Cowan sees as a key feature of the politicized form of the secret-history genre that emerged in the post-Reformation period. Readers of Peter Lake’s work will recognize in “The Kealwyves Comoning” those tropes of “evil counsel” and the defense of “true religion and the commonweal” common to late Elizabethan polemical material. Like English examples of the type, “The Kealwyves Comoning” also has *politique* aspects, in which the struggle for advantage over rivals is integral to its purpose.<sup>11</sup> As will be made clear, Maddie’s words were directed against a specific group of people at a crucial moment for both the Covenanter leadership and the king’s supporters. It shows that the rhetoric of “nation and true religion,” rightly identified as central to Covenanter polemic, was compatible with a variation on the “plot talk” permeating English publications of the period.<sup>12</sup>

“The Kealwyves Comoning” uses language similar to, and alludes to events referenced in, the proclamations, protestations, petitions, informations, and declarations more commonly associated with the campaign against the Scottish Prayer Book. It does not, however, belong in that category of either official or semiofficial Covenanter material on which political accounts of the period have tended to rely.<sup>13</sup> Although the poem offers a lively and creative response to controversial events, it has escaped the notice of early modern literary scholars. Balfour’s manuscripts,<sup>14</sup> including the satires selected for publication by Maidment, have not attracted the same attention as the classically inspired and undeniably more complex productions

10. David Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (Oxford, 2018), 11.

11. Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2016), 5. There is a large literature on secret histories. Scholars do not agree on its defining features. For an exploration of literary and political approaches to the genre, see Brian Cowan, “The History of Secret Histories,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 121–51 at 138.

12. Noah Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2016), 279.

13. The key contributions are David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637–1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (Edinburgh, 1973; new ed., 2003); and Allan I. Macinnes, *Charles I and the Making of the Covenanting Movement, 1625–1641* (Edinburgh, 1991).

14. Balfour’s collections are surveyed in J. D. Mackie, *The Denmilne Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1928).

of Balfour's contemporary and friend Sir William Drummond of Hawthornden.<sup>15</sup> Yet the poem's political force, and its capacity to provide the historical context in which contemporary readers were meant to make sense of the events unfolding around them, depends heavily on an appreciation of the way in which the poem channels Reformed reworkings of Scotland's Renaissance literary traditions. As the penultimate section of the essay will show, what is so skillful about "The Kealwyves Comoning" is the fact that it does this work, not through clunky explanatory narrative, but by the simple device of placing two conversing kalewives in a known physical location.

"The Kealwyves Comoning" ties in with the inventive presbyterian polemic produced in response to King James's determination to assert the royal supremacy in the spiritual sphere, restore the authority of the episcopate, and, later, to align Scottish church worship more closely with English practice. Edinburgh, Scotland's capital and its leading urban center, became the fulcrum of a culture of dissent that emerged in the later sixteenth century and continued to flourish in the decades after the Stuart dynasty left for London in 1603. Material produced in opposition to the 1618 Five Articles of Perth, and its influence on the campaign against the Prayer Book, has recently received attention.<sup>16</sup> Both need to be viewed as part of a longer continuum of presbyterian writing, in which Renaissance literary forms were being repurposed by presbyterians determined to win a culture war with the Stuart dynasty over who "owned" the Scottish Reformation. In the final section of this essay, we will reflect on what our kalewives have to tell us about the way in which presbyterians sought

15. Most notably John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics 1603–1707* (Oxford, 2008), but see also David Atkinson, "Flowres of Sion: The Spiritual and Meditative Journey of William Drummond," and Michael Spiller, "'Quintessencing in the Finest Substance': The Sonnets of William Drummond," in *Langage Cleir Illumynate: Scottish Poetry from Barbour to Drummond, 1375–1630*, ed. Nicola Royan (Amsterdam and New York, 2007), 181–91 and 193–205. For the ways in which historians have approached Drummond's literary output, see David Stevenson, "From Midden Fecht to Civil War: Drummond of Hawthornden's *Polemo-Middinia*," *Scottish Literary Review* 5, no. 2 (2013): 41–60; and Stewart, *Rethinking*, 77–86. Interest in Drummond stems in part from his interactions with Ben Jonson in the 1610s.

16. The best single account of James's religious policies remains Alan R. MacDonald, *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567–1625: Sovereignty, Polity, and Liturgy* (Aldershot, U.K., 1998). The Five Articles of Perth were named after the location of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland held in 1618. They were ratified by Parliament in 1621. This set of reforms to religious worship included the controversial injunction that communicants should kneel rather than sit, as was the Kirk's preferred practice, to take the sacrament; see Laura A. M. Stewart, "The Political Repercussions of the Five Articles of Perth: A Reassessment of James VI and I's Religious Policies in Scotland," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 4 (2007): 1013–36; and Stewart, "Brothers in Truth: Propaganda, Public Opinion and the Perth Articles Debate in Scotland," in *James VI and I: Government, Authority and Ideas*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke (Farnham, U.K., 2007), 151–68. For the emergence of a culture of dissent, see Laura A. M. Stewart, *Urban Politics and the British Civil Wars: Edinburgh, 1617–53* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2006), 173–74. The influence of this culture on the campaign against the Prayer Book is discussed in Stewart, *Rethinking*, chap. 1.

to render a partisan interpretation of Reformation synonymous with a universalist story of the Scottish nation itself.



“The Kealwyves Comoninge” is presented in two parts. Its shorter first section (70 lines) is a dialogue between two women, the eponymous kalewives, who are overheard discussing the present state of politics by, we presume, a male listener. In the second, significantly longer, section (224 lines), subtitled “the tryell of ther Newes,” we hear the listener’s internal monologue as he puts the women’s news to the test of his own reason and interprets its significance.

Through the eavesdropper, we hear the women talking, although they speak in their own voices. We are also given a location: the Tron, or weighbeam. This is significant. Within the first three couplets of the poem, we can be sure that we are in the company of Sempill’s Maddie, who was known to have a stall on the high street near the Tron. She has been placed at the heart of the Scottish capital, where the town council’s tollbooth, the main parish church of St. Giles’s, the new parliament house (opened only in 1639), and the market cross were clustered together. Anyone passing to or from the royal palace of Holyroodhouse, situated at the bottom of the high street, would have had to travel past Maddie’s stall. “Gif men thair walk,” Sempill’s Maddie informs us in 1570, “I heir thair talk / And beiris it weill away.”<sup>17</sup> Almost nothing of note could occur in Edinburgh without Maddie knowing about it. Moreover, Maddie is positioned in a public space—indeed, the most public of Edinburgh’s spaces. She is evidently intended to be read as an individual staking a claim not only to some form of public status but also to the authority to speak for others. This is a point to which we will return.

The two kalewives, we quickly learn, are not happy. In the words of our eavesdropper, the wives “sore complaine” about “sade newes” (lines 3–6). Maddie’s companion expresses dismay that men who, only a matter of months ago, had spilled their blood “for Christ’s right” now seem “to fall away” from the “cause in hand.” She has heard that the court, whether by flattery or fear, “[o]r by the promisse of cursed geare,” has “bewitched” Scotland’s politicians, and that there will now be much sorrow in the land (lines 11–22). In response, Maddie declaims, “that can not be / [t]hat honest men of ther degree” would betray “cause and countrey” (lines 23–26). The women do not intend to sit as passive observers of the actions of men. Something must be done. Maddie asks for the names of the backsliders, so that she “freily may tell them my mynde / For so ye know I am inclynde / For feude nor favor I shall not spaire / My mynde to them for to declaire” (lines 37–40).

17. “Maddeis Proclamatoun,” in *Satirical Poems*, ed. Cranstoun, vol. 1, no. 20, p. 150, lines 23–24, cited hereafter by line number.

