

1986

James Hogg's Second Thoughts on The Three Perils of Man

Douglas S. Mack

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mack, Douglas S. (1986) "James Hogg's Second Thoughts on The Three Perils of Man," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 21: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol21/iss1/14>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Douglas S. Mack

James Hogg's Second Thoughts on
The Three Perils of Man



The Three Perils of Man; or, War, Women and Witchcraft was first published in 1822, and was reprinted with considerable alterations in Blackie's posthumous 1837 edition of Hogg's *Tales and Sketches*. In his Scottish Academic Press edition of the novel, Douglas Gifford suggests that Hogg was himself responsible for these changes, which were made because of his "demoralisation" and "lack of self-confidence" in the face of hostile criticism.¹ Some modifications of this view are suggested in the present article.

Hogg's letters suggest that he began to work on *The Three Perils of Man* towards the end of 1819. Approximately a third of the novel had been completed by the spring of 1820, but work on this project was then laid aside for some months. By May 1821, however, the novel had been completed, and part of the manuscript was sent for consideration to the Edinburgh publishers Oliver and Boyd. Much to Hogg's dismay Oliver and Boyd decided not to proceed, but by October 1821 *The Three Perils* had been accepted for publication by Longman in London. Printing was in progress during November and December, and the work was eventually published in three volumes in 1822.²

The novel is set during the reign of Robert II, and the early chapters tell of an attempt by the Scots to dislodge an English garrison from the castle of Roxburgh. Attention then turns to an expedition by some of the Scots to the home of the celebrated wizard Michael Scott, and in the final chapters the story of the siege and the story of the expedition are brought to a conclusion.

Blackie's 1837 edition of Hogg's *Tales and Sketches* does not include a work entitled *The Three Perils of Man*, but "The Siege of Roxburgh," which appears in volume VI, pp. 67-274, is in fact a shortened version of the 1822 work. "The Siege of Roxburgh" reprints the early chapters of *The Three Perils*—that is to say the chapters which deal with the siege; it omits the chapters which deal with the expedition to Michael Scott; and its version of the concluding chapters removes the various references to this expedition which appear in the original version.

In the case of Hogg's novel *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, some revisions made for the 1837 collection appear to be the work of Hogg, and others appear to have been made at the instigation of Blackie & Son.³ Who, then, was responsible for the metamorphosis of *The Three Perils of Man* into "The Siege of Roxburgh"? Some light is shed on the matter by Hogg's letters and reminiscences. For example, in his *Memoir of the Author's Life* Hogg writes of *The Three Perils of Man*:

Lord preserve us! what a medley I made of it! for I never in my life rewrote a page of prose; and being impatient to get hold of some of Messrs. Longman and Co.'s money or their bills, which were the same, I dashed on, and mixed up with what might have been made one of the best historical tales our country ever produced, such a mass of diablerie as retarded the main story, and rendered the whole perfectly ludicrous.⁴

Similarly, in his *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, Hogg reports Scott's opinion of the novel:

When *The Three perils of Man* appeared he read me a long lecture on my extravagance in demonology and assured me I had ruined one of the best tales in the world. It is manifest however that the tale had made no ordinary impression on him as he subsequently copied the

whole of the main plot into his tale of *Castle Dangerous*.⁵

Hogg, then, came to feel that the "diablerie" of the expedition to Michael Scott "retarded the main story" of *The Three Perils*. This clearly suggests that Hogg himself may have been responsible for the revisions which delete the diablerie, and thus convert *The Three Perils* into "The Siege of Roxburgh." Support for this conclusion is provided by a letter written by Hogg to William Blackwood on 26 May 1830. At this period Hogg was beginning to lay plans for a collected edition of his work, and he writes that for such an edition "The Perils of Man which contains some of the best parts and the worst of all my prose works I would divide into seven distinct tales."⁶

In 1832 Hogg visited London in order to arrange for the publication of a collected edition of his prose to be entitled *Altrive Tales*. On leaving London he wrote to his publisher James Cochrane, giving detailed instructions for the contents of the first seven volumes of the proposed series.⁷ In this letter, Hogg indicates that "The Seige of Roxburgh" is to occupy the third volume.⁸ In the event, only one volume of *Altrive Tales* was published, because Cochrane became bankrupt. Nevertheless, Hogg's use in this letter of the title "The Siege of Roxburgh" is another strong indication that he himself revised *The Three Perils*, and that his revisions were followed in the text of "The Siege of Roxburgh" published in Blackie's *Tales and Sketches* of 1837.

