

THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT OF WOMEN: SCOTLAND'S EXPERIENCE WITH
FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECT ON WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS

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Brittany Godburn

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by

Brittany Godburn

APPROVED:

David Mayes, PhD
Director

Nancy Baker, PhD
Committee Member

Benjamin Park, PhD
Committee Member

Abbey Zink, PhD
Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

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In the pre-modern era, Scotland experienced twelve times the number of witchcraft accusations and executions per head, when compared to their neighbor, England. This study will provide a gendered perspective on what made Scotland different. The focus will be on female leadership, set against the backdrop of religious reform. The events surrounding the regencies of Margaret Tudor and Mary of Guise, and the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots generated instability. Their perceived failures led the new Scottish Protestant Kirk to use them as scapegoats, fostering an environment that allowed for all women to be blamed for any hardship in a quest to avoid repeating the instability the Kirk associated with the rule of women. The moral regulations imposed by the Kirk, defined as an “obsession with sex” began the quest for their “Godly state.” The Kirk’s moral discipline, aimed mainly at women whom they perceived as more liable to sin than men, began after Mary, Queen of Scot’s abdication, and led to more than four-thousand accusations of witchcraft, with women accounting for more than ninety-three percent.

This research was taken directly from source materials available on specific witchcraft trials, and the words of those most principally involved in the events between 1502 and 1625, specifically Mary, Queen of Scots and John Knox. Quotes from ambassadors to the Scottish court and excerpts from personal letters written by Scottish nobility are used liberally to gain an understanding of the view of those surrounding power in Scotland.

Several secondary interpretations of witchcraft in Scotland exist, including impressive overviews written by Christina Lamer, Brian Levack, and Julian Goodare. None, however,

mesh together the importance of the role of the female leader in Scotland, and how the Kirk's use of moral discipline, aimed primarily at women, helped further the witch hunt.

KEY WORDS: Witchcraft, Scotland, Mary, Queen of Scots, Scottish Reformation

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CHAPTER ONE

Identity and Superstition

Religion and superstition were woven into the cultural tapestry of the pre-modern European world.¹ God's power represented all that was good, and conversely, the Devil embodied evil. Pre-modern Europeans blamed evil for a range of events, from personal ailments and crop failures, to military defeats and the collapse of nations. If people could beseech God for good, then surely the opposite was also true.

This worldview greatly contributed to witchcraft accusations in pre-modern Europe. As people believed that higher powers influenced their fortunes, it stood to reason that the evils of the world could be due to their neighbor's involvement with the Devil. *Maleficia*, defined as a method for causing harm by way of the Devil, could be blamed for evil and used to accuse anyone of witchcraft.² At some points in pre-modern European history, these accusations reached levels of hysteria, with thousands of people being put to death for witchcraft during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Historians today have not arrived at a consensus on what caused witchcraft hysterias. Theories range from reactions to economic hardships and plague, to church influence, to the desire to control women. Yet, no one theory can claim to explain the phenomenon single-handedly; the hysterias happened across Europe for complex reasons.

¹ Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), xi.

² Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 6.

In terms of witchcraft hysterias in Europe, Scotland was an outlier. Scholars disagree over the number of witchcraft accusations and prosecutions in Scotland between 1400 and 1700; conservative estimates place the accusations close to four thousand, with as many as half resulting in execution.³ Particularly curious, however, is not the frequency itself, but rather how the rate of accusations in Scotland compared to that of England. England and Scotland share a border, and despite their distinctions, their histories have been entwined for millennia. One might assume that their experiences with witchcraft accusations and executions would be comparable. In reality, Scotland, the smaller nation of the two, experienced twelve times the rate of witchcraft trials and executions as England.⁴

Several historians have endeavored to explain this phenomenon. In 1981, historian Christina Lerner first explored the Scottish witch hunt in depth with her work *Enemies of God*. Lerner delved into the significance of Scottish ideology after the Protestant Reformation of 1560, and used the new Church's ideas of a "Godly state" to illustrate how their programs of conformity generated mass hysterias of witch hunting.⁵ She further discussed how the moral regulations imposed by the new Protestant Scottish Church targeted women as the titular "Enemies of God." Further major studies of witchcraft accusations since 1981 include works by Julian Goodare and Brian Levack. Goodare's research delved into the involvement of the Scottish government, which he

³ Brian P. Levack, *Witchcraft in Scotland* (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 1.