A real event is now recounted by the women. Around two years earlier, on October 18, 1637, a disturbance even more threatening than the infamous Prayer Book riots had taken place in Edinburgh. One individual targeted by the crowd on that day was Sir John Hay. The former town clerk and clerk to the king's Privy Council had been installed by the king as provost of Edinburgh, contrary to the town council's constitution, in the wake of the Prayer Book riots. Maddie's companion recalls approvingly how the women had "followed" Hay down the high street (line 60). In reality, he was physically attacked by Edinburgh's women, and a crowd threw stones at the windows of his house. Hay remained in Scotland until March 1639, when he traveled south to join the king at York in advance of the march of the royal army to the Scottish border. He was subsequently denounced as one of five so-called "incendiaries" whom the Covenanter leadership wanted returned to Scotland to face trial for fomenting discord between the king and his subjects.<sup>18</sup> According to the women, Hay had never been a friend to the "cause," but his sins were minor compared to the "falsse men" who have become "deceavors under trust / And Judas name deserves just" (lines 54, 67–68). Maddie voices suspicion that some of the noblemen who had taken the Covenant in 1638 were now, for their own advantage and self-interest, ready to betray "cause and countrey." The women do not tell us whom they suspect of being "turnecottes" (line 41) but, as we will see in due course, the author almost certainly had particular individuals in mind. Having aired their doubts, the women conclude their conversation by stating that they will suspend judgment until more is known.

The poem now moves into the second section, entitled "The tryell of ther Newes." It is narrated by the eavesdropper, who initially expresses skepticism that the words of women can be anything other than "idle tealles" (line 76). Having paused to take "a little vieu / Of this grate courte and quhat syde ther prevaiills" (lines 77–78), the narrator begins to change his opinion. Having convinced himself that the women must be telling the truth, the narrator goes on to endorse and expand upon what the women have said. Our narrator observes that the prince, meaning Charles I, has been peacefully "petitioned by our Peers" to call a parliament. For it is specifically Parliament, the domain of men, that will "satle this distracted natione / And pute an end to all our grieffes and feares" (lines 93–96). There is a problem, however. Both the kalewives and the eavesdropper fear that the court has "bewitched" the senses of the pure in heart. The eavesdropper likens the court to a seductress using supernatural powers to tempt good men away from the path of righteousness (line 216). Maddie has not been bewitched. "Liberty" is mentioned several times in the poem. She could be read here as a personification of freedom, not only from false religion but also from the risk of political corruption. Great men, it seems, can learn from the example of

18. The other incendiaries were Sir Robert Spottiswoode, president of the Court of Session and son of John, archbishop of St. Andrews; John Stewart, first Earl of Traquair, Lord Treasurer; John Maxwell, bishop of Ross; and Walter Balcanquhall, dean of Rochester, later dean of Durham.

their social inferiors, as is made plain in a passage that alludes to the swearing of the National Covenant:

How wonderfully [God] hes brought to passe  
 More then at first wee durst presume to seike  
 Man, woman, all, yea evrey lade and lasse  
 For comon cause enabled them to speake  
 With quhate grate courage did they us inspyre  
 Our cause, our lawes and liberties to defend  
 Should not this be all trew Scotts hartes desyres  
 That so wee might continew to the end.

(Lines 191–98)

Maddie is a manifestation of a well-established trope in which women step up to remind “honest men” to do God’s will. Such an individual appears in John Knox’s *History*. When describing the sacking and burning of Scone Abbey in 1558, Knox recounts words allegedly spoken by a “poor aged matron.” Her “plain and sober manner of speaking” is contrasted with the frenzied scenes to which she gives witness: “Now I see and understand that God’s judgements are just, and that no man is able to save where He will punish.” The matron goes on to claim insights that men do not possess. “If all men knew as much as I,” she continues, “they would praise God, and no man would be offended.” This poor, old woman acts the part of the truth-teller, capable of discerning God’s inscrutable will at a moment when the men of “estimation” have been perplexed by their inability to control events.<sup>19</sup> Like the Jenny Geddes figure who reputedly kicked off the 1637 riots,<sup>20</sup> Knox’s matron may be a fictionalized version of a real woman. The parallels with the Maddie character are self-evident.

Another pasquil, dating to late 1641 or early 1642, borrows from this trope when it avers that it was the weak and “sillie geese,” meaning women, who kept “God’s capitall” while “our Chiftains strong were all on sleep.”<sup>21</sup> The choice of a female speaker can be problematic, however. Are “sillie” women ever to be trusted?<sup>22</sup> After all, who better than inconstant women to recognize deceitful practices in others? Our male eavesdropper explicitly states that Maddie might be spreading “idle tealles,” raising the possibility that the “comon cause” is being imperiled, not by the actual existence of “turnecottes” within the ranks of the Covenanters but by false and malicious reports that such people exist. Maddie might, therefore, be no

19. John Knox, *The Historie of the Reformation of the Church of Scotland* (London and Edinburgh, 1644), 155–56.

20. Stewart, *Rethinking*, 56, 58.

21. “Scotland’s Triumph over Rome,” in *Scottish Pasquils*, ed. Maidment, 129, lines 11–12.

22. Tricia A. McElroy, “The Uses of Genre and Gender in ‘The Dialogue of the Twa Wyfeis,’” in *Premodern Scotland: Literature and Governance, 1420–1587; Essays for Sally Mapstone*, ed. Joanna Martin and Emily Wingfield (Oxford, 2017), 209.

more than a rumormonger whose feminine credulity inadvertently does the enemy's work through words that breed suspicion and sow division. A woman's speech could therefore be signaling a paradox: her plain speaking, supposedly a mark of her trustworthiness, could be a deception to make the character seem credible. The female voice could denote both honest speech *and* its abuse.<sup>23</sup>

In a later section, we will examine the devices deployed by the writer of this poem to persuade readers that Maddie can be trusted. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to say something of the fraught political events alluded to by the kalewives. Although we have seen that the Covenanter leaders had successfully defied the king's army in the summer of 1639 and secured his grudging consent to hold a parliament, they knew very well that Charles had not been decisively defeated, either militarily or politically. All might yet be lost if the king's supporters could use Parliament to outmaneuver the Covenanter leadership. An examination of the way in which the author of the poem, through the kalewives, offers readers an interpretation of these events will enable us to consider more carefully the significance of using a female literary figure with historical resonances to offer a commentary on the contemporary actions of men.



The immediate context for the poem was the convening of Parliament on August 31, 1639. As in any parliament, the first business to complete was the selection of the members who would sit as the Lords of the Articles. This was a steering committee, made up of eight members from each estate—the clergy, nobility, and burgesses—plus eight officers of state, that prepared legislation for presentation to full Parliament. During the early seventeenth century, the nomination of members to the Articles had become a subject of controversy, as James and Charles sought to manipulate ill-defined customary procedures in order to exert control over the legislative agenda. From 1621 onward, the bishops (who had all been appointed to their offices by the king) were given the nomination of the nobles, who then chose the eight bishops to sit on the Articles. Nobles and bishops together proceeded to choose the shire and burgh representatives. The officers of state were granted their places on the Articles *ex officio*.<sup>24</sup>

What made the nominations even more contentious in 1639 was the absence of the bishops. This created a dilemma: was the meeting legally a parliament if one of the estates was missing? The new king's commissioner, Lord Treasurer Traquair, was tasked with blocking Parliament from making any determinations concerning its own constitution. A means was found, agreeable to both Covenanters and the king's supporters, of selecting a body of people from among the nobility, gentry, and

23. Martin Dzelzainis, "'Presbyterian Sibyl': Truth-Telling and Gender in Andrew Marvell's *The Third Advice to a Painter*," in *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (London, 2006), 126.

24. Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*, 167; John R. Young, *The Scottish Parliament, 1639–1661: A Political and Constitutional Analysis* (Edinburgh, 1996), 2–3.

burghesses to convene as the Articles and begin preparing the legislative agenda. It was now the commissioner's aim to buy time until a majority of the nobles appointed to the Articles could be persuaded that the Crown should have the right to nominate replacements for the clerical estate. With places for his own supporters secured on the Articles, the king would be in a much stronger position to influence what legislation would be presented to full Parliament for ratification. This opened the possibility that a committee amenable to the king's views could prevent acts against the episcopal office from being put to a vote by the rest of the house.

The larger constitutional controversy over how the Articles should be constituted, in which the shire and burgh commissioners made an ultimately successful proposal to have each estate choose its own representatives, has been rehearsed by other historians and need not detain us here.<sup>25</sup> On September 4, Traquair convened with the representatives of the three remaining estates plus the officers of state, and the Articles began its work. Assertive behavior by the gentry and burghesses aided Traquair by raising concerns that noble dominance of Parliament was being challenged. Scotland's "greate lords" were "much divided," observed the English intelligencer Edmund Rossingham, "the king haveing gotten a greate, and a considerable party of them." A newsletter to the English peer John, first Viscount Scudamore, reported that at least two "very active" Covenanter nobles—James Graham, first Marquis of Montrose, and John Lindsay, first Earl of Lindsay—were "body and soul for his Majesty in Parliament," as were unnamed "divers others of the known Covenanters."<sup>26</sup> By early October, Traquair was ready to ask the Articles whether the question of its composition should be remitted to the king. Lindsay ultimately opted to stand with the leading Covenanter nobles—Archibald Campbell, first Marquis of Argyll, and John Leslie, sixth Earl of Rothes—who wanted Parliament to make the decision, but five of the eight nobles, including the Covenanter John Maitland, second Earl of Lauderdale, supported Traquair. The commissioner had miscalculated, however, and he lost by two votes. The initiative now swung decisively in favor of the Covenanter leadership. After repeated delays in summoning full Parliament, Traquair finally prorogued the session on November 14, by which time both sides were preparing for renewed hostilities.<sup>27</sup>

On October 23, leading Covenanters had complained to Traquair about the length of time the Articles had been deliberating and urged him to allow Parliament to complete its work. By November, a scribal tract entitled "The Causes of the Long Sitting of This Parliament" was in circulation.<sup>28</sup> "The Kealwyves Comoninge" alludes

25. See Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*; and Young, *Scottish Parliament*.

26. Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603–1642*, 10 vols. (London, 1883–87), 9:50–55, esp. 51–52n3, quoting "Political Letters of News Addressed to John, first Lord Scudamore," Add. MS 11045, fol. 62r [October 7, 1639], fol. 66v [October 21, 1639], British Library.

27. Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*, 172–74; Young, *Scottish Parliament*, 10–11.

28. "Papers Belonging to David Calderwood, 1584–1648," Wod.Qu.LXXVII, no. 22, NLS.

to these developments when our narrator observes how “tyme is trifled still away” and “grate matters trewly are neglected” (lines 79, 106). Its author also issues a warning against Traquair’s scheme to have compliant men appointed to the Articles. Although the Kirk has “put doune” the bishops, it has “suffred since parliament begane / Means to propone to bringe them in againe” (lines 149, 151–52). When the 1639 verse complains against those “[w]ho wer the cause of all ther grate disorders” and have now “lefte ther native nation / Our overthrowe to helpe to bringe aboute” (lines 143–44) it is referencing a demand made by the Covenanting leadership that the “Incendiaries” be returned to Scotland for trial.<sup>29</sup>

Maddie’s warnings also chime with a protestation read on November 14 before “publict audience” in Parliament, and in the name of the three estates, by one of the authors of the National Covenant, Archibald Johnston of Warriston. Despite the “malignant oppositionne” of “some of our disnaturated cuntrymen,” the king had graciously granted an assembly of the church and a parliament for settling Scotland’s “tempestis and troubles.” Yet “malitiouse adversaries” had sought to subvert these proceedings with their “obloquies,” “misinformatione,” and lies. By such underhand means, the king’s commissioner had been persuaded to prorogue Parliament without its consent (which the protestation deemed, questionably, to be contrary to its liberties). Immediately prior to the reading of this protestation, the Earl of Lauderdale had “removeit” himself “out of the house” in the company of two of the king’s supporters, the Lord Privy Seal, Robert Ker, first Earl of Roxburgh, and the Treasurer Depute, Sir James Carmichael.<sup>30</sup>

Thanks to the kalewives, our narrator’s eyes have been opened to the hidden menace of doubt and disunity. We know, with the benefit of hindsight, how close Traquair had come to dividing the nobles sitting on the Articles and, by extension, the Covenanter leadership. In its work of exposing the threat posed by the divisions manifesting themselves among the Covenanter nobles, the poem turns waverers and doubters into an “enemy within” who will ultimately destroy the nation. It is not Traquair who will wreck the cause but “oure awen eivell gyding” (line 204).

One possible conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is that the language used by the kalewives can be seen as little more than the author’s skillful and inventive ventriloquizing of Covenanter propaganda. As indicated at the head of this essay, however, it is the Maddie character’s past literary life that makes her more than simply a creative means by which the author could demonstrate his political acuity. Maddie represents Covenanter assertions to be acting “for the preservacione” of a church and a constitution coming under attack from “enymies” whose recourse to “their owne inventiones and innovationes” is part of a larger scheme to divide the king from his

29. Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*, 2. See above, note 18.

30. Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707 (hereafter RPS), ed. Keith M. Brown et al., [www.rps.ac.uk](http://www.rps.ac.uk), 1639/8/31/10, November 14, 1639.

people.<sup>31</sup> Here the competing claims about what constituted Scotland's "laws and liberties"—made by the king's supporters, on the one hand, and the Covenanter leadership, on the other—naturally raised the question of which side was telling the truth. It is Maddie's established status not only as a truth-teller but also as one whose interpretative capabilities have been validated by history to which we now turn.



Numerous scholars have discussed Maddie in her sixteenth-century incarnation. Steven May and Alan Bryson, in their study of Renaissance verse libel, see Maddie as a "female *vox populi* who enunciates the majority will of common folk."<sup>32</sup> Tricia McElroy offers an explicitly gendered analysis of Maddie's status as the representative of the "ordinary, sensible citizens of Edinburgh." McElroy persuasively argues that contemporaries understood Sempill's true-hearted Citizen Maddie as the perfect foil for Mary, Queen of Scots, whose depiction as a murdering adulteress by Moray's client, George Buchanan, was part of a campaign to blacken her reputation and undermine sympathy for her cause in the Catholic courts of Europe.<sup>33</sup> Sebastiaan Verweij helpfully sites Maddie in Edinburgh's vibrant literary culture, presenting her as a fictionalized representation of real textual communities in which women were actively "engaged in scribal practice and news publication."<sup>34</sup> In a close reading of some of the key tropes used by Sempill, Amy Blakeway notes Sempill's idiosyncratic decision to put his own words into the mouth of a lowborn fictive female character.<sup>35</sup> Maddie's resurrection nearly seventy years later has, however, escaped scholarly notice.

Central to Maddie's "everywoman"<sup>36</sup> persona is her ability to give her mind "freely" because she is beholden to no one. Although she refers to herself as "A wife with sempill lyfe," there is no indication that she has a husband or family: the primary definition of a *wife* in early modern Scotland was "a woman."<sup>37</sup> Comparison with one of Maddie's fictive contemporaries, Lady Scotland, reinforces the point. In a standard piece of complaint literature, the "Lamentation" of 1572, Lady Scotland identifies herself as the wife of another major literary character, John the Commonweal, made famous in Sir David Lindsay's *Satyre of the Three Estates*. Unlike Lady Scotland, however, Maddie has been constructed as a figure more complex, compelling, and,

31. RPS, 1639/8/31/10, November 14, 1639.

32. May and Bryson, *Versé Libel*, 62–63.

33. Tricia A. McElroy, "Imagining the 'Scottis Natioun': Populism and Propaganda in Scottish Satirical Broad-sides," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49, no. 4 (2007): 332; McElroy, "Uses of Genre and Gender," 205.

