

8-2020

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Recommended Citation

Hotchkiss, Duncan (2020) "Performing Authenticity in the 19th-Century Short Story: Walter Benjamin, James Hogg, and The Spy," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 46: Iss. 1, 100–116.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol46/iss1/12>

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**PERFORMING AUTHENTICITY
IN THE 19TH-CENTURY SHORT STORY:
WALTER BENJAMIN, JAMES HOGG, & *THE SPY***

Duncan Hotchkiss

Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay “The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov,” wrote that the short story, as a printed artefact, works to undermine the value of storytelling by removing the “thin layers” of narration and the experiential moment of recitation:

We have witnessed the evolution of the “short story,” which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings.¹

At the crux of Benjamin’s essay is a concern about the advance of modernity and its subversion of tradition that turns on an opposition between print and orality. For Benjamin, the tradition of storytelling is crucially bound to conceptualisations of the *oral* tradition and “the realm of living speech” (Benjamin, 3). Benjamin argues that writers such as Nikolai Leskov, and others including J. P. Hebel, Rudyard Kipling, Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson, stay true to the oral storytelling tradition because of their attentiveness to storytelling as a craft in which traces of the teller cling to the story “the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (5). While Benjamin avoids empirical analysis, his conceptualisation of the oral tradition rests upon an understanding of modernity defined through print culture. According to Benjamin, modern fictional forms, particularly the novel, are isolated from the oral tradition because of their very nature as printed items (3). The short story as a form shares this print-based isolation from the oral tradition, and on top of that carries with it a brevity of informative conciseness which, for Benjamin, is both antithetical to the oral storytelling tradition and emblematic of the

¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” (1936). Available at <http://ada.evergreen.edu/~arunc/texts/frankfurt/storyteller.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2017), 6; hereafter cited in the text.

usurpation of imaginative and critical thought by “the dissemination of information” (4).

Yet, as Paula McDowell has recently argued, the concept of oral tradition is itself an effect—a “back-formation”—of an increasingly self-aware print culture in the eighteenth-century, during which “tradition” as a concept moved from the theological to the (largely) secular and modern idea of oral tradition as Benjamin deploys it.² In other words, the concept of the oral tradition is one borne out of the idea of print culture, rather than one rooted in an essential difference between timeless tradition and encroaching modernity. This article argues that Benjamin’s binarism of modernity and tradition is problematised when situated within the historical record of the early nineteenth-century short story in the case of James Hogg. Hogg’s periodical short stories could textually perform Benjamin’s idealised authentic oral storytelling through its formal characteristics within the periodical print medium, problematising Benjamin’s distinction between traditional oral storytelling and the printed short story as vanguard of modernity. The central claim of the following discussion is that the periodical short story as a form embodies modernity while performing tradition. I use the short stories of the early nineteenth-century Scottish labouring-class writer James Hogg to show how the modernity-tradition binary can be productively replaced by understanding Hogg’s short stories as a dialogue between tradition and modernity.

Hogg’s disruption of the binary distinction between literary and oral modes of production has been noted within Hogg scholarship, though not in relation to the short story as a genre within the magazine context of one of Hogg’s earliest publishing ventures, *The Spy* (1810-11). Ian Duncan, in his introduction to the Stirling/South Carolina research edition of Hogg’s 1820 collection *Winter Evening Tales*, which included stories originally published in *The Spy*, describes Hogg’s stories as “simulat[ing] the improvisatory charm of oral storytelling,” which “mix oral—and print—cultural conventions ... promiscuously.”³ By noting textual and contextual differences between book and magazine short stories, this essay builds on Duncan’s work to show the disintegration of the print-orality binary, which Duncan recognised as characteristic of stories in Hogg’s book format collection, as a function of the distinctive magazine context of the original site of publication of those short stories which later appeared in *Winter Evening Tales*. Penny Fielding has used Walter Benjamin’s essay in

² Paula McDowell, *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 288.

³ Ian Duncan, “Introduction”, in James Hogg, *Winter Evening Tales*, ed. Ian Duncan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh university Press, 2002), xxix, xiii.

relation Hogg's stories to engage with the larger discussion of the relation between orality and writing, reading the Hoggian story's tendency to "dramatise ... the activity of storytelling" and noting their awareness "of their own location in magazines."⁴ While Fielding emphasises the magazine contexts of Hogg's stories, more recent work on Hogg and the short story by John Plotz, which characterises Hogg as "an almost anti-Poe,"⁵ neglects the role of magazines in conditioning the short story's aesthetics and function. Fielding's excellent monograph, however, overlooked Benjamin's singling-out of the short story as a genre. My own argument makes a refinement of Fielding's groundbreaking work, by regenerating the discussion of Benjamin and Hogg to amplify Fielding's broader thesis on the intimate relationship between print and orality.