⁴ Levack, *Witchcraft in Scotland*, 2.

⁵ Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981).

believed assisted in the new Church's quest for discipline, resulting in more witch hunts.⁶ Levack, on the other hand, believed that the witch hunts were actually contained by the government, and perpetuated by other sources in Scottish society, including the new Church. Levack also used legal evidence, including the differences of procedures in local and larger courts as a way to explain how the Scots and the English experienced witchcraft trials differently, arguing that the loose interpretations of what made a "witch" allowed for more accusations and executions in Scotland.⁷

Upon visiting Scotland in the twenty-first century, one can still see the echoes of pre-modern superstition. Fairy circles sit in a valley on the Isle of Skye, and standing stones still mark sacred locations in the Highlands. Although many countries in pre-modern Europe believed in the supernatural, Scotland in particular boasted a strong culture of myths and legends, including the magical power of standing stones and river rocks.⁸ Myths and legends formed the bedrock of Scottish identity, including that of William Wallace, the national hero of Scotland who died at the hands of the English during the Scottish Wars of Independence. Storytellers immortalized both Wallace and Scottish King Robert the Bruce in epic poems.⁹ Scottish myths often stressed their

⁶ Julian Goodare, *The Scottish witch-hunt in context* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2002).

⁷ Levack, *Witchcraft in Scotland*.

⁸ James Porter, "The Folklore of Northern Scotland: Five Discourses on Cultural Representation," *Folklore* 109, 1 (1998): 7.

⁹ T.M. Devine and Jenny Wormald, *Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford University Press: 2012), 67.

autonomy as their own nation, instead of an extension of their allies. When comparing the myth of Scottish antiquity to that of English antiquity, the Scottish version tells of Greco-Egyptian settlers who arrived in Scotland by sea, whereas the English version of the same tale is based on settlement by the Trojans, who only went to Scotland secondarily, after arriving in England first.¹⁰ Scotland's history was always tied to that of England, but when considering their own origins and legends, the Scots preferred to stand on their own, stressing their personal autonomy as their own nation.

The Scottish people of the pre-modern era also believed in many otherworldly things, including fairies, and their capacity to affect any aspect of life.¹¹ Scottish people did not want to anger the fairies, as they assumed that it would lead to bad fortune. This belief, according to British historian Emma Wilby, translated into the understanding that it could be hard for the Scots to distinguish a fairy from the Devil.¹² The idea of this difficult distinction was in place well before the Protestant Reformation swept through Scotland, and showed that Scots strongly believed in the ease of being taken by the Devil. However, Scottish people, according to Julian Goodare, were not “haunted by their beliefs,” an important distinction between Scots and some of their pre-modern neighbors.¹³ In Scotland, such beliefs operated intrinsically with everyday life and could not be extricated from other aspects of culture.

¹⁰ Devine and Wormald, *Oxford*, 66.

¹¹ Emma Wilby, “The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland,” *Folklore* 111, 2 (2000): 285.

¹² Wilby, *Witch's Familiar*, 287.

¹³ Goodare *The Scottish witch-hunt*, 1.

Scotland's belief in the mystical was not monolithic; differences lay across geographical lines, language barriers, and divisions created long before the pre-modern era by invasions. Few census records prior to 1885 exist in Scotland, making it difficult to ascertain numerical information for the Lowlands and Highlands. There were – and remains today – cultural differences between the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland. The Highlands have traditionally been a wilder terrain, with the Gaelic language reigning supreme over English. Clans ruled the Highlands for millennia and became known by the different patterns of their tartan, until the donning of clan colors was outlawed after the Scot's defeat by the British at Culloden in 1746.¹⁴ More than eighty percent of pre-modern Highlanders lived off the land, which, in some instances, could lead to imbalanced trade and economic hardship.¹⁵ There was likely a harvest shortfall every four to seven years, leading to the potential for catastrophic levels of food shortage on a semi-frequent basis.¹⁶ Conversely, the Lowlands of Scotland were closer to the base of government, whether it sat in Stirling or Edinburgh. Eighty percent of the economy was located in greater Edinburgh.¹⁷ The Lowlanders lived closer to England, and more frequently spoke English as a result.¹⁸ Lowlanders may have been accustomed to border

¹⁴ Magnus Magnusson, *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 631.