34. Verweij, *Literary Culture*, 119–20.

35. Amy Blakeway, "The Response to the Regent Moray's Assassination," *Scottish Historical Review* 88, no. 225 (2009): 20–21, 23, 24, 29, 32–33.

36. John D. Staines, *The Tragic Histories of Mary Queen of Scots, 1560–1690* (Farnham, U.K., 2009), 51, 53.

37. DSL, s.v. "Wif(e, Wyf(e, n," sense 1.

hence, unsettling than the allegorical one of Lady Scotland. Maddie speaks, not *for* the people of Scotland, but as one of their number.<sup>38</sup> Although she is poor, Maddie makes her own living in honest employment and “Dois wyn my meit ilk day.” Tricia McElroy has observed that “Maddie holds an important position in the market.”<sup>39</sup> We can go further. Maddie’s stall at the Tron signifies her economic self-sufficiency *and* her stake in urban society. Maddie is not simply an inversion of the male eavesdropper—the defenseless woman speaking truth to power. Despite her gender, Maddie possesses the authority to speak for a community of which she is an active and productive member.

In other respects, the trope of the urban “everywoman” needs some qualification. Maddie is *not* an “everywoman” but a partisan claim to “everywoman” status, made by people whose own authority and legitimacy is in doubt. Sempill’s ballads were produced in the service of the Protestant party seeking to rule Scotland in the name of Mary’s infant son, James VI.<sup>40</sup> Protestants were by no means secure in their command of either Edinburgh or the country. More than this, Mary’s flight to England and her claims to Elizabeth Tudor’s throne put at risk the survival of Protestantism in the entire archipelago. During the first half of 1569, a scheme to marry Mary to England’s premier peer, the Duke of Norfolk, and restore her conditionally to the Scottish throne was being seriously contemplated by leading figures inside the Elizabethan regime.<sup>41</sup> The result was an internationalized polemical battle over the reputations of Mary and her half-brother, Moray, of which the Sempill poems were a major component.<sup>42</sup>

38. Roderick Lyall, “Complaint, Satire and Invective in Middle Scots Literature,” in *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408–1929*, ed. Norman Macdougall (Edinburgh, 1983), 57. Tricia A. McElroy brackets Maddie and Lady Scotland together as “allegorical-like” but suggests that the former had the superior capacity to capture “the voices of Scotland”; “Ane Wyfis Quarrel,” 67–68, 78.

39. “Maddeis Proclamatoun,” line 18; McElroy, “Imagining,” 332.

40. For those interested in Robert Sempill’s work more broadly, see, in addition to other works already cited, Tricia A. McElroy, “Executing Mary Queen of Scots: Strategies of Representation in Early Modern Scotland” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2005), chap. 1; Jamie Reid-Baxter, “‘Judge and Revenge My Cause’: The Earl of Morton, Andro Blackhall, Robert Sempill and the Fall of the House of Hamilton in 1579,” in *Older Scots Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (Edinburgh, 2005); and Priscilla Bawcutt, “A New Poem by Robert Sempill: *The Warning to the Lordis*,” *Scottish Literary Review* 1, no. 1 (2009): 17–49.

41. Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?*, chap. 1.

42. Sempill the polemicist can be read as a personification of the Moray party in a way similar to the pamphleteer Thomas Norton, who represented Sir William Cecil’s interest in England. Norton was involved with the publication of the anti-Marian *Detectioun*, composed by Buchanan. Norton worked with another Cecil client, the printer John Day, whose London press produced Buchanan’s 1571 *Ane Admonition*; see Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?*, 42–43. See also May and Bryson, *Versè Libel*, 43; Mason, “George Buchanan’s Vernacular Polemics,” 56; *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots: A Critical Edition and Translation of George Buchanan’s “De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus,”* ed. Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith (Aldershot, U.K., 2004), xxvi–xxxii; and ODNB, s.v. “Lekpreuik [Lekprevick], Robert (fl. 1561–1581), printer,” by T. F. Henderson, rev. by Martin Holt Dotterweich, last modified September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16414>.

Scholars of the later Stuart period have shown how partisan politics exacerbated anxieties about truth claims and generated creative explorations of the meaning of fiction. These anxieties were rooted in the post-Reformation problem of validating “truth” once the rending of Catholic Christendom had created rival claimants to the authority represented by “church” and “monarchy.”<sup>43</sup> *Parrhesia*—the practice of speaking candidly—was one mode used to address this concern. As Martin Dzelzainis has pointed out, contemporaries realized how hard it could be in practice to spot the difference between truth and duplicity.<sup>44</sup> Maddie’s character has been constructed in this vein. She speaks directly to readers in her “Lamentatioun,” a wide-ranging piece of complaint literature that, in its reification of the “commoun weil,” has echoes of Lindsay’s *Satyre*, first performed in the 1550s and printed only in 1602. Maddie’s accompanying “Proclamatioun”—itself a bold claim to the authority associated with magistracy—explicitly eschews the “lofty veirs” of the “Lamentatioun” for plainer talk, so that “all, baith greit and small” may understand her. When her critics ask Maddie why she refuses to sit still and remain silent, her response is that circumstances compel her to “answer plane.” She is a truth-telling *parrhesiastes* who risks punishment by more powerful people because she is driven to expose their cruelty, oppression, and tyranny. “Thair malice vane I do disdaine,” declaims Sempill’s Maddie in a “Proclamatioun” given out in her own name. Maddie’s credibility as a *parrhesiastes* is staked on straight talking, but this demands openness about her own identity. She names herself as the author of the “bills” she posts and, moreover, tells her adversaries where she can be found. Other voices in the Sempill poems reinforce Maddie’s fame and authenticate her boast that “My name is knawin.”<sup>45</sup>

What does Maddie’s visibility say about the man for whom she is ventriloquizing? Is Sempill the polemicist deliberately using the Maddie character as a means of hiding himself in plain sight? In an enigmatic production, on William Cecil’s desk by August 1567, Sempill owns giving his words to the character who makes them public on his behalf. In a taunt to Sempill’s enemies, Maddie exclaims, “Luik the first letter of euerie weress, / Hangman! Gif thow can reheress, / Mark weill my name and set ane day.” The letters spell out “Robart Sempil,” who promises to make himself a worthy contender against the hangman. Other scholars have noted that Maddie, by referring to herself as being of “sempill lyfe,” thereby divulges for whom it is she speaks.<sup>46</sup> So what we have here is a fictional female character whose claims to credibility are partly validated by giving her a recognizable social identity, voicing for a real man, who

43. Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005), chap. 6, esp. 273–74.

44. Dzelzainis, “Presbyterian Sibyl,” 113.

45. “Maddeis Proclamatioun,” lines 1–5, 13, 15, 21–22, 29, 185.

46. “Ane Ansr Maid to ye Sklanderaris yt Blasphemis ye Regent and ye Rest of ye Lordis,” in *Satirical Poems*, ed. Cranstoun, vol. 1, no. 8, lines 56–58; McElroy, “Imagining,” 332. For some brief comments on female personae, see Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2003), 289–90.

reveals himself to us through the words he gives to a persona created to enable the author to hide within a substitute self.