Rather than looking to define what the short story is, whether a fragment of authentic orality from what Frank O'Connor called "submerged population groups" or a "minor and lesser genre with respect to the novel," something to, in Hogg's words, "keep the banes green," I look instead to what short story *does* in Hogg's treatment of the form.⁶ Through a process of what I call performed authenticity, in which texts stake a claim in their proximity to cultures and traditions peripheral to the metropolitan centres of their readerships, the Hoggian short story is a form in and of modernity, rather than a nostalgic representative medium of marginal labouring class life in Scotland. Indeed, among the oral tradition features that Benjamin sees in Leskov include a closeness to "the people" and to "folk belief," as well as the importance of and the role of memory in the narratives and the recital of how the teller happened upon the story—features that are shown below to be common in Hogg's stories. Hogg's short stories perform a folkish anti-modernity, whilst being a thoroughly modern form in terms of its textuality and its writerliness.⁷ Authenticity is

⁴ Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 125, 122.

⁵ John Plotz, "Hogg and the Short Story", in Ian Duncan and Douglas S. Mack, eds, *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 115.

⁶ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 18; Mary Louise Pratt, "The Short Story: The long and the short of it", *Poetics*, 10 (1981): 187; James Hogg, *Altrive Tales, Featuring a "Memoir of the Author's Life"*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), xix. Though Tim Killick advocates for the term "short fiction" as opposed to the "theoretically loaded" short story, I use the term "short story" in this article to refer to prose fiction that is short enough to fit within the pages of Hogg's weekly magazine. See Tim Killick, *British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Tale* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 10.

⁷ On "writerly" texts see Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (London: Blackwell, 1974), 5.

performed through the textualisation of orality, which includes the representation of “authentic” dialect speech, the deployment of frame tales and editorial commentary, and a recurring emphasis on the oral sources of narratives within the stories and their framings. Ian Duncan’s concept of “authenticity effects” in Hogg’s fiction is important to this discussion. Duncan describes these “unprecedented” literary innovations—the manuscript facsimile, the “real” letter in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1823—in relation to Hogg’s 1824 novel *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Duncan argues that these:

authenticity effects ... address not only, not even primarily, a residual, metaphysical nostalgia for orality but an emergent, modern idealization of writing as a transfigured mode or medium of industrial production.⁸

He suggests that, particularly in the case of Hogg, this transfiguration functions to iterate the novel’s “material condition as a text” (*ibid.*). While Duncan’s argument reads Hogg’s textuality as a function of his authenticity effects, that relationship can be inverted in the case of Hogg’s periodical short fiction, where textuality functions towards the performance of authenticity. In this reworking of Duncan’s analysis, textuality stands as the basis for “authenticity effects” that share similarities with Hogg’s novelistic output but that are distinctive to the form of the short story in its dialogic periodical context.

Hogg’s short-lived periodical venture, *The Spy; Being a Periodical Paper of Literary Amusement and Instruction*, ran from 1810 to 1811 and has been described by Robert Crawford as “one of the places the modern short story was nurtured.”⁹ The editorial identity of “Mr Spy,” played-out in the first-person narratives of the opening and closing editions of the magazine and in editorial framings throughout its existence, provided a formal framing with which the periodical’s short stories functioned in dialogue. This dialogue in part enabled the “slow piling one on top of the other” of “retellings” that Benjamin ascribed to the oral tradition. Furthermore, the periodical’s self-referential approach to literary identity, authorship and textual constructed-ness acts as a precursor to the characteristic Hoggian short story form as it appeared in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (launched in 1817), a magazine which, since Edgar Allan Poe’s satire of the magazine’s “Terror Tales,” scholars of the short story have recognised as significant in the development of the form.¹⁰ *The*

⁸ Ian Duncan, “Authenticity Effects: The Work of Fiction in Romantic Scotland,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102:1 (2003): 93-116 (102, 111).

⁹ Robert Crawford, *Scotland’s Books: A History of Scottish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 433.

¹⁰ Killick, as in n. 6 above, 24-26.

