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David Groves

Stepping Back to an Early Age: James Hogg's *Three Perils of Woman* and the *Ion* of Euripides



James Hogg's *Three Perils of Woman; or, Love, Leasing, and Jealousy* is a brilliant, searching, and enigmatic work which loosely but vividly re-casts Euripides' tragedy of *Ion* in both nineteenth- and eighteenth-century Scotland. Written one year before Hogg's *Confessions*, *The Three Perils of Woman* is indebted to *Ion* for some aspects of plot and character, and follows Euripides in profoundly questioning the nature of divine justice by examining the sufferings of women. The novel presents questions, rather than answers, and so most of its 1823 reviewers were petrified by its "vulgarity" and its "shockingly irreverent" approach. Such a work was clearly unfit for women: one critic felt obliged to "make it a sealed book" for his wife and daughters, while another felt that Hogg's "occasional bursts of a higher strain" were unfortunately contaminated "with grosser passages, that must banish 'The three perils of Woman' from the toilets of those who would wish to learn what the perils are."¹

At first sight the work can be confusing in its division into overlapping volumes, "Perils," letters, and tales. The first Peril

comprises volumes one and two, and contains two separate stories: the romance of Gatty and Cherry and the shorter comic tale of their cousin Richard Rickleton. "Peril Second" and "Peril Third" together make up volume three, which describes the adventures of Sarah Niven in 1745 and 46. The first two tales illustrate the Peril of *Love*, while the final tale warns against the two Perils of *Leasing* (or lying) and *Jealousy*. Chronologically, however, *The Three Perils of Woman* resembles Hogg's *Confessions* in being divided approximately into two halves, the first set in contemporary Scotland in the 1820's, and the second set in the same country a century earlier.

In the opening Peril two cousins named Gatty and Cherry fall in love with a young Highlander of uncertain parentage who has the significant name of Diarmid McIon. Gatty and Cherry ostensibly remain friends, even though they recognize each other as rivals and as opposite types of personality. The "pure and delicate-minded" Gatty struggles "against [her] growing passion"² and vows "never more to expose herself to the blandishments of idle and unmeaning love" (I, 54). Cherry's attitude is very different, for, as she explains, "I will always think as I feel, and express what I think, . . . and if I should love Mr. McIon ever so well, and die for him too, what has any body to say?" (I, 74).

Gatty is the daughter of a well-to-do Border farmer, but cousin Cherry is an orphan, "a poor dependant girl, without fortune, and without a piano" (I, 297). McIon at first loves Gatty, but then turns to the more demonstrative Cherry, who promptly accepts his proposal of marriage. Suddenly McIon is reunited with his long-lost mother, and learns that he is "a Highland Chief" (II, 100) and heir to a large estate. Gatty renews her interest in McIon, but the reader is never certain whether she is motivated by selfishness, snobbery, or love. It soon becomes obvious that McIon still loves Gatty, and Cherry sadly agrees to relinquish her claim. At the wedding Cherry, serving as bridesmaid, falls into a trance:

McIon's hand was already extended: the bride gave her maiden a quick tap on the arm to remind her of her duty: Cherry started as from a dream, but, instead of pulling off her cousin's glove, she stretched out her hand to put it into the bridegroom's. That hand did not open to receive hers. Poor little Cherry's hand was turned aside; and the bride,

a more conscious or social level, once she or he has returned to the everyday world. Thus, Gatty ends up a responsible, caring adult, a mother, and she and McIon repair their marriage and move to the Highlands to look after the estate.

Most twentieth-century critics have condemned the tale of Cherry, Gatty, and McIon as "wildly improbable," as "a kind of compendium of false taste," or as "completely incongruous" in its mixture of drawing-room romance with "prosaic background of a Border farming family."³ These reactions are partly valid, and indeed the first story of *The Three Perils of Woman* is its weakest part. Only later, after reading the second and third tales, are we likely to sense the imaginative harmony of the work as a whole.