This dynamic interplay between the real and the fictional, and the visible and the concealed, could be seen as a comment on the instability of the times. The lords claiming to govern Scotland in the name of the young James VI faced a serious military challenge from Queen Mary's Scottish followers, who managed to shoot dead two of the king's regents in succession in as many years. That Mary might yet return to Scotland, either through a deal engineered by Elizabeth's government, or by Mary's Catholic supporters successfully liberating her by force, invited conspiracy, side-changing, deceit, and fabrication. Politics in this volatile climate came to be defined by questions of trust and truth. Sempill's stratagem of calling upon an imaginary woman to describe what is really going on exposes the inability of mortal men to cut through the chaos and discern it for themselves.<sup>47</sup>

Maddie was not the only female commentator on the politics of James VI's early reign. To gain a sense of the daring challenge made by Sempill's Maddie to established literary forms, we can briefly consider another dialogue composed in the same era. It not only offers a much more conventional representation of lowborn women but also namechecks Maddie herself. The anonymous "Dialogue of the Twa Wyfeis" has been identified by Mark Loughlin as an early Scottish exposition on "the political principles in Machiavelli."<sup>48</sup> In the "Dialogue," two women meet in a tavern and are overheard by an unidentified eavesdropper as they lampoon the leading figures of the Queen's Party. Sir William Maitland of Lethington, secretary of state to Queen Mary, is the Machiavellian mastermind of the piece: he had cooperated with Mary's enemies to engineer her downfall in 1567, before defecting to the party committed to restoring her to power. That some of the country's leading nobles should be ridiculed by two lowborn women is clearly meant to be emasculating and demeaning. The point is reinforced when one of the women concludes the conversation by taking solace in her drink and reflecting on the ease with which she could "haif ane uthir"—that is, replace her husband—if the civil war ended up claiming his life. Like our kalewives, the "twa wyfeis" are concerned with the deceitful dealings of men but, unlike the kalewives, the authority of the "twa wyfeis" is undermined by the resort to gender stereotyping.<sup>49</sup>

47. Jane Dawson provides an admirably clear account of this period in *Scotland Re-Formed, 1488–1587* (Edinburgh, 2007), chap. 12. The key in-depth studies remain Gordon Donaldson, *All the Queen's Men: Power and Politics in Mary Stewart's Scotland* (London, 1983), and Donaldson, *The First Trial of Mary, Queen of Scots* (London, 1974). For an important reappraisal of regency government in Scotland, which includes the regencies of James VI's early reign, see Amy Blakeway, *Regency in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge, U.K., 2015).

48. Loughlin, "The Dialogue," 227. I am grateful to Dr. Jamie Reid-Baxter for discussing the "Dialogue" and sharing his own transcription of it with me.

49. Sempill is in the frame as author, but the evidence is inconclusive. Buchanan has also been suggested as a candidate; see Loughlin, "The Dialogue," 235–36; McElroy, "Uses of Genre and Gender," 208–9; and Mason, "George Buchanan's Vernacular Polemics," 47.

Dialogues in which female characters are placed in taverns with drink loosening their tongues depended on the misogynistic assumption that, temporarily freed from the good regulation of men, women will “sore complaine” about their husbands and engage in bawdy gossip.<sup>50</sup> This is not how Sempill makes use of Maddie. She is a woman with her own voice, espousing her view of what constitutes the common good. Indeed, Maddie’s effectiveness as a metaphor for popular claims to hold rulers to account for their misuse of power is partly derived from her status as a woman whose words confront the gender stereotypes common to established literary forms. John Knox was unsettled by her in 1564: “Thus with us ravis Maddy every day,” he observes, “but heirupon I gratlie pans [care] not.”<sup>51</sup> A woman’s “newes” is here dismissed as a delirium to which men need pay no heed. A man has permitted Maddie to speak but, in the end, he must silence her to signify that good order has been restored. Sempill has Maddie reassure us that, once wrongs have been righted, “I na mair sall flyte”—I will dispute no further.<sup>52</sup>

Sempill’s Maddie is last known to have given her “verray excellent” counsel in 1571, some eighteen months short of the pacification that brought an end to open hostilities and enabled the last of James’s regents, James Douglas, fourth Earl of Morton, to bring some measure of stability to Scotland.<sup>53</sup> Polemical use of female truth-tellers continued to be relevant once James VI had reached an age when he was capable of exerting his own political will. What constituted “truth” became central to the bitter public debate between defenders of a presbyterian system of church government and advocates of the merits of a royal supremacy undergirded by episcopal authority. The broad correlation of ecclesiastical positions with factional politics generated a series of coups d’état in which the king was seized by people convinced that, for the good of the realm, he should be separated from his preferred counselors.<sup>54</sup> It was in this context that a row broke out between two Edinburgh ministers, James Lawson and Walter Balcanquhall, and the archbishop of St. Andrews, Patrick Adamson. While the former sought refuge in England, their wives claimed to be the authors of a “Reply” to Adamson written in defense of their husbands’ conduct. By its tone, the tract was surely intended to be seen by a much wider audience than the archbishop alone.

It is certainly not beyond credibility that Jonet Guthrie and Margaret Marjoribanks wrote the lengthy “Reply,” either by themselves or, more likely, in collaboration with fellow presbyterians. The parallels with the Maddie character lie in the

50. McElroy, “Uses of Genre and Gender,” 201–5.

51. May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 62, quoting *Works of John Knox*, ed. Laing, 541. In Scots, a *maddie* is a “mad person, a lunatic,” but it does not seem to have been in use before 1700; *DSL*, s.v. “maddie, n,” sense 1.

52. “Maddeis Proclamatioun,” line 192.

53. “The Exhortatioun to the Lordis,” in *Satirical Poems*, ed. Cranstoun, vol. 1, no. 26, line 106. This appears to be the last dated reference to her before 1639, although the very poor survival rates for such ephemera may mean there were later productions, now lost.

54. These complicated events are summarized in Dawson, *Scotland Re-Formed*, 306–15.

personae adopted by the writers. As “simple weomen,” they may not possess the “sugarred eloquence of Cicero or Demosthenes,” but this is to their advantage: “the simplicite of the simple truthe” will out the “false calumneis” issued by Adamson against their husbands, confound his “counterfoote eloquence,” and expose the slanders that the women claim Adamson has “decked” with rhetoric. Guthrie and Marjoribanks as personae are less threatening than the Maddie character. The tract’s authors must, ipso facto, be of relatively elevated social status, and their intervention, as women, is legitimated by the claim to be acting out of spousal loyalty. They nonetheless deploy the now-familiar trope, shared with Maddie, of ordinary women forced to speak out against the threat posed to “Gode’s truthe” by the powerful and worldly.<sup>55</sup>

We cannot know whether Sempill was acquainted with Guthrie and Marjoribanks, but his own work makes it clear where the sympathies of “your brother Semple” lay. Around the same time that the 1584 “Reply” was written, Sempill penned a scurrilous attack on Adamson alleging his extravagance and ill behavior on a visit to London in 1584. This satire circulated in presbyterian circles and was referenced by a generation who lived long enough to witness the crisis of the late 1630s. David Calderwood (d. 1650), who was very much alive in 1639, noted a Sempill poem called “The Legend of the Lymmar’s Life,” which appears to have been a copy of the tract against Adamson. William Scot (d. 1642), another presbyterian cleric who was almost certainly an associate of Calderwood’s, also referenced “The Legend” in his “narration” of the period.<sup>56</sup>

Sempill’s broader influence on presbyterian polemic is detectable even among those who did not reference his work directly. John Row noted “sundrie poesies” circulating in 1610 against the bishops, one of which was entitled “The Legend of Limmers’ Lyves.” (Calderwood also noted “verses” against the bishops but dates them to 1609, not 1610.) This second “legend” was a generalized attack on the “Pride” and “blind Ambition” of the bishops.<sup>57</sup> Although the later “legend” does not appear to be

55. “A Reply of Jonet Guthrie and Margaret Marjoribanks,” in Calderwood, *History*, 4:126–41 at 126, 129. For acceptance of the women as the authors, see Calderwood, *History*, 4:141; see also James Anderson, *The Ladies of the Covenant* (Glasgow, 1851), 10. See also David J. Parkinson, “‘The Legend of the Bishop of St. Androis Lyfe’ and the Survival of Scottish Poetry,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9 (May 2003): 1–24, <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-1/parkscot.html>.