Spy as a periodical “does not simply stand in secondary relation to the literary work it contains”; rather, it contains “a dynamic relation among contributions [that] informs and creates meaning.”¹¹

Hogg had only recently arrived in Edinburgh, Scotland’s bustling metropolis, from his native Etrick Valley in the rural Scottish Borders (on foot, after another farming disaster had led to bankruptcy) when he embarked upon his ambitious periodical venture. The periodical itself is centred upon the idea of a rural outsider looking-in on a city, a spy in more ways than one. Hogg’s outsider status can be located across three intersecting areas. Firstly, he was an outsider to Edinburgh in terms of regional identity. Edinburgh functioned as a metropolitan centre of Romantic cultural production, whereas Hogg’s native rural Etrick was peripheral and, as Alice Munro reminds us in *The View from Castle Rock*, held “no advantages.”¹² Secondly, he was an outsider in terms of his Lowland Scots speech, his dress and his manners. Thirdly, he was an outsider to metropolitan literary culture in Edinburgh in terms of his class position as a labouring-class autodidact. Place, language and class combined to inform both the periodical’s identity and the short stories which operate in dialogue with it. “The short story,” argued Ian Reid in 1977, “seemed especially suitable for the portrayal of regional life, or of individuals who, though situated in a city, lived there as aliens.”¹³ *The Spy* embodies this country-city alienation in its identity as a periodical, and in the short stories within it. Hogg positioned himself as a “lonely voice,” bringing rural labouring-class Scotland to the nation’s cultural centre.

As Ian Duncan has argued, “the editors and reviewers who monitored the literary marketplace would invoke” his rural “origins to disqualify Hogg’s attempts to write in metropolitan genres.”¹⁴ Structural and institutional forces could function against Hogg’s attempt to establish himself as a serious writer. At the same time, however, Hogg, largely through his friendship with Walter Scott, did have some kind of foothold in Edinburgh’s literary culture. He was not, like one of the magazine’s character-come-storytellers John Miller, completely isolated in his attempts to establish himself in the literary marketplace of Romantic-era Edinburgh. Crucially, the foothold that he did have in Edinburgh’s literary culture allowed him an opportunity via *The Spy* to construct his persona as that of

¹¹ Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

¹² On Edinburgh as Romantic metropolis, see Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Alice Munro, *The View from Castle Rock* (London: Vintage, 2007), 3.

¹³ Pratt, as in n. 6 above, 188.

¹⁴ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, 148.

a literary underdog. Studies of *Blackwood's* have focused upon the periodical's contribution to the phenomena of the personality, played out through authorial identities and the problematisation of emergent Romantic ideas of authorship.¹⁵ In *The Spy*, the textualised performativity of identities, which throughout the periodical's existence engaged with ideas of authorship, narration and storytelling in short fiction, is what characterizes the periodical—seven years prior to *Maga*.

Although Hogg was at an early stage of his career and was far from being established as a successful writer, by textually performing the Spy's outsider qualities and its connection to folkloric oral traditions the short stories published within the periodical could assert their authenticity as insights into, and from, the perspective of those at the margins of society—the rural peasant grieving for her husband in “Peasant's Funeral,” the destitute single mother alone in a city in “Affecting Narrative of a Country Girl,” the hoddie-grey-clad broad-Scots-speaking Nithsdale shepherd in “Encounter with John Miller.” The stories function in dialogue with that context of the outsider; a process helps guide the reader toward the textual performance of authenticity regarding the stories being told. This dialogism between text and context functioned in different ways, including, as in the case of “Peasant's Funeral,” Mr. Spy playing a role in the portrayal of character and narrational perspectives within a text, or, as in the case of “Affecting Narrative of a Country Girl,” functioning as a letter to Mr. Spy published alongside an editorial response.

By becoming a “spy”, Hogg is able to claim agency in a society to which he does not belong; an outsider observing, not from the outside, but from within:

For though there is scarcely a single individual in Edinburgh who has not seen me, as have great numbers in the country besides, yet not one of a thousand amongst them know who I am, or what I am about: so that though I am bound to tell the truth, I am not bound to tell the whole truth; and the omissions which I chuse to make have very little chance of being discovered.¹⁶

Mr Spy here is presented as a shadowy presence in Edinburgh, seen by all while remaining successfully hidden from discovery. Yet we see in the above passage, taken from the first page of the very first issue of *The Spy*, the challenge to the reader regarding the “truth” of the reporting of this

¹⁵ Tom Mole, “Blackwood's Personalities,” in Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, eds, *Romanticism and Blackwood's Magazine: “An unprecedented phenomenon”* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 97.

¹⁶ James Hogg, *The Spy: A Periodical Paper of Literary Amusement and Instruction Published Weekly in 1810 and 1811*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1; hereafter cited by page number in the text.

Spy. "I am not bound to tell the whole truth," says Mr Spy, "and the omissions which I chuse to make have very little chance of being discovered" (1). The Spy is declaring the presence and activity of the role of the editor in the production of texts, drawing the reader's attention to the periodical as self-aware textual construct. This self-referential textual constructed-ness would become a key characteristic of Hogg's short fiction as it developed, particularly in *Blackwood's*. The reader is invited to ask questions of what is being omitted by the editor, and prompted to consider *why* those omissions have taken place. Meiko O'Halloran, in a recent monograph, identified Hogg's characteristic invocation of the agency of the reader via what is described as Hogg's "kaleidoscopic" aesthetic.¹⁷ *The Spy*, by drawing attention to its constructed-ness and to the presence of the editor in the text, demands that interpretative agency from the very outset.