¹⁵ Jenny Wormald, *Court, kirk, and community: Scotland 1470-1625* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 43.

¹⁶ Devine and Wormald, *Oxford*, 32.

¹⁷ Devine and Wormald, *Oxford*, 223.

¹⁸ Porter, *Folklore*, 2.

raids, both as the victim and instigator, as skirmishes with the English were common.¹⁹

They had been invaded by barbarians over the years but, in many cases, by different races than that of their Highland neighbors. Because of their differences, the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland developed differently into the pre-modern era, despite sharing the same identity as Scots. Their understanding and response to witchcraft, therefore, was different. The majority of witchcraft trials and executions took place in the Lowlands, which was closer to the seats of both government and religion.²⁰

Scotland's shift of leadership began in the early 1500s. Men dominated the myths and legends of Scotland, and Kings traditionally ruled the small nation. From 1488, King James IV reigned in Scotland. As a teenager, he killed his father on the battlefield, successfully taking the crown. By all accounts, the young king was a successful ruler. Crime, particularly in the Highlands, decreased substantially during his reign, due to his more hands-on approach with all the people of his realm. He spoke the languages native to each corner of Scotland, and his frequent visits to the farthest reaches of his kingdom enabled him to exercise his power and influence, making him a great ruler by simply "being there."²¹ In 1492, James renewed the "Auld Alliance," the historic alliance between Scotland and France, both of which were Catholic nations. This move created uneasy tension with Scotland's southern neighbor, England, which had historically fought with both Scotland and France. Despite this, James IV was betrothed to Margaret Tudor,

¹⁹ Porter, *Folklore*, 4.

²⁰ Wormald, *Court*, 168.

²¹ Jane E. A. Dawson, *Scotland Reformed: 1488-1587* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009, 50.

daughter of King Henry VII of England, in 1502.²² The betrothal created the “Treaty of Perpetual Peace” between England and Scotland, the first formal agreement between the two nations in nearly two hundred years. Margaret and James were formally wed in 1503. For the next nine years, Scotland enjoyed a relative peace. James IV was a shrewd ruler, choosing to install his illegitimate children into important offices in the nation to ensure compliance from all sides.²³ He continued to exercise his power throughout the nation, and, due to the peace agreements with France and England, Scotland enjoyed a relatively calm decade.

The peace halted upon the death of Henry VII of England. Eager to prove himself, Margaret’s brother, Henry VIII invaded France. In 1513, wishing to honor the Auld Alliance with France, James IV invaded England, only to meet his death on the battlefield during the Battle of Flodden.²⁴ Prior to his departure for battle, James IV had declared Margaret Tudor as regent of Scotland, in case of his death. Their son, the future James V, only a year old at the time, needed a regency government to rule in his name until his majority rule began. The conditions of the regency were simple: Margaret could not remarry in order to keep the regency of her son.²⁵

In the immediate wake of James IV’s death, the Scottish council’s response to Margaret Tudor’s regency was rife with uncertainty. Her home country’s army had just

²² Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 60.

²³ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 67.

²⁴ Wormald, *Court*, 7.