56. A *lymmar* is a rogue, scoundrel, or villain; *DSL*, s.v. “limmar, *n*,” sense 1. See Calderwood, *History*, 6:61, quoted in *Satirical Poems*, ed. Cranstoun, xxxiii; William Scot, *An Apologetical Narration of the State and Government of the Kirk of Scotland since the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1846), 51; and Parkinson, “The Legend.” James Melville, nephew of the presbyterian theologian Andrew Melville (and friend of William Scot), died in 1614. He, too, knew of (and enjoyed) Sempill’s work; Melville, *Autobiography and Diary*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1842), 1:22. For links between Scot, Melville, and Calderwood, see *ODNB*, s.v. “Scot [Scott], William (c. 1558–1642), church of Scotland minister and historian,” by Alan R. MacDonald, last modified September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/69590>.

57. John Row, *The Historie of the Kirk of Scotland, M.D.LVIII.–M.DC.XXXVII*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1842), 105–7; Calderwood, *History*, 7:1–2. The Maitland Club constructed its edition of Row’s *Historie* from several surviving manuscripts. Another edition produced

Sempill's poem, it would not be unreasonable to suppose, given its title and the theme of episcopal vice, that it was deliberately intended to be read as a homage to Sempill.

This section of the essay has attempted to show that Maddie's 1639 incarnation was intended to be read by contemporaries as an embodiment of the larger historical narratives built up by presbyterian writers since the Reformation era. In this respect, she has parallels with her better-known English contemporary, Margery Marprelate. Margery identified herself in November 1640 as a spokesperson for the "Generation" that had delighted in the anti-episcopal satires produced half a century earlier under the alias Martin Marprelate.<sup>58</sup> The Maddie character imagined by Sempill is, however, a more substantial one than that of Margery, and the urban environment to which she belongs is realized in a way not attempted for the latter. In the final section of this essay, we will return to questions about how contemporaries were meant to interpret Maddie by placing her within the context of a literary battle between presbyterians and supporters of royal policy over how the Scottish Reformation ought to be depicted, framed, and understood.



What does the Maddie character tell us about how contemporaries were meant to contextualize the events of 1639? We have seen that Maddie represents a time, just fading out of living memory, when the survival of the Protestant Reformations in Scotland and England was far from assured. She was part of a pivotal moment when the people stood up against the corrupted power of female rule and idolatrous, worldly churchmen. Yet the role of "the people" in bringing about Reformation was looked upon with disquiet even by those who had encouraged it. Knox in his *History* had been at pains to show that the "men of greatest estimation" had done all they could to contain the destructive fury of "the multitude easily enflamed."<sup>59</sup> The question of how Reformation had been achieved—divinely inspired acts of faith and courage against tyranny, or an unholy rebellion against constituted authority?—became a

simultaneously by the Wodrow Society exhibits differences in the text. "The Legend of Limmers' Lives" was among a number of poems that form a more extensive set than those printed in the Maitland edition. David Laing, editor of the Wodrow edition, wrote that, after consulting "other MSS," he decided to insert them as a supplement to the main text; John Row, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland from the year 1558 to August 1637* (Edinburgh, 1842), 291–96, esp. 291n1, 294n2. Calderwood also noted "verses" against the bishops, but he set down only two of those featured in Row's manuscripts, and there are slight differences between the texts. See also Van Heijnsbergen, "Masks of Revelation," 83.

58. A key function of the "Margery Marprelate" press was the production of Covenantan propaganda. Four pamphlets carried Marprelate's fictitious imprint. One is a dialogue featuring Scottish "wives," *Vox Borealis, or The Northern Discoverie* ([London]: Margery Mar-Prelat, 1640), sigs. Cr–v, C3r–v, Dr–v, reprinted as *A Second Discovery* (London, 1642); see Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 50–89.

59. Knox, *Historie of the Reformation*, 155–56.

major polemical battleground in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as presbyterians and supporters of the Crown deployed diametrically opposed versions of history to legitimate their claims about the Kirk's "true" nature. A key publication that did not appear as intended in 1639, although it was deemed "fitt to be printed," was the *History of the Church of Scotland* penned by John Spottiswoode, archbishop of St. Andrews and lord chancellor. Spottiswoode's account of the Scottish Reformation not only exhibits considerable sympathy for the "honest and honourable" French Catholic regent Marie de Guise, mother of Queen Mary, but also falls short of endorsing the Protestant Lords of the Congregation. Knox is portrayed as a demagogue whose sermons did more to "incite" than restrain the violence of the people. Spottiswoode makes almost no effort to refute the regent's assertions that the Lords had only "pretended" religion in order to usurp her daughter's crown. "It is strange to think," muses Spottiswoode, that the Reformation could have come about "by so weak means, in such a disorderly way."<sup>60</sup>

For Spottiswoode, the Reformation was wrought by ambitious men who whipped up popular "fury" and encouraged "barbarous" acts of destruction by "the meaner sort." The archbishop's great purpose was to show that King James VI had done the real work of Reformation by restoring godly order to a church born in sedition and a kingdom distracted by the overthrow of legitimate authority.<sup>61</sup> It was a narrative already established by James himself in his *Basilicon Doron*, dedicated to his eldest son, Henry, and first published in 1599. Reformation had been "inordinately done by a popolare tumult and rebellion," in which people blinded by "their owne passions" chose not to see what God had intended. "Fierie spirited men in the miniserie" had aspired to build a "Democratick forme of government" upon the "wracke" of his grandmother and mother. After they had usurped "the liberty of the time in my long minority," these men had sought to establish a "populare gouernment by leading the people by the nose."<sup>62</sup>

This absolutist reading of Scotland's Reformation was brought up to date by the publication in 1639 of two works by Scots-born supporters of James's son Charles. The most substantial was the aptly named *Large Declaration*. It was authored in the king's name by the cleric Walter Balcanquhall, soon to be dean of Durham. He was son of the presbyterian minister of Edinburgh, also Walter, mentioned above, who had clashed with the archbishop of St. Andrews, and therefore a particularly pointed choice as the public defender of the king's policies. In an exhaustive examination of the Scottish crisis, Balcanquhall endeavors to expose the truth about how the Covenanters have treacherously used religion as a cloak for their real design, a

60. John Spottiswoode, *History of the Church of Scotland*, ed. M. Russell and Mark Napier, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1851), 276, 280, 287, 319. Inserted into vol. 1 is a facsimile of the license to print the *History*, dated November 18, 1639. It was published in 1655.

61. Spottiswoode, *History*, 281, 372.

62. *The Basilicon Doron of King James VI*, ed. James Craigie, vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London, 1944–50), 75, 77 (quoting the edition published in Edinburgh by Waldegrave in 1603).

smash-and-grab of the king's regal rights. To achieve their ends, the Covenanters had deployed the "basest sort" to take down the defenders of authority. The "tumult" and "barbarous hubbub" of July 23, 1637, was the profane work of the "scum of the people," "most of them women."<sup>63</sup> John Corbet's shorter *Ungirding of the Scottish Armour* (a mere 56 pages to Balcanquhall's 430) is based on the then-unpublished text of Alexander Henderson's "Instructions for Defensive Arms," read from many pulpits in 1639.<sup>64</sup> In a dialogue between "Covenanter" and "Anticovenanter," the former exposes the Covenant as a "Cloak" under which its authors brought forth, in notably gendered language, a "monstrous birth of informations for resisting the Lords Anonynted." Corbet, like Balcanquhall, portrays the Covenanters as a seditious faction that has endeavored to stir up the people. In place of Maddie's courageous lads and lasses defending true religion, Corbet describes "inferiours" who have claimed a "usurped authority and insolency" to "disclaime their Superiors."<sup>65</sup>

Covenanters were conscious of the need to respond to the aggressive polemical counteroffensive being waged against them by the Crown in 1639. On August 30, a committee of the general assembly discussed a supplication denouncing the *Large Declaration* as "Lies" and "Untruthes." Two weeks later, the Lords of the Articles debated whether the supplication should be read publicly in Parliament; the prorogation of November 14 prevented the passage of an act desiring the king to accede to the supplication.<sup>66</sup> That Balcanquhall's manifesto also caused distress to Robert Baillie is testimony to Covenanter fears that negative portrayals of their actions would rally English opinion against them. At around the same time, Baillie instructed a friend then traveling in England to send him "a catalogue of all that is printed against our late proceedings."<sup>67</sup>

Although "The Kealwyves Comoninge" does not engage directly with the polemical material published against the Covenanters, contemporaries would have read it in this context.<sup>68</sup> Maddie explicitly endorses both the right and the duty of the people to take autonomous action in defense of true religion. Her position attained

63. [Walter Balcanquhall], *A Large Declaration concerning the Late Tumults in Scotland* (London, 1639), 23, 26, 40.

64. Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*, 133–34. The "Instructions" were later published as *Some Speciall Arguments Which warranted the Scottish Subjects lawfully to take up Armes in defence of their Religion and Liberty* ([London and Amsterdam], [1642]).

65. Lysimachus Nicanor [John Corbet], *The Ungirding of the Scottish Armour: or, An Answer to the Informations for Defensive Armes against the Kings Majestie* (Dublin [i.e., London], 1639), 1, 13, 23.

66. RPS, C1639/8/9, September 11, 1639; *Records of the Kirk of Scotland, containing the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies from the Year 1638 Downwards*, ed. Alexander Peterkin (Edinburgh, 1838), 265–68.

67. *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1841–42), 208–9, 227.

68. I am grateful to Sam Fullerton for prompting me to think again about the interactions between these texts.

qualified support from Baillie, who acknowledged that popular “passions” had run high in 1637, yet excused the behavior of “good zealous people” who had no choice but to defend the true faith against the bishops.<sup>69</sup> While the Maddie character stands as a representative of the view that direct action by the people is justified when their magistrates have failed them, she does not provoke a more radical questioning of how the Scottish constitution should operate. The dialogue is an endorsement of the repeated Covenanter insistence that what is being sought is the restoration of the constitution to its proper functioning, stripped of the innovations effected by the episcopal estate since the turn of the century. It could be argued that the first section of the dialogue is a vision of disorder, in which political institutions have broken down and the principles of good government have been corrupted. This chaotic world, in which lowborn women openly impugn the actions of high-status men and physically attack them in the street, is described by the women themselves to show us what has gone wrong. It is the male narrator who offers us the remedy in the second section: “our leaders” must stand “stoutly” to Scotland’s “Religion, Lawes, Liberty and State” (lines 183–84) by ensuring that Parliament acts to protect true religion. Parliament is here being constructed as the “panacea for the ills of the commonweal” in terms analogous to contemporary English polemic.<sup>70</sup> “The Kealwyves Comoning” explicitly ties the security of the Church to the robustness of Scotland’s representative institutions:

For though religion rightly be restored  
If in the stait things go not right bot wronge  
It is ane matter much to be deplored  
Churche puritie be seure can not last longe  
For eache one other is seine for to depend  
One being faultie, the other without fail  
Will soune corrupte, experience is kend  
And error, be longe corruptione vill prewaile.  
(Lines 239–46)

These lines come near the end of “The Kealwyves Comoning.” They site the poem within narratives of legitimate action in defense of true religion utilized more formally by the Covenanters’ protestations and informations but do so in ways that re-emphasize the ambiguities of resorting to a lowborn female character with a controversial past. Recourse to the Maddie character reflects the fact that the politicians for whom she was a ventriloquist’s dummy, both in the 1560s and the 1630s, were mounting a challenge to established authority in a bid for power. As in the 1560s, the advice

69. Robert Baillie, *An Historicall Vindication of the Government of the Church of Scotland, from the manifold base calumnies which the most Malignant of the Prelats did invent of old* (London, 1646), 44, quoted in Stewart, *Rethinking*, 155.

70. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 16.

given by Maddie in 1639 was seemingly heeded by the great men of the realm. The “promise that a parliament could restore the kingdom by punishing evil counsellors” proved to be a “fantasy” in England, where civil war broke out in 1642.<sup>71</sup> In Scotland, by contrast, the Covenanters successfully secured the king’s grudging assent to constitutional reforms that placed the exercise of the royal prerogative into the hands of parliamentary representatives. Those “evil counsellors” par excellence, the bishops, were removed entirely from church and state. The Covenanters now wielded power through a remodeled privy council expunged of those unwilling to reconcile themselves to the new order.

The devices used by “The Kealwyves Comoninge” to reveal what was really going on in 1639 had consequences for the development of Covenanter political rhetoric. Opponents of Charles I’s policies in Scotland were constructing politics in much the same way as their English sympathizers, using tropes developed over many years within the transnational networks populated by English, Scottish, and Dutch puritans. Yet the historical narrative to which the kalewives speak is distinctively Scottish. The site of that narrative is a real place, Edinburgh, carefully realized by the author of the 1639 work as a deliberate reminder of the capital’s centrality to the battles fought to preserve God’s truth in Sempill’s time and again in his own.<sup>72</sup> In this respect, Maddie would have made little sense to either English or Dutch readers. Recent scholarly emphasis on the porosity of political boundaries and the shared conceptual spaces created by the circulation of texts has undeniably enriched our understanding of early modern communicative practices.<sup>73</sup> It remains important, nonetheless, to read transnational productions as contemporaries did, alongside material intended to speak to an imagined national community about its own history. The idea that the bishops had been intruded into the purest church in Christendom against its will, and within living memory, was crucial for persuading political elites to back, or at least not to oppose, the controversial act of extirpating the episcopate from both church and state.<sup>74</sup> It also placed limits on the more radical religious and constitutional implications of the appeal to popular activism. When the eavesdropper commends “*our kirk*” for putting down “*prelacie*” (line 151 [my italics]), he is implying that the bishops have been intruded into a church that is, in consequence, entirely justified in seeking to restore its former (presbyterian) purity simply by ejecting them. A similar view could be taken of Parliament once the bishops had been barred from all civil

71. Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation*, 21.

72. Dawson, *Scotland Re-Formed*, 277–81; Stewart, *Urban Politics*, chap. 6.

73. For important recent contributions to these debates, see Helmer J. Helmers, *The Royalist Republic: Literature, Politics, and Religion in the Anglo-Dutch Public Sphere, 1639–1660* (Cambridge, 2015); *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden, Netherlands, 2016); and Jason Peacey, “Print Culture, State Formation, and an Anglo-Scottish Public, 1640–1648,” *Journal of British Studies* 56, no. 4 (2017): 816–35.