The presence of the editor in the text of *The Spy's* short fiction can be considered as the periodical short story's textual embodiment of Benjamin's "transparent layers" of narrative. As well as the editor, a further narrative layer within *The Spy's* short fiction is the self-referential constructed-ness of the text, as appears in the short story "Dangers of Changing Occupation":

Now in what manner it becomes so useful to them, I leave to you, and all who shall read this letter to discover, for it is an established rule with every good writer, always leave something *to the imagination of his reader*. But I have been insensibly led away from the thread of my story (28).

Here too we see Hogg's stress on "omissions" and storytelling. Rather than offering explanation and resolution, Hogg prefers to say to his readers "I leave to you," and is aware of the importance of individual imagination and readers' agency in the reading process. The telling of the tale is dramatized in the above passage, alerting the reading that there is a "thread" of the story being told and that the writer has been "insensibly led away" from the telling of the tale. Indeed, the deployment of the letter trope itself adds a further layer of retelling to the tale.

In *The Spy* the short story form is self-consciously taken from its folkish, vernacular and oral origins and placed explicitly in print culture. Hogg positions Mr. Spy as a fabricator while using his staged closeness to rural communities to give a platform to subaltern, rural and labouring-class voices. "Dangers of Changing Occupation" shows how the periodical short form's self-positioned closeness to orality performs the clash between speech and the printed word, as the narrator recounts his rural education:

¹⁷ Meiko O'Halloran, *James Hogg and British Romanticism: A Kaleidoscopic Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 9.

although we all pronounced the words differently from the present and proper diction of the English language, that made little difference in the main, as we did not aim at either the pulpit or the bar. We sounded Earth *yirth*, Plough *pleuch*, Abraham *Aubrahaum*. When we spoke of singing Psalms at church, we called them *sawms*; but when we came to the word in course of a lesson, we pronounced it *psalms*. We likewise made a palpable difference in the pronunciation of all the following monosyllables, - *wright*, *right*, *write*, and *rite*, which are long ago become one and the same (22-23).

There is a staged tension here between orality and the printed word, between “the present and proper diction of the English language” encountered and used in school and the Berwickshire dialect where “we all pronounced the words differently.” Berwickshire speech is bestowed with “outsider” status, marginalized by “proper” written English, a language encountered when reading printed items, such as “Mason’s Collection”, as opposed to in the lived experience of rural life.

The staged tension between spoken Scots and printed English combines with local knowledge of history and tradition in “Dangers of Changing Occupation” to help foster the formation of authenticity effects in *The Spy*’s short fiction:

“Lang syne, when foks were a’ Papishes, they keepit a portridge or a graven image o’ the Virgin Mary, i’ that chapel; and they pretendit that it cou’d baith wurk miracles and pardon fo’ks sins. Lord help them, I wonder how ever they cou’d think sic a thing! Atweel it cou’d do nae mair at that than I cou’d do. But the Papish priests about Mewros made a great deal o’ siller wi’t, and land baith” (35).

The deployment of Scots here is set against the earlier depiction of formal taught English as official and hegemonic. Scots is connected to a pre-Reformation Scottish past, which can be viewed within the framework of ideological tension identified by Ian Duncan between an “older, mythic” Romantic ideology and that of modern Enlightened rationality.¹⁸ In the passage above, the authenticity of Scots is strengthened by its ability to communicate a “papish” Scottish past, whereas formal and written English clashed with that ancient and native orality. Orality combines with history to stress the short story’s authenticity in relation to matters relating to rural labouring-class Scotland.

Benjamin’s essay stresses the importance of the experiential moment of recitation in storytelling. Framing narratives, a recurring feature of *The Spy*’s fiction, can perform that function in periodical short stories. An example of how this formal context engages with a story’s content can be

¹⁸ Quoted in Killick, as in n. 6 above, 138.

found in a story called “Affecting Narrative of a Country Girl—Reflections on the Evils of Seduction,” which tells of a young woman who becomes pregnant and destitute at the whim of a man who had promised her his wealth, and eventually loses her child:

The Spy sends his kindest respects to M.M. and requests to be favoured with a continuation of her correspondence (230).