Like the two later stories, the first part of Hogg's novel has striking affinities with Euripides' play *Ion*.⁴ In *Ion* the title character discovers his parentage, comes to be re-united with his mother, and is destined to become a national hero. Whereas Ion learns that he is the child of Apollo and the mortal Creusa, McIon learns that he is the son of a Highland chief and the Lowland servant Mrs. Johnson. Ion will later become the "founder of the colonies / On th' Asiatic coast,"⁵ and a major figure in the growth of Greek civilization, just as McIon (and the final part of *The Three Perils of Woman* will emphasize this theme) will help to heal the divisions of Scottish society and rejuvenate the Highlands by reclaiming his estate and settling in the north with his Border wife Gatty.

Much of the interest in Euripides' play centers on Apollo's barbarous treatment of Creusa in the past, whom he had raped in fathering Ion. "How wretched is our sex," cries Creusa bitterly,

And, O ye gods,
What deeds are yours? Where may we hope for right,
If by th' injustice of your pow'r undone?⁶

This theme will become more prominent in the final section of *The Three Perils of Woman*, but in the first story it is conveyed through Daniel's questions about divine justice, as he sees his niece die and his daughter succumb to a coma. "O Lord," he cries, "why art thou thus laying thy hand upon us in thy hot displeasure?" (II, 164). Hogg follows Euripides in expressing skepticism of easy or conventional forms of religion which ignore

the central human realities of uncertainty and suffering. Daniel's heartfelt and questioning prayer is in contrast to what Gatty contemptuously dismisses as the "exhortations of . . . formal divines" (II, 130). "I maun expostulate with ye a wee," Daniel prays; "There are some things that the heart of man can neither thole, nor his head comprehend" (II, 134). It is hardly surprising that one reviewer found in this passage a "sporting with things sacred" and a "blasphemous . . . familiarity with the Deity," even going so far as to warn the author against "a fourth peril, —that of a prosecution by the attorney-general."⁷

The middle story of *The Three Perils of Woman* is the comic tale of Richard Rickleton. According to one critic, this is a "piece of coarseness" in which the "burly, hot-headed, wholly ridiculous" hero "marries a lewd woman whom he afterwards learns is with child by her seducer."⁸ Richard Rickleton is a distant cousin of Gatty's and Cherry's. He marries a woman who, as he explains, "has a kind affectionate heart, and is very much disposed to the tender passion" (II, 245). So affectionate is she, that Cathrine Rickleton gives birth to a son only three months after their marriage. Arriving at his wife's bedside shortly after the birth of the child, Richard fails to realize that the "spruce lawyer" standing beside her is actually his wife's former lover. He demands to know "whether that boy can possibly be mine or not";

‘Mhoai, sir, I believe,’ said the lawyer, ‘that the child being born in lawful wedlock, is yours in the eye of the law.’

‘It strikes me that he has been forthcoming excessively soon,’ says I.

‘Mhoai, sir—Mhoai, that very often happens with the first child,’ said the lawyer. ‘But it very rarely ever happens again; *Very* rarely, indeed. But, God bless you, sir! It is quite common with a woman's first child.’

This gave me great comfort. So I opened the door and thanked the gentlemen for their courtesy; and they rushed out, the lawyer foremost and the doctor hard after him . . .’ (II, 269-70)

Richard's suspicions are aroused, however, when a maid informs him that the lawyer is "No other than the seducer of your lady,

and the father of yon babe" (II, 275). Vowing to wreak a horrible revenge on the lawyer, Richard unfortunately chases the wrong man across Scotland and ends up in a Glasgow jail on a charge of assault. In court he confesses his error, and pleads, "Whoy, after all, I must beg the gentleman's pardon. I has been guilty of a foolish mistake" (II, 300).