In his letter to Blackwood of 26 May 1830, Hogg indicated that he intended to split *The Three Perils* into "seven distinct tales." This intention was fulfilled, at least in part. The volume of *Altrive Tales* which did appear contains a short story, "Marion's Jock," which is reprinted for the portion of *The Three Perils* devoted to the expedition to Michael Scott. The same quarry also supplied Hogg with the verse tale "The Three Sisters," published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1835.⁹ No doubt other tales would have been extracted from *The Three Perils of Man* if Hogg had lived to see a collected edition of his prose through the press.

It seems clear from all this that by the 1830s Hogg believed that the "diablerie" of the Michael Scott chapters had spoiled a first-rate historical tale about the siege of Roxburgh castle; he therefore wished to extract the historical tale from the main body

of *The Three Perils*, and to make use of the "diablerie" in separate shorter works, thus making up a total of "seven distinct tales."

How did Hogg arrive at this figure? In the part of the novel which deals with the expedition to Michael Soctt, there is a story-telling contest during which five separate tales are told. *The Three Perils* therefore falls naturally into seven portions: the story of the siege; the story of the expedition to Michael Scott, with its diablerie; and the five tales told during the story-telling contest (including the tales later reprinted as "Marion's Jock" and "The Three Sisters"). These seven portions have no very obvious thematic connection, and as a result *The Three Perils* (for all its vigor and color) is somewhat chaotic as far as structure is concerned. In the light of this, Hogg's desire to split the novel into "seven distinct tales" seems to be a rational decision, which can be understood without resort to Douglas Gifford's view that the revisions in the 1837 text are symptomatic of a debilitating lack of self-confidence which caused Hogg "to savage *The Three Perils of Man*" in his later years. Nevertheless the evidence clearly supports Gifford's assumption that Hogg himself was responsible for these revisions.¹⁰

How then should a modern editor approach *The Three Perils* and the shorter tales derived from it? If the arguments presented above are accepted, then it is clear that the complete, original text of *The Three Perils* does not represent Hogg's *final* intentions for the work. Nevertheless the complete novel is a work of genuine literary merit, and an editor could rationally choose to produce an edition which seeks to reflect Hogg's intentions in the early 1820s, rather than his intentions in the early 1830s. The manuscript of *The Three Perils* does not survive, and the novel was not reprinted during Hogg's lifetime. The first edition, therefore, is our only guide to Hogg's intentions for this text during the early 1820s. In these circumstances an editor of the complete novel will of course base his text on the first edition—and this is the course followed by Douglas Gifford. Naturally Gifford's edition of 1972 also seeks to correct obvious errors made by the printers of the 1822 text.¹¹ This is an entirely reasonable procedure, and gives a text which presents the novel as conceived and written by Hogg.

As an alternative, an editor might wish to provide a series of texts which would present Hogg's *final* intention—which was to

divide the novel into "seven distinct tales." In order to examine how this might be done, we shall now consider the seven tales in turn, beginning with "The Siege of Roxburgh."

The textual differences between "The Siege of Roxburgh" of 1837 and *The Three Perils* of 1822 are listed and discussed in Gifford's edition of the novel (pp. 465-66). For the most part, the variants are deletions designed to remove the "diablerie" of the expedition to Michael Scott; but, as Gifford puts it, there are also "occasional attempts to bowdlerise and similarly modify the original." Gifford also points out that "in several places Hogg's spelling has been interfered with" in the 1837 version. On the whole, however, the 1837 text follows the general pattern of the punctuation of the original 1822 version, and it therefore seems likely that the printer of "The Siege of Roxburgh" worked from a marked copy of the first edition of *The Three Perils*.