74. For a key example, see Archibald Johnston of Warriston, *A Short Relation of the State of the Kirk of Scotland since the Reformation of Religion* ([Edinburgh], 1638).

offices. Neither church nor legislature is inherently corrupt. There was consequently no need to demolish either to put new creations in their place.<sup>75</sup>

More problematic is the poem's rhetoric of corruption and turncoats, which helps structure the idea that the people of a Covenanted nation need to be constantly alert to the signs that will expose the "enemy within." The language of malignancy, suggestive of disease spreading through a healthy body, was already present in War-riston's protestation of November 14, 1639. It pervades the public record from the mid-1640s, when a royalist rising came close to extinguishing Covenanter government. Corruption sprouting from the inside was manifested in the person of the rebellion's leader, the turncoat Covenanter James Graham, Marquess of Montrose, whose loyalties had been suspected almost from the outset. Intensive investigations into political loyalty conducted under the 1646 Act of Classes, which was renewed and extended in 1649, sought to root out the backsliding and moral weakness that had allowed the infection to spread. The irony was that an exercise intended to restore Covenanter unity further exposed divisions both in national politics and in local communities.<sup>76</sup>

Covenanters were highly sensitive to the charge that the visibility and volubility of women indicated that their challenge to royal authority was risking the collapse of the sociopolitical order. The taking of the Covenant in at least some parishes in 1638 gave further prominence to women: few appear to have signed it, but many more undoubtedly swore it. Anxieties about the assertive role taken by women in the late 1630s may explain some distinctions between Sempill's Maddie and her later reincarnation. The 1639 author has placed Maddie within a familiar literary genre, the overheard dialogue, which depends on negative gender stereotypes.<sup>77</sup> Maddie is not permitted to address the public directly, as she had done in the 1570s. She is presented as holding a private conversation with another woman of her own social standing, seemingly oblivious to the presence of the eavesdropper. Her speech has been contained within the interpretative structures provided by the male narrator. The effect is the attenuation of the oracular qualities exhibited by Maddie's sixteenth-century self. The scene constructed for Maddie puts it beyond doubt that her candidness is genuine. She has no reason to flatter, dissemble, or lie when she is speaking in confidence to a social equal. This strategy removes any concerns about either the breach of social decorum when an inferior speaks freely to a superior or the temptation to alleviate the resulting discomfort by resorting to apology and praise.

Sempill's Maddie had engaged in this kind of rhetoric when averring, in an act of self-excusing, that only the urging of the other market women had made this "wyfe" audacious enough to write with her "awin hand." As the 1639 author appears to have realized, truth-tellers have a problem when their words are spoken in public: the speaker's desire to win over the audience can lead to a duplicitous form of *licentia* and,

75. *Scottish Pasquils*, ed. Maidment, 85. Cf. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 70–72.

76. For a fuller analysis, see Stewart, *Rethinking*, 246–55.

77. Loughlin, "The Dialogue," 244. See also McElroy, "Uses of Genre and Gender," 204.

hence, to the suspicion that *licentia* is itself a deception. Frankness becomes a rhetorical play—a “frankness effect”—in which truths that an audience was always prepared to accept are packaged in such a way that the speaker’s powers to persuade can nonetheless be applauded.<sup>78</sup> Maddie’s authority has been made to give way to the need for authenticity. The figure who once gave commands and counsel as the “Piores of the Caill mercat” is nearly mistaken by the eavesdropper for a common gossip.<sup>79</sup>

Further possibilities for developing the Maddie persona do not appear to have been taken up by later writers. We might speculate that both the real author and his creation belonged to a creative and confident style of post-Reformation Scottish polemic that jarred in the wake of the experience of war and occupation by an English army. Gender stereotyping should also be considered. In a male-dominated culture where women’s voices were not meant to be heard in political spaces, Maddie represented a dangerous and subversive challenge to accepted social norms. The male eavesdropper has to concede that Maddie’s critique of current politics cannot be dismissed, denigrated, or ridiculed simply because it has come from a woman’s mouth. Maddie’s claim to be taken seriously as a woman with a legitimate interest in public affairs would have been threatening enough.<sup>80</sup> Taken in the context of the known involvement of women of some social standing in the organization of resistance to the Prayer Book, Maddie becomes a commentator on the realities of female authority in presbyterian circles. In the wake of the destruction of Covenanter government, the English occupation, and the restoration of the British monarchy, Maddie was an all-too-potent signifier for the forces of disorder that much of the Scottish political elite wanted to see contained. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Restoration satirists returned to less inventive forms of gender stereotyping in consequence.<sup>81</sup>

Yet the kalewives’ positive contribution to the shaping of political discourse in the post-Reformation century ought to be acknowledged. Our kalewives gave voice to a vivid and inventive “seditious memory” among a community of people who had actively opposed royal religious policy for around half a century. They represent the triumph of a narrative in which the attainment of religious truth against all odds continued to be lived through familial and professional networks, as well as the circulation of illicit texts. The oppositionist activities of younger generations after 1603

78. “Maddeis Proclamatioun,” lines 17, 185–88; David Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2005), chap. 2, esp. 28, 42, 44, 48. See also Dzelzainis, “Presbyterian Sibyl,” 114–15.

79. “The Bird in the Cage,” in *Satirical Poems*, ed. Cranstoun, vol. 1, no. 22, line 119.

80. For a similar interpretation in the English context, see Sharon Achinstein, “Women on Top in the Pamphlet Literature of the English Revolution,” in “Gender, Literature and English Revolution,” ed. Achinstein, special issue, *Women’s Studies* 24, nos. 1–2 (1994): 131–63, esp. 142–43, 153.

81. For example, Elizabeth Murray, Countess of Dysart suo jure and Duchess of Lauderdale, who is portrayed in Restoration satire as a sexually voracious despot who shares traits with Buchanan’s Mary, Queen of Scots; “Satire on the Duchess of Lauderdale,” in *Scottish Pasquils*, ed. Maidment, 243 [i.e., 234]–42.

continued to add new features to the presbyterian “mnemonic landscape.” These narratives would be used during the 1640s, with considerable success, to underpin the assertion of a new “mnemonic hegemony” based on the communal experience of taking the Covenants.<sup>82</sup> Women were central to the networks, both personal and scribal, that had sustained these memories through testing times. They took a leading role in the events that brought down Charles I’s government and brought in the Covenanters—a positive and authoritative role, legitimated by existing traditions of female activism in godly circles.<sup>83</sup>

This essay has shown how the established literary trope of the truth-telling woman was appropriated by godly Protestant polemicists in the Reformation era. It provided the cultural context in which the notion of allowing sisters, wives, and daughters to swear the Covenant, perhaps at their own behest, became acceptable. The respect accorded to such women is evident in the way in which the kalewives are depicted. The women give their opinion first, without interruption or contradiction. There is no bawdiness or drunkenness. The wives make no apologies for their frankness and, while they praise the actions of the Covenanters, they cannot be accused of contaminating free speech with adulation.<sup>84</sup> Knowledge of God has entitled them to use their judgment to determine what constitutes right action and who has acted falsely. They have tacitly been permitted to exercise a form of justice, by publicly denouncing the “deceavors” revealed to them with God’s guidance. Maddie exemplifies a form of publicness that is engaged and critical. She stands on the boundary between the street and the parliament house; between governors and governed; between the marketplaces where women are purveyors as well as consumers and the private rooms where powerful men deliberate on matters of state. Maddie is testament to the ambiguities of female authority as they were imagined in early modern Scotland. Although the kalewives can work as literary devices only in a hierarchical society that understood women to be the inferiors of men, they are depicted as honorable and honest members of a community to which they are integral. With this in mind, it no longer seems surprising, but entirely apposite, that the characters invited to speak for the Covenanted nation in 1639 should have been female.

82. For an important exploration of these ideas in the postwar era, see Edward Legon, *Revolution Remembered: Seditious Memories after the British Civil Wars* (Manchester, 2019), introduction.

83. David Stevenson, “Conventicles in the Kirk, 1619–37: The Emergence of a Radical Party,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 18, no. 2 (1973): 99–114; David G. Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590–1638* (Oxford, 2000), chap. 5. Jamie Reid-Baxter’s work on Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross, and her circle describes the richness of Scottish puritan culture and the importance of women’s contributions to it; see, for example, Reid-Baxter, “Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross: New Light from Fife,” *Innes Review* 68, no. 1 (2017): 38–77.

84. See Colclough, *Freedom of Speech*, 44, quoting Erasmus, *Parabolae*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors, in *Collected Works*, vol. 23, *Literary and Educational Writings I: Antibarbari / Parabolae*, ed. Craig R. Thompson (Toronto, 1978), 131–34.

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