By the time the tale appears as “Maria’s Tale” in Hogg’s book-length collection of short fiction, *Winter Evening Tales* (1820), it loses the editorial endnote, and so is removed from its periodical context, where it stood as a letter in dialogue with the editor, Mr. Spy. One of the effects that this has is to distance the narrative once again from *The Spy*’s positioning as “real” or “authentic.” Another effect of the framing narrative in the above excerpt is the explicit expression of sympathy towards the “country girl.” Mr. Spy is displaying to his readers his sympathy for the outsiders of society, siding with those oppressed by patriarchy and poverty. *The Spy*’s exploration of Edinburgh’s outsiders is here performed through the form-content relationship between the periodical context of a story and the short story itself. In this way, we also see how the “thin layers” of the telling of a tale operate: editorial notes “speak to” fictional correspondents who have submitted their stories. The content of a story (M. M.’s narrative) interacts with the editorial framing (Mr. Spy’s sympathy), which in turn keys into the over-arching periodical framework of *The Spy*’s authenticating project of its outsider identity.

The Spy contains characters, narrators and fictional correspondents from a wide range of occupational backgrounds, social classes and regions. The term “ethnographic authority” is useful for thinking about the appearance of John Miller across layers of narrative within number 12 of *The Spy*. Maureen McLane has described how “ethnographic authority” is “bound up with other cultural modes invoking knowledge of local topography, dialect and lore, and ... carries potential class constraints for labouring-class authors.”¹⁹ In the text of “The Spy’s Encounter with John Miller”—both in the framing narrative and in the interpolated narrative “Description of a Peasant’s Funeral, by John Miller”—references to specific customs and traditions work to ground John Miller’s narrative as an authentic account of the rural peasantry and labouring classes in southern Scotland. The text uses its constructed authenticity and closeness to “subaltern” communities to disrupt the certainties of patronage, power and social hierarchies in early nineteenth-century Scotland.

The *Spy* himself, the narrator in the periodical’s framing narratives and editorial commentary, foregrounds John Miller’s ethnographic authority:

¹⁹ Quoted in O’Halloran, as in n. 17 above, 253.

He let me understand that he came to Edinburgh depending upon being introduced to the world in my paper; and with the most cheerful alacrity, engaged to furnish me with a great number of anecdotes illustrative of country manners in general, delineations of many singular characters in Nithsdale and Galloway, old legends, and stories of ghosts and bogles (p. 122).

The publisher of *The Spy* thought that Hogg was the middle-man between the publisher and the author (516), with the identity of *The Spy* being presented within the periodical as a highland gentleman in Edinburgh. We are repeatedly confronted with the issue of Hogg deploying multiple fictional versions of himself. Miller's connection to the folkloric traditions of the countryside, particularly relating to the supernatural, is spoken of in "a kind a familiar tone", in "the broadest dialect of the district" (119). Hogg performs that dialect and its connection to Ettrick oral story-telling forms through reported Scots speech within the framing: "I dinna care ... I can write about any thing I' the Yirthly world" (120).

The short story framed by that editorial paratext, "Description of a Peasant's Funeral, by John Miller," places the teller at the centre of the telling. "I went with my father to the funeral of George Mouncie", where "we got each a glass of whisky as we entered" (p. 122). This equips the telling with a close knowledge of issues affecting the rural peripheries of Scotland and their encounter with an encroaching modernity in its discussion of religious patronage:

One man said, in the course of some petty argument, "I do not deny it, David, your minister is a very good man, and a very clever man too; he has no fault but one." "What is that?" said David. "It is patronage," said the other. "Patronage," said David, "that cannot be a fault." "Not a fault, Sir? But I say it is a fault; and one that you and every one who encourages it by giving it your countenance will have to answer for. Your minister can never be a good shepherd, for he was not chosen by the flock." "It is a bad simile," said David, "the flock never chuses its own shepherd, but the owner of the flock." The greatest number of inhabitants of that district being dissenters from the established church, many severe reflections were thrown out against the dangerous system of patronage, while no one ventured to defend it save David; who said ... (123).

The comedic reference, in the erroneous sheep analogy, again points to Hogg's labouring-class background and biographical "authenticity" as the "Ettrick Shepherd." It is John Miller, the character in the frame tale and the narrator of the excerpt above, who benefits here from the text's authority on matters concerning labouring-class rural life.

G rard Genette's "narrative distancing" can be useful in dealing with the passage above from "Peasant's Funeral." Quoted speech is used in the opening exchanges between the two men taking oppositional positions on

the issue of patronage, and, given Miller's textual authority and closeness to the communities in question, the reader is invited to trust his account. The account then switches to reported speech ("David; who said ...") as the narrator summarizes the argument being made in favour of patronage. The use of free indirect discourse is the key to the paragraph in terms of unlocking the significance of these narratological strategies. There are two words that the narrator deploys which reveal his position on the issue, and, given his ethnographic clout, the position of the community at large. The first instance is "in some petty argument." "Petty" feels out of place somewhat, given the effort made in the sentences that follow to explain the patronage debate and convey the depth of feeling behind the issue. It clashes with the second instance of free indirect style, found in "the dangerous system of patronage." There is a lack of certainty over whose word "dangerous" is: it seems to be somewhere between the narrator, Miller, and the community to which he is closely bound. "Dangerous" can therefore operate at once as both Miller's personal and the community's collective condemnations of patronage. Yet it is the clash between "petty" and "dangerous" that proves most significant here in disentangling the ideological strands of the tale.