Richard Rickleton's "very confused state of mind" (II, 271) causes him to confuse personal identity, and finally to admit that, just like his rival, he himself is "guilty" also. Like the trance and coma of the first story, these adventures lead the protagonist into a realm of extreme uncertainty, where he must concede affinity with a rival, and where implicitly all of humanity is united by virtue of its frailty and its involvement in mystery. In many ways this tale echoes both the preceding story, and Euripides' *Ion*, with all three works depicting extra-marital sex, a love-triangle, the birth of a son, the descent of major characters into a personal chaos, and finally the overcoming of rivalry.

Meanwhile Cathrine Rickleton pleads, "Love alone was my error" (II, 310), explaining to her husband how the lawyer had seduced and also robbed her. Richard at length relents, adopting her "little rogue" (II, 309-10) as his heir, and adding with pleasure, "I never knew what social happiness was before" (II, 329). He expects to be made a laughing-stock among his neighbors, but the man he most fears becomes his friend and tells him that, "with all your obstreperous oddities," Richard is "possessed of a more gentle, forgiving, and benevolent heart, than almost any other of your sex" (II, 327-28). Although the hero is a comic figure, he develops towards maturity after enduring and acknowledging the amorphous uncertainty at the center of human relationships. Having seen the vision of human oneness at that primitive and frightening level, he returns to his normal existence and helps create a basis for fellowship and "social happiness" by transcending rivalry and learning to forgive. The story of Richard Rickleton, like both the previous tale and *Ion*, ends with a vision of harmony based on the union of man, woman, and child.

Each section of *The Three Perils of Woman* presents from a different angle Hogg's distinction between superficial, rigid, or intolerant religion, on one hand, and on the other a deeper faith which takes into account the obvious facts of suffering and

mankind's inability to know with certainty. In the middle story Richard's simple act of forgiveness and acceptance stands in pointed contrast to the disturbing fact that, as Cathrine says, "No reverend divine will, out of pity or commiseration, pronounce a blessing on [the child's] unhallowed head" (II, 319). James Hogg implies that much of the apparent cruelty of the gods or God is the fault of hypocritical clergy, but at times his novel has the tone of Creusa's angry accusation, as she stands near the altar crying out to Apollo, "Son of Latona, thee before this light / Will I reprove."⁹

In *Ion*, Apollo deceives Creusa's husband Xuthus into thinking that he (Xuthus) is the boy's father, in order

that the child
When to Cruesa's house brought back, by her
May be agniz'd; the bridal rites of Phoebus
Kept secret, that the youth may claim the state
Due to his birth¹⁰

The situation of the cuckolded Xuthus is similar to that of Richard Rickleton, who at the height of his rage declares that "a man who has an estate to heir, and leases on lands that extend to seventeen thousand acres, which are heritable property—*ought* to be entitled to be the father of his own child" (II, 246). Creusa's and Cathrine's reputations are saved when each of their rich husbands adopts the child in question as his heir; this in turn ensures that when he grows up the child will be able to play a prominent role in the politics of his nation. Both *Ion* and the Rickleton story end with the establishment of social (or family) harmony which is apparently based on the will of God or the gods, but which is also, in a literal sense, false, since it conceals the truth of an illegitimate birth. As in the first tale, this implies that uncertainty and mystery are necessary, central aspects of human relationships and society. The paradoxical implication is that human beings are both separated from each other, and at the same time deeply united, because of their fundamental exclusion from certainty.

The third and final story of *The Three Perils of Woman* begins in 1745. It too presents the basic themes of confusion, the sufferings of women, and the nature or even existence of divine justice. In this tale, the minister, an "old amorous divine"

servant; and though I intend raising you to rank and high respect, I will not suffer you to go away with that young officer. I dislike his look exceedingly.'