In these circumstances, what strategy should be adopted by an editor of "The Siege of Roxburgh"? The evidence we have examined suggests that Hogg was responsible for the major cuts which cause "The Siege of Roxburgh" to be only a third of the length of *The Three Perils*. As is the case with *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, however, the changes to Hogg's spelling and the attempts to bowdlerize the 1837 text may well have been produced at the instigation of Blackie & Son. It would seem reasonable, therefore, for an editor of "The Siege of Roxburgh" to follow those cuts and changes in wording in the 1837 text which he attributes to Hogg, but to reject those cuts and changes in wording which he attributes to Blackie & Son.¹²

This, then, suggests a strategy so far as the words of the text are concerned. What of the accidentals—that is to say spelling, punctuation, capitalization and the like? The variants in accidentals between the 1822 and 1837 texts are of a kind which a printer would be likely to introduce in setting a new edition, and it would therefore be reasonable to follow the accidentals of the earlier text, as it is a step nearer Hogg's manuscript in the chain of transmission. In other words, an editor of "The Siege of Roxburgh" should use the first edition of *The Three Perils* as his copy-text; he should attempt to correct any printer's errors in the first edition; and he should incorporate into his text the very substantial cuts and other changes (including the change in title) which appear to have been made by Hogg for the collected edition eventually published as the 1837 *Tales and Sketches*.

What, then, of the six other tales which Hogg intended to extract from *The Three Perils*? "Marion's Jock" appeared in the single published volume of *Altrive Tales* in 1832, as has been noted. This story, which occupies pp. 164-90 of *Altrive Tales*, corresponds to the story entitled "Laird of Peatstacknowe's Tale" which occupies vol. II, pp. 188-224 of the first edition of *The Three Perils*, where it forms part of the story-telling contest. The *Altrive Tales* version omits from the first paragraph an aside in which the narrator refers to the situation in the novel:

(I wish we had sic things here, even though we had to fight for them!)

In addition, the *Altrive Tales* text makes a number of minor changes, of a kind that might be expected to appear in a somewhat careless reprinting. Some of these changes are clearly errors: for example, "goodman" and "goodwife" in *The Three Perils* frequently become "good man" and "good wife" in *Altrive Tales*. As with "The Siege of Roxburgh," therefore, it would seem sensible for an editor of "Marion's Jock" to use the first edition of *The Three Perils* as his copy-text, and to follow any changes in the later version which appear to be the work of the author, rather than the publisher or printer. In "Marion's Jock" only two changes appear to be authorial: the change in the title of the story, and the deletion of the aside in the first paragraph.

Like "Marion's Jock," "The Three Sisters" is one of the tales from the story-telling contest in *The Three Perils*. It is the final tale of the contest, and occupies vol. III, pp. 41-81 of the first edition. In the novel it is entitled "The Poet's Tale"; and, appropriately enough, the rhythms of blank verse are recognizable in the story, even though it is printed as prose. When Hogg decided to republish the tale out of its context in the novel, there was no longer anything to be gained from printing it in prose form. "The Three Sisters" therefore appears as a poem in blank verse in the June 1835 number of *Fraser's Magazine* (vol. XI, pp. 666-79).

Apart from the change from prose to verse, a number of revisions were made to the words of the text for the *Fraser's Magazine* printing. This process may be illustrated by quoting a short extract from each version.

From *The Three Perils* (1822):

Once on a time, in that sweet northern land called Otholine, the heathen Hongar landed, and o'er-ran city and dale. The rampart and the flood in vain withstood his might. Even to the base of the unconquered Grampians did he wend with fire and sword; and all who would not kneel, and sacrifice to his strange northern gods, he tortured to the death. (III, 44)

From *Fraser's Magazine*, XI (1835), p. 667:

Once on a time, in that sweet northern land
Called Otholine, the heathen Hongar landed,
And laid waste city, church, and fruitful dale—
The rampart and the flood in vain withstood him:
Even to the base of the unconquered Grampians
He bare with fire and sword. Destruction groaned
Behind his host, and trembling dread before;
And all who would not kneel and sacrifice
To his strange northern gods, he put to death.

Some of the revisions in wording are quite substantial—but in essence "The Three Sisters" is "The Poet's Tale" re-cast in blank verse. When he was submitting the work to *Fraser's*, Hogg no doubt found it convenient to produce a new manuscript in verse form and no doubt the revisions were made at that stage. The manuscript does not survive, and "The Three Sisters" has never been reprinted since it first appeared in *Fraser's*. It would therefore be natural for an editor of the poem to follow the 1835 *Fraser's* text.