After the exchanges on patronage, the text becomes focalized through the wife of the "peasant" who has died. Again, the narrative uses quoted speech to recount a conversation ("it was the language of nature") between the bereaved wife and a character, James, who is evidently close to the family although the connections between the pair remain hidden from the reader's view. In the final paragraph of the tale the quoted speech ends, leading to the appearance of textual features that provide an ideological function:

Her heart was full, and I do not know how long she might have run on, had not one remarked that the company were now all arrived, and there was no more time to lose. James then asked a blessing, which lasted about ten-minutes;—The Bread and wine were served plentifully around—The coffin was brought out, covered, and fixed on poles—The widow supported that end of it where the head of her late beloved partner lay, until it passed the gate way—then stood looking wistfully after it, while the tears flowed plentifully from her eyes—A turn in the wood soon hid it from her sight for ever—She gave one short look up to Heaven, and returned weeping into her cottage (125-126).

Up until this point, the narrator has been seeing and telling in mimetic fashion, through quoted speech, reportage, and paraphrasing. The text pivots on "her eyes", in the above excerpt. The selection of detail in the narrative is important, as James Wood suggests:

The artifice lies in the *selection* of detail. In life, we can swivel our heads and eyes, but in fact we are like helpless cameras. We have a wide lens, and must take in whatever comes before us. Our memory selects for us, but not much like the way literary narrative selects.²⁰

Wood's cinematographic metaphor can be extended here. If we imagine the narrative focalization in "Description of a Peasant's Funeral" as a camera, the tale thus far has been viewed through the lens of John Miller, but with the detail of "her eyes," the camera zooms in, and at that specific point we are able to see through those eyes: "the turn in the wood hid it from her sight." We no longer see from the perspective of the narrator, but from that of the peasant woman. The focus on detail is important here, particularly on the linkage of the images of coffin, corpse, tears, and wife's eyes. Death—what Benjamin described as "the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell"—comes in to focus. "Her eyes" then lead to "her sight," allowing the reader to see from the perspective of a peasant. The peasant experience of death ends the story. This has the effect of aligning the reader in step with the grief of the peasant wife, and it also has ideological implications.

Miller's narrative opens with fierce discussion over religious politics and doctrine among the men. It is noted by the servants that while the men talk about religion, it is the women who show more sympathy during the funeral to the issues of loss and grief. It is only through the wife's eyes that we garner a sense of how rural peasants, already framed within ethnographic authority, see "for ever," heaven, and loss. Providence, for the wife of the deceased peasant, is an everyday concern rather than one that rests in the interpretations of competing religious doctrines. Patronage and power hierarchies are thus subverted as the text's focalization on the wife's grief prompts the reader to "confound the bodies" of the "petty"-ness of competing religious doctrines and their ideological certainties.

This is where the free indirect clash between "petty" and "dangerous" takes on a greater significance. The ideology of patronage is shown in *The Spy's* narrative as anti-intellectual and undemocratic, and judged in Miller's narrative as "dangerous", yet the "petty" reminds us to focus upon the personal and the individual experience of larger structural inequalities. Miller responds to those structures by saying "confound the bodies," and his narrative of the "Peasant's Funeral" itself therefore becomes an act of subversion in its very being. The text enables the labouring-class rural woman to respond to structures of power by allowing the reader to see through her eyes the rural labouring class experience of death, which I would argue becomes an act of radicalism in itself in a period in which societal authorities viewed labouring and working-class communities with

²⁰ James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 47.

suspicion, in particular following the politically tumultuous 1790s. It is worth noting here the allegorical significance of the name “The Spy” with popular political agitation and the climate of fear and accusation around government spies, which, as Gordon Pentland has shown, are discourses that permeated popular political culture and rhetoric in Scotland in the early nineteenth century.²¹ There are also suggestive political implications in the discussion over sheep choosing their shepherd: patronage, and the right to choose, becomes “dangerous” on a number of interpretative levels. Like Benjamin’s effusion on storytelling, “the most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy”—the woman’s detailed visual farewell to her husband’s coffin, and the debate about patronage—“but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader” (Benjamin, 4).