'Aih, how can ye say that, maister? I think I never saw as gude a looking young gentleman i' my life.' (III, 140-42)

His self-importance makes the minister oblivious to the ironic implication that everyone is Sarah's "cousin," or that all people are indeed in a sense "connected." He continues to judge others with absolute faith in his own omniscience, and appropriately he claims to "know the gentleman perfectly well." By continually imposing judgmental and categorical terms like "honour," "virtue," "rank," and "respect," the parson holds himself aloof from the central message of *The Three Perils of Woman* as a whole.

Yet ironically the minister becomes a powerful symbol of the very qualities he tries to deny or repress. The fact that Hogg does not give him a name makes the clergyman an even more menacing and mysterious figure (a little like the strangely-named Gil-Martin in the *Confessions*), and at the same time tends to undermine his much-vaunted individualism and superiority. When he is freed from Inverness, his first concern is to protect his possessions, and he rides home across a battlefield ignoring the cries of wounded and dying soldiers, until he is thrown from his horse and lands unconscious on top of a rotting corpse. Although the minister is blind to the meaning of this episode, it nevertheless resembles Cherry's trance, Gatty's coma, or Richard Rickleton's "foolish mistake" by dramatically affirming his affinities with other people and his subjection to ordinary human limitations.

The minister finally discerns that Sarah does not love him. He immediately dismisses her, refusing to pay the five years' wages she has earned. On the same day Peter Gow breaks their engagement because he assumes that she has been sleeping with the minister. Sarah admits that her troubles spring from "her own want of veracity" (III, 234), and she tries "to begin life anew" (III, 233). She gives up deceit and flirtation, and in doing so implicitly recognizes the inadequacy of human fellowship on a primitive, undifferentiating, and promiscuous level. Like the protagonists of the two preceding stories, Sarah ascends from the frightening amorphous realm, and subsequently affirms the vision of oneness or kinship on a higher, moral, and social level.

She also moves up in the social hierarchy, for, again like Gatty, she marries a Highland gentleman. Her husband Alaster is a Jacobite soldier, and after the defeat and massacre of Culloden Sarah sets out to discover whether he has been killed or is merely in hiding. As she wanders slowly southward through the Highlands Sarah finds "her husband's kinsmen and associates hanged up, and butchered in the most wanton manner" (III, 249). She comes to a house "that had lately been reduced to ashes," containing "the bodies of a woman and two boys, half roasted" (III, 261). The King's burial agent describes to her the scene at Culloden:

Tere were tey lhying tier above tier, and rhank pehind rhank; but te tevil a clhan of tem had a reidcoat mixed out through and through tem but te Mackintoshes. . . . Tere was one lhittle mhoss tere tat I am sure I puried a tousand in and mhore, and him will lhy fresh and whole in it too till te tay of shoodgment. (III, 256-57)

These horifying scenes demonstrate in a different and more graphic way Hogg's underlying conception of the precariousness of individual life and the oneness of humanity, regardless of divisive categories like "rhank," nationality, "clhan," or partisan rivalry.

At this point Sarah learns of her husband's hiding-place, and she assumes that the woman who protects him is Alaster's lover (although, as we find out later, the woman is actually his sister). Alaster meanwhile hears that Sarah and Peter Gow are secret lovers, and he sets out to find Peter, who like himself is now a Jacobite outlaw hiding for his life. "Whether it was love, hate, jealousy, revenge, or a determination to be at the bottom of an affair that seemed inexplicable" (III, 306), Alaster determines to kill the man he assumes is "his wife's seducer" (III, 317), just as his wife Sarah, similarly provoked by "Jealousy, that fiend of infernal descent" (III, 300), searches for her husband with the intention of confronting him with his infidelity. Alaster sets an ambush for Peter, shoots him, and Peter in return stabs Alaster with his skene-dhu.