Hogg proposed to divide *The Three Perils* into "seven distinct tales"—but because a collected edition of his work was not published during his lifetime, he was able to arrange for the publication of only three of the seven ("The Siege of Roxburgh," "Marion's Jock" and "The Three Sisters"). In these circumstances, how might an editor set about providing texts of the remaining four tales? Three of the four would be the remaining tales in the story-telling contest in *The Three Perils*: "The Friar's Tale," "Charlie Scott's Tale," and "Tam Craik's Tale." In these cases, the editor could simply reprint the stories from the first edition of

the novel.

The seventh and last of Hogg's "seven distinct tales" was presumably the story of the expedition to Michael Scott; that is to say, what remains of the novel after "The Siege of Roxburgh" and the story-telling contest have been extracted. This portion of the novel could be printed as a separate story under a suitable title chosen by the editor: "The Castle of Aikwood," perhaps, from the name of Michael Scott's residence. For such a project, the editor would clearly have to follow the text of the appropriate portion of the first edition of *The Three Perils*. Naturally enough there would be some awkward transitions in the narrative in a text extracted in this way from the main novel. Only the author himself could solve this problem satisfactorily, but an editor might ameliorate it by means of judicious linking notes.

The strategy outlined above would enable an editor to present *The Three Perils* as "seven distinct tales," in accordance with Hogg's final intentions. This would usefully complement Douglas Gifford's existing edition, which presents the work as originally conceived and written by Hogg.

University of Stirling

NOTES

¹ See James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Man*, introduction, textual notes and glossary by Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh and London, 1972), p. xvi. Gifford expresses a similar view in his later book, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 136.

² See Hogg's letters to William Blackwood of 16 November, 30 November and 10 December 1819 (National Library of Scotland, MS. 4004, ff. 156-61); Blackwood's letters to Hogg of 3 and 15 August 1820 (NLS, MS. 2245, ff. 42-45); Hogg's letters to Blackwood of 10 January 1820 (NLS, MS. 4005, ff. 148-49), 13 April 1820 (NLS, MS. 4807, ff. 40-41), and 20 August and 7 October 1820 (NLS, MS. 4005, ff. 162-65); Hogg's letters to George Boyd of 5 May and 27 June 1821 (NLS, MS. Acc 5000); Hogg's letter to Sir Walter Scott of 26 June 1821 (NLS, MS. 3892,

ff. 180-81); Hogg's letter to Blackwood of 3 July 1821 (NLS, MS. 4007, ff. 30-31); Longman's letter to Hogg of 18 October 1821 (Longman Archives, part 1, item 101, letter-book 1820-25, f. 174C); and Hogg's letters to Scott of 16 November and 10 December 1821 (NLS, MS. 3893, ff. 159-60 and 181-82).

³ See Douglas S. Mack, "The Transmission of the Text of Hogg's *Brownie of Bodsbeck*," *The Bibliothek*, 8 (1976), 7-46.

⁴ Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh & London, 1972), p. 55. This section of the *Memoir* appears to have been written in 1832.

⁵ Hogg, *Memoir and Scott*, ed. Mack, p. 108. Hogg's *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott* were written in 1833.

⁶ National Library of Scotland, MS. 4036, ff. 102-03.

⁷ Beinecke Library, Yale University, MS. Vault Shelves Hogg (letter of 19 March 1832).

⁸ The spelling "Seige" in the letter is characteristic of Hogg.

⁹ See Hogg, *Altrive Tales* (London, 1832), pp. 164-90 for "Marion's Jock"; and Hogg, "The Three Sisters," *Fraser's Magazine*, XI (1835), 666-79.

¹⁰ See *The Three Perils of Man*, ed. Gifford, p. xvi and pp. 465-66; and Gifford, *James Hogg*, p. 136.

¹¹ For these corrections, see *The Three Perils of Man*, ed. Gifford, pp. 465-66.

¹² One substantial cut which may be the work of Blackie is listed by Gifford as appearing in his edition at p. 432 line 11 (see *The Three Perils of Man*, ed. Gifford, p. 466).