John Miller functions as an intermediary level of staged storytelling between the authentic oral culture of labouring-class, peasant Scotland and the print environs of the Edinburgh periodical press. In the staging of levels of storytelling, *The Spy*’s short fiction makes explicit its construction in print. In “Story of the Ghost of Lochmaben, by John Miller,” Hogg discusses head-on the form’s shortness as a material object in the periodical paper:

Well, to make a long tale short, one morning the poor unhealthy woman was found drowned in a loch adjoining the town; and as all the burghers believed that she had put herself down, they refused her Christian burial (192).

The reference to the required conciseness of the periodical short story displays a self-awareness of the characteristics of the form. Such an awareness of form, displayed to the reader from the outset, combines with the story’s content in which a women’s ghost accuses her husband of her murder and the townsfolk, believing the supernatural testimony, invoke pursue justice:

though acquitted in the eye of the law, he was not so in the eyes of his neighbours, who all looked upon him as the murderer of his wife. And one night, after his return home, the mob assembled ... and made them ride the stang through all the streets of the town, and then threw them into the lock, and gave them a hearty ducking (193).

The shortness of the story contributes to the mystery and unresolved ending, in which the townsfolk’s judgement is not necessarily the “right” judgement. Multiple explanations—jealousy, suicide, retribution—exist alongside the popular supernatural explanation, a ubiquitous trope in

²¹ Gordon Pentland, “Betrayed by Infamous Spies’? The Commemoration of Scotland’s ‘Radical War’ of 1820,” *Past and Present*, No. 201 (2008): 141-173.

Hogg's work. The authorial voice does not do the explanatory work for the reader. While the story appears in *Winter Evening Tales*, it loses the "by John Miller" tag, so that the reader of *Winter Evening Tales* misses out on the *The Spy*'s efforts to construct its auto-ethnographic authority as short storyteller.

Likewise, in "Dreadful Narrative of Major Macpherson," the shortness of the form adds to the indeterminacy of the content of the story. While the story was included also appeared in *Winter Evening Tales*, there are distinctive features in its original form. It positions itself as a letter to *The Spy* and so engages directly with the periodical's identity. The story stages its levels of tellings in print, by firstly positioning itself as a letter, but also in its opening lines:

I received yours of the 20th October, intreating me to furnish you with the tale, which you say you have heard me relate ... I think the story worthy of being preserved, but I have never heard it related save once ... being told by one who was well acquainted both with the scene and the sufferers yet I fear my memory is not sufficiently accurate, with regard to particulars; and without these the interest of a story is always diminished, and its authenticity rendered liable to be called in question. I will however communicate it exactly as it remains impressed on my memory, without avouching for the particulars relating to it; in these I shall submit to be corrected by such as are better informed.

I have forgot what year it happened... (135).

The fictional correspondent, already one layer of the telling, explains to the reader that he has already heard the story, in oral form, from someone who was more immediately connected to the experience of the event being told. The sources of narrative authority that underpin these layers of telling are made explicit. The oral form from the experiencer is able to make a "considerable impression" upon the hearer, whilst the retelling in print, being based upon memory, is made unstable as "my memory is not sufficiently accurate" and the story is thus "diminished ... its authenticity liable to be called in question." In this way, the short story's oral roots are textually performed within the periodical, in a similar way to the treatment of Scots vernacular discussed in relation to "Dangers of Changing Occupation." The story of the "Dreadful Narrative," in which a hunting party go missing and are discovered dead in mysterious circumstances, is itself left open to interpretation, between the rational impulses of the implied metropolitan readership and the "belief in supernatural agency" which prevails in "every mountainous district of Scotland" (138). The story subtly suggests a possible explanation for the deaths:

Macpherson was said to have been guilty of some acts of extreme cruelty and injustice in raising recruits in that country, and was, on that account held in detestation by the common people (136).

As in the “Ghost of Lochmaben”, local cultures of orality in “Dreadful Narrative” contain competing explanations of events, and explanations that exceed the purely rational are mobilized by Hogg.

Karl Miller has argued that “The magazine can be characterized by beginning at the end.”²² This circular narrative of editorial performativity, and its fictionalization of the periodical’s identity, is a context inseparable from the short stories contained within it, speaking as it does to issues of orality, class, language, and closeness to the outsiders and the subaltern communities of Scotland. In the final number of *The Spy*, the editor dramatically reveals his identity as a labouring-class autodidact from Scotland’s rural margins, an outsider to literary Edinburgh:

for that a common shepherd who never was at school, who went to service at seven years of age, and could neither write nor read with accuracy when twenty, yet who, smitten with an unconquerable thirst after knowledge, should run away from his master, leave his natural mountains, and ... come to the metropolis with his plaid wrapt round his shoulders (515-516).