The two mortally wounded men then discover that Sarah is "free of stain" (III, 320), and that "all had originated in mistake" (III, 322). Like the rivalries between Gatty and Cherry, or

between Richard Rickleton and the lawyer, the rivalry between Alaster and Peter leads them into a realm of "mistake" where finally each must admit his error and both are reduced to a common condition that emphasizes their frailty and confusion. Sarah now joins the dying men and shares their grief. Their suffering has the effect of "knitting" the three characters "strongly together in the bonds of mutual affection" (III, 356), but suddenly a troop of Whig soldiers appears. The two men are arrested, tortured, and executed. Sarah becomes delirious, and in the last pages she wanders aimlessly through the Highlands, alone and pregnant. At last a shepherd finds her "sitting rocking and singing over the body of a dead female infant" (III, 371). When the shepherd returns with help, Sarah too is dead.

The Three Perils of Woman tries to heal the antagonisms that have divided Scotland. The dangers of narrow religion are clearly set forth in each tale, whether through Gatty's suspicion of "formal divines," or through the church's refusal to baptize Cathrine Rickleton's child, or through the minister's hypocrisy towards Sarah, or finally through the "contracted views of redeeming grace" (III, 324), which, according to the Catholic Alaster, have corrupted his own church and are partly responsible for the persecution suffered by Highland Jacobites. In each tale a marriage unites characters from opposite social, economic, and geographic backgrounds: Gatty is a middle-class Borderer who marries a rich Highlander, while Richard Rickleton is a rich Borderer who rescues his wife from "pauperism" (II, 312), and Sarah is a poor Protestant from Lothian who ends up married to an aristocratic Highland Catholic. There is also in each story a journey across Scotland, with McIon and Gatty moving to their estate in the north, Rickleton chasing his presumed rival through Edinburgh and Glasgow, and Sarah trudging from the Lowlands up to Inverness and beyond.

The three tales present in different ways a striking image of amorphous chaos at the center of human relationships. This is conveyed in the trance, coma, and similar experiences of Peril First, in Richard Rickleton's discovery of his own uncertainty and confusion, and in the holocaust of Peril Third. Throughout this work Hogg associates the amorphous area with sexuality and with the impossibility of certain knowledge. All the main characters descend to this realm of confusion, which undermines their pretensions, pride, and individuality, while demonstrating

their common humanity and common involvement in uncertainty and error. Except for the minister in the third story (who remains pompously impervious to the suffering of those around him), the characters learn the painful lesson of human oneness, and are then capable of reconciliation with a rival. Afterwards, they try to affirm their new sense of community: Gatty through faith, family, and friendship; Rickleton through forgiveness; and Sarah, Peter, and Alaster through mutual concern and their shared endurance of suffering.

The reader, too, must confront the same realm of confusion, particularly in trying to understand the characters of Hogg's heroines. We never know, for instance, whether the charges against Gatty, McIon, and Cherry, in the first tale, or against Sarah in the third tale, are true or false. If a reader assumes that the charges are true, he is making the same foolish error as Peter Gow and Alaster make when they disown Sarah. But if we endure uncertainty and resist the temptation to judge on inconclusive evidence, then we can emerge, like Gatty and McIon, with a strengthened and more purposeful sense of love. Between these two alternatives is a third possible response, that of a reader who first acquiesces in, say, Grizzly's easy judgment of Gatty or Cherry, but later begins to see the theme of uncertainty and the parallels between the three stories. This third kind of reader will undergo a Purgatorial experience, emerging like Richard Rickleton with a realization of his former error and a desire to show greater charity in the future. The same willingness to suspend judgment would apparently help the wise reader to preserve religious faith in spite of doubts and despite the fact of human suffering, and to conclude (as the narrator does on the final page) that God is "Just" even though his "paths are beyond the ken of mortal man" (III, 371). The central uncertainty ("beyond the ken of mortal man") unites physical and spiritual aspects of human love, creates a deep bond between all people, and reduces both characters and readers to a common condition. In its intended effect, *The Three Perils of Woman* is similar to what one critic has seen as the intended effect of *Paradise Lost*: the "true center" of the work, according to this critic, "is the reader's consciousness of [its] *personal* relevance," or in other words his awareness that the work "describes, in addition to the careers of the characters, the education of its reader."¹¹