He takes a swipe at the literary marketplace of Edinburgh and its reading public, many of which “are too indolent to read any thing till its reputation is established, others too envious to promote that fame which gives them pain by its increase” (p. 518). He reveals how he had played tricks on the readers and their literary prejudices by publishing contributions written by himself, “which he was certain were his worst, and insinuated that they were the productions of such and such gentlemen, famous for their literary abilities” (p. 514).

The *Spy* performs his outsider identity in the closing number by pointing to his uniqueness in comparison to other periodical writers, and stresses the connection to oral storytelling modes. “No periodical writer before him was perhaps necessitated to struggle with” the outsider characteristics of class, region, manners, and language (p. 519), which left the editor of *The Spy* confined from “his infancy to the conversation of the lowest classes of mankind,” leaving him a wealth of “unpolished gems” in storytelling material. In the final performance of *The Spy* as outsider, he reveals more than the “true” identity of the editor. He reveals the authenticating processes of the storytelling ideal—closeness to the speech of the “lowest classes”, “unpolished gems” of folk material—which forms the crux of the identity of the *The Spy*. That identity, and the processes which help forge its construction, is the context with which his short fiction in the periodical operated in and through.

²² Karl Miller, *Electric Shepherd: A likeness of James Hogg* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 77.

The identity of “Mr. Spy” in Hogg’s magazine is constructed in a Benjaminian ideal story-teller mould, one rooted in oral culture, and one in which the experience of the telling is as much a part of the story as the contents being relayed to the audience. According to Benjamin, a story:

does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow (Benjamin, 5).

Traces of “Mr Spy” permeate Hogg’s short stories in the magazine. The magazine stakes a claim as an authentic collection of fragments of subaltern life from Scotland’s rural peripheries, presented to a metropolitan audience. Mr. Spy’s outsider identity is rooted in Hogg’s biography as a labouring-class autodidact from the regional margins of Scottish society.

Through the textualization of the Benjaminian oral storytelling ideal, Hogg’s short fiction in *The Spy* can be considered as what Catherine Belsey termed an “interrogative form”: one in which the reader plays an active role in making sense out of the periodical’s lack of formal stability, and one in which the place of editor and author within the text is “seen as questioning or contradictory.”²³ As Benjamin argues in his discussion of the difference between information and storytelling:

Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it.... It is left up to [the reader] to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks (Benjamin, 4).

The Spy’s interrogative short stories omit explanatory narrative features, avoiding narrative resolution and drawing the reader’s attention towards modes of (re)tellings in both print and in oral culture. Hogg’s Benjaminian performance of the authentic subaltern storyteller in his short stories draws readers towards questions regarding the axis of narrative authority in the text. Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell have recently argued that “the short story has a much more troubled—and troubling—relationship to modernity than Benjamin necessarily suggests.”²⁴ The Romantic era short story and its relationship to magazine culture can offer an insight into the form’s “troubling” relationship between the oral tradition and a modernising print culture.

²³ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 84.

²⁴ Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell, “Introduction: the short story and the postcolonial,” in Awadalla and March-Russell, eds, *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

In *The Spy*, Hogg's short stories use their connection to tradition—their embodiment of rural culture, of Lowland Scots speech, and of orality—to perform an authentic mode of storytelling which complicates Benjamin's binary conceptualisation of the short story and the oral storytelling tradition. The performance of authenticity functions through the form's textuality, in the deployment of multiple framing narratives and shifting narratological perspectives, and in the self-referential constructedness of the form which points to the sources of narrative authority underpinning stories. In other words, print technology forms the basis upon which tradition is performed, and through which the oral storytelling ideal, its "thin layers" and "retellings," is textually mimicked. Tradition is mediated through modernity in the short story form. Moreover, the brevity of the short prose narrative form within the pages of the periodical meant that explanatory narrative resolutions are often avoided in favour of an interrogative mode of storytelling, in which meanings are left open to readers' interpretation. Benjamin's essay on storytelling and the short story draws a binary distinction between modernity and tradition that begins to falter upon closer analysis of the function of the periodical short form in the case of Hogg.

Hogg's periodical short story form was self-consciously an object of print, which could textually perform "authentic" orality. Through Hogg's rural incomer and Edinburgh flâneur Mr Spy, metropolitan readers encountered a textual performance of Scotland's margins while being presented with a critique of the class-based exclusionary literary marketplace of which they, as consumers, were a part. A Benjaminian reading of James Hogg's short stories in *The Spy* can therefore offer a new way of thinking about modernity and its connection, rather than opposition, to tradition. In the textual production of the Hoggian short story, "authenticity" is not an innate essence but a performative function of form.

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