The gods are vindicated, and bitterness turns into love, at the end of Euripides' *Ion*. In the final scene the mother, son, and Chorus agree to protect Apollo by pretending that Ion is the son of Creusa by her mortal husband Xuthus. This obvious falsehood is ironically presented by Euripides as the symbolic basis of harmony in his society; James Hogg shifts the emphasis slightly from falsehood to uncertainty, implying through his three narratives that confusion is an essential, unavoidable condition of human life, a state that must be endured and accepted rather than transcended. In *Ion* the characters eventually find answers to their questions, either because they learn the truth, or because (like Xuthus) they learn what they think is the truth; Euripides' resolution, then, divides people into two camps, those who know, and those who don't know. But in *The Three Perils of Woman* there is no honest escape from doubt. The only solution, Hogg implies, is through the simple and radical acceptance of human unity and fellowship, which in turn brings a substitute for certainty in the shape of values that are capable of being universally shared, rather than merely private, subjective values.

Each of Hogg's three narratives analyzes and re-writes the story of *Ion* from a different angle. The romance of Gatty and Cherry and McIon centers on the sexual vulnerability of women, and recalls the disgrace and suffering of Creusa after she bore an illegitimate child. McIon, the orphan who discovers his parentage and inherits an estate, is a modern, Scottish version of the Greek hero Ion. The comedy of the middle story then presents the *Ion* situation from the point-of-view of the wronged husband, with Richard Rickleton in the role of Xuthus. In the third tale the cruel clergyman's lustful treatment of Sarah is James Hogg's very provocative version of the rape of Creusa by Apollo. The ending of Peril Third explores the possibility that seems inevitable throughout most of *Ion*, with the death of Sarah and her child, and the seeming indifference of the heavens.

Although *Ion* has always been classed as a tragedy, both in its own day and in the 1820's, its last moments see the catastrophe averted and, in its place, a miraculous reconciliation between people as well as between human and divine. The first two parts of Hogg's work follow this pattern, with an unexpected happy ending for Gatty and her child, and for Cathrine Rickleton and *her* child. However, the final story ends at a moment of deep tragic despair, as Sarah holds her dead baby and

"look[s] wildly up to heaven" (III, 371) before dying herself. On the other hand Hogg seems to modify the tragic implications through his inversion of chronology, since the third story actually takes place about four generations earlier than the first. When its three parts are seen in their historical sequence, then, *The Three Perils of Woman* has a happy ending, with McLon's and Gatty's recovery of their Highland estate symbolizing a rejuvenation of Scotland after the terrible divisions witnessed by Sarah in 1745. Hogg's novel in this sense echoes the statement of Minerva at the end of *Ion*: "Slow are the gifts of heav'n, but found at length / Not void of pow'r."¹² It is the reader, however, who must construct this meaning (and other meanings) out of James Hogg's deliberately disturbing, shocking, and confusing work. "[T]he story is about you," as Northrop Frye says, "and it is the reader who is responsible for the way literature functions, both socially and individually."¹³

A close reading of *The Three Perils of Woman* will show Hogg using *Ion* in the same way that in the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* he uses Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*:¹⁴ as a source of inspiration, a way of giving shape to his work, and an aid in defining his own attitude on a profound theme. Many editions of *Ion* appeared during the Ettrick Shepherd's lifetime; the translation from which I have quoted was published by the same London firm, Longman's, that brought out *The Three Perils of Woman*. This edition of Euripides' play was re-issued at least five times between the 1780's and 1823. It also happens that the owner of Longman's, John Murray, was in the habit of giving Hogg direction in his reading and his considerable self-education, by regularly sending him parcels of books published by Longman's. In 1816 James Hogg wrote to Murray to thank him for the latest Longman's volumes:

Though I had no letter from you for a long while I have in effect often heard from you in the new works which you always so kindly sent—they were to me in the country a high treat and I felt very much beholden to you for your kind remembrance.¹⁵

Although Hogg never mentions Euripides in his writings, he was definitely interested in Greek drama and classical literature in translation; in an unpublished draft to his poem "The

Dominie," the poet recalls meeting "weekly or so" with the local schoolteacher, either at his own home or at the alehouse, where the teacher's

kind heart
 Would lighten up; and he would talk of Homer,
 Of Eschylus, and even of Zoroaster!
 In language most intense and dignified.¹⁶

Hogg often read "translations . . . of the ancients," and his last book, *Lay Sermons*, advises "young men of imagination" to

step back to an early age; and if the original stamina of genius is yours, the fame you covet is secure. Take the simplicity of Moses, the splendour of Job, David, and Isaiah. Take Homer, and, if you like, Hesiod, Pindar, and Ossian; and by all means William Shakespeare. In short, borrow the fire and vigour of an early period of society, when a nation is verging from barbarism into civilisation; and then you will imbibe the force of genius from its original source.¹⁷

This is advice which the author himself followed when he wrote *The Three Perils of Woman*; by "step[ping] back to an early age," he found in Euripides the "force of genius" and "fire and vigour" which inspired him to develop similar themes in a modern, Scottish context.

Most readers in 1823 apparently regarded Hogg's novel as an abysmal failure, on the triple score of sacrilege, less-than-perfect heroines, and disrespect for polite social mores. Sir Walter Scott and Lady Scott were unanimous in their disapproval: "The great Hogg," Scott wrote to a friend, "found his lair at Abbotsford on Friday, Lockhart bringing him here like a pig on a string, for which the lady of the mansion sent him little thanks, she not thinking the hog's pearls [*i.e.*, *Perils*], an apology for his freedoms."¹⁸ A *Blackwood's* review, normally attributed to John Wilson, condemned the shepherd as "a most unmannerly writer":

You think you are shewing your knowledge of human nature, in these your course daubings; and that you are another Shakespeare. But consider that a writer may be

indelicate, coarse, and even beastly, and yet not at all natural You are a man of an original mind; a shrewd, noticing, intelligent man But you know little or nothing of the real powers and capacities of James Hogg, and would fain be the fine gentleman, the painter of manners, and the dissector of human hearts. That will never do in this world.¹⁹

Another Edinburgh critic was more ambivalent, finding "all your exhaustless genius, combined with an utter want of judgment," and suggesting that "you should have read [the three tales] over to your wife, as you do not seem to be a dead hand at the delicate."²⁰ Hogg was coming dangerously close to Byron, it was said, through his irreverence and his scurrilous portrayal of women: "in indecency they both delight," declared one critic mournfully. Yet after noting the "jumble of the ridiculous and the trashy, of the passable and the disgusting," this reader went on to describe, sensitively,

what appears to us to be his greatest excellence in this production:—it is the fertility which produces a rapid succession of events, that hurry on the reader, without giving him a breathing space. There is a rude animation throughout; a vigorous, rustic activity, that keeps the attention perpetually on the alert, notwithstanding some egregious violations of unity of character, and much uncouthness of language.²¹

A similar assessment came from Hogg's friend R. P. Gillies, who thought "your third vol. of the 'Perils'" "pre-eminently vivid in its characters and descriptions," adding that "I was more delighted with it than anything I had seen for a long time."²²

The Three Perils of Woman has its blemishes, but even so it remains a thoughtful, provocative, questioning work. Inspired by the "fire and vigour" and "force of genius" of Euripides, James Hogg achieved, at least according to some readers, a vividness, fertility, and animation. The work transcends its own age, and in its theme of human uncertainty and fellowship it speaks directly to the twentieth century, as well as harking back to the age of *Ion*. In some ways *The Three Perils of Woman* might be summed up by the words of the Player in *Rosencrantz and*

Guildestern are Dead: "Uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special."²³

Edinburgh

NOTES

¹ Anonymous reviews of *The Three Perils of Woman*, in *The Repository of Modern Literature*, 2 vols. (London, [1823]), II, 391; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 30 Aug. 1823, p. 548; *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 27 Sept. 1823, p. 615; and *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 10 Sept. 1823, p. 257.

² James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman; or, Love, Leasing, and Jealousy: a Series of Domestic Scottish Tales*, 3 vols. (London, 1823), I, 50. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.

³ Edith Batho, *The Ettrick Shepherd* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 121; Louis Simpson, *James Hogg: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 201; and Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh 1976), p. 127. For a more appreciative approach to the novel, see Douglas S. Mack, "Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life: James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman*," *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century*, ed. Horst W. Drescher & Joachim Schwend (Frankfurt a. M., Bern & New York, 1985), pp. 15-27 (Scottish Studies, Vol. 3); and my "Myth and Structure in James Hogg's *Three Perils of Woman*" in *The Wordsworth Circle* (Autumn 1982), pp. 203-10.

⁴ Hogg's creative use of *Ion* is also briefly discussed in my article, "The Concept of Genre in James Hogg's *Scottish Pastorals*, Basil Lee, *Three Perils of Woman*, and *Confessions*," in *Papers Given at the First James Hogg Society Conference*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Stirling, 1984), pp. 6-14.

⁵ *Ion*, in *The Tragedies of Euripides*, trans. R. Potter, 2 vols., London; 1808, II, 62, ll. 88-89.

⁶ *Ion*, ll. 244-46.

⁷ Anon. rev. of *The Three Perils of Woman* in *Literary Chronicle*, 27 Sept. 1823, p. 616.

⁸ Henry T. Stephenson, *The Ettrick Shepherd: A Biography* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1922), p. 92.

⁹ *Ion*, ll. 927-28.

¹⁰ *Ion*, ll. 83-87.

¹¹ Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost,"* rev. ed. (Berkeley & London, 1971), p. 340.

¹² *Ion*, ll. 1674-75.

¹³ Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1976), p. 186.

¹⁴ See my article, "Allusions to *Dr. Faustus* in James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*," *SSL*, XVIII (1983), 157-65.

¹⁵ Letter to Murray, 1 Mar., 1816, rpt. in Alan Lang Strout's *The Life and Letters of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd*, I (Lubbock, Texas, 1946), 108. Other volumes sent to James Hogg from Longman's apparently included *The Quarterly Review*, and works by Byron, Crabbe, and Jane Austen (see Strout, I, 99-103, 108-18, and Mrs. Oliphant, *William Blackwood and his Sons: Their Magazine and Friends*, 3 vols. (New York, 1897), I, 321-23).

¹⁶ MS papers 42, f. 26, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. I am grateful to the Alexander Turnbull Library for permission to quote from their collection of Hogg's manuscripts.

¹⁷ James Hogg, *A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding* (London, 1834), pp. 290, 281-82.

¹⁸ Letter to W. S. Rose, Aug. 1823, rpt. in *The Letters of Sir*

Walter Scott ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols. (London, 1932-37), VIII, 65.

¹⁹ An Old Friend with a New Face (pseud.), "Hogg's *Three Perils of Woman*," *Blackwood's Magazine*, XIII, Oct. 1823, p. 431.

²⁰ Nicodemus Tod, "Letters to the Literati. —No. VII: To James Hogg, Esq.," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 18 Feb. 1824, p. 221.

²¹ Anon. rev. of *The Three Perils of Woman*, *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 10 Sept. 1823, pp. 257, 257-58.

²² Undated letter to James Hogg, rpt. in Mary Garden's *Memorials of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd* (London, 1885), pp. 206-07.

²³ Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (London, 1968), p. 49.