²⁵ Sarah Beth Watkins, *Margaret Tudor: Queen of Scots: the life of King Henry VIII’s sister* (S.l.: Natl Book Network, 2017), 57.

killed the Scottish King, but Margaret had options to prove herself as a smart ruler of Scotland. The Duke of Albany, a lord who had lived in France his whole life remained the only other contender for the regency, and he likely knew less of Scottish politics than Margaret.²⁶ Margaret Tudor knew that the council favored the Duke of Albany, for not only was he a man, but France had been Scotland's ally. Rent income plummeted upon Margaret's regency as well; without James IV enforcing the collection of rents, income dropped fifty-six percent.²⁷ Left on their own with little influence of a King, the landowners in the Northern Highlands held a substantial amount of power.²⁸ Margaret managed, however, to aid in negotiations to make Scotland safe, and keep the peace with both France and England. On the surface, it offered a promising start for the regency of an outsider to Scotland whose brother's army had just killed the Scottish King. Parliament agreed to sue for a longer peace with England when, less than a year after the Battle of Flodden, Margaret Tudor's secret marriage was revealed to the Scottish council.²⁹

Whom she married compounded the problem. As a relative newcomer to Scotland, Margaret did not fully understand the intricacies between the families of Scotland. In particular, the Douglas family was not well trusted, due to their historic insubordination to the Kings of Scotland.³⁰ The Douglasses also lived in conflict with

²⁶ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 94.

²⁷ Wormald, *Court*, 13.

²⁸ Wormald, *Court*, 27.

²⁹ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 94.

³⁰ Watkins, *Margaret Tudor*, 60.

several other families of Scotland, including the family of the Duke of Albany. Therefore, when Margaret Tudor, effectively the reigning monarch of Scotland, announced that she had married Archibald Douglas, the Earl of Angus, “for her pleasour,” she created an internal conflict that would be her downfall.³¹

Upon her remarriage, Margaret Tudor yielded the regency of her infant son to the Duke of Albany, per the stipulations set down by James IV before his death. Margaret’s happiness with Archibald Douglas was short lived, and she was soon petitioning Rome for a divorce. She beseeched her brother, Henry VIII for help, but timing was not on her side: their sister Mary’s husband, the King of France, had just died, and Henry focused his attention on her instead of his sister to the North.³² Though welcome in Scotland as the mother of the King, Margaret returned to England to appeal to her brother in person, but Henry VIII was “horrified” by Margaret’s wish to divorce her husband.³³ He instead decided to support Margaret’s estranged husband, Archibald Douglas, who had challenged the Duke of Albany for the regency of the young James V. Henry VIII encouraged Douglas to create a pro-England group in Scotland, to foster political rifts within the country he thought should be his by right.³⁴ With the young King James growing closer to his majority, Margaret chose to side with the Duke of Albany, her former rival, against her husband. During this time, Lord Dacre, a ranking member of the Scottish court, stated that “there was never so much disorder in Scotland,” an immense

³¹ Magnusson, *Scotland*, 299.

³² Watkins, *Margaret Tudor*, 64.

³³ Watkins, *Margaret Tudor*, 91.

³⁴ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 109.

change from the peaceful reign of Margaret's late husband, King James IV.³⁵ At the age of twelve, King James V escaped his French protectors – put in place by the Duke of Albany – to the safety of Edinburgh with his mother, who had since broken her alliance with the regent. Archibald Douglas marched on Edinburgh with the support of Henry VIII, but was fired upon by his wife's men, and then retreated. Lord Dacre would later refer to Margaret Tudor as “marvelous evil entreated,” one of many personal insults the Warden General bestowed upon the Dowager Queen.³⁶

Upon Margaret's remarriage, “great was the commotion, violent the rage, and intense the indignation, of all ranks and conditions of the Scottish people,” with “feuds swelling to the height of Civil War” as the years continued and her relationship with her second husband soured.³⁷ The instability of the decade influenced by Margaret Tudor was especially clear, as it followed such a peaceful time during the reign of her late husband. Lord Home, Warden of the Eastern March of Scotland said of Margaret, “our old laws do not permit that a woman should govern in the most peaceful times, far less now when such evils do threaten.”³⁸

Although there had been female leaders in Europe, the idea of a “queen in her own right” was still a relatively foreign notion in pre-modern Europe. Women in pre-

³⁵ Watkins, *Margaret Tudor*, 66.

³⁶ Watkins, *Margaret Tudor*, 87.

³⁷ Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of Scotland and English Princesses Connected with the Regal Succession of Great Britain, Vol I* (New York: Harper and Brothers publishers, 1851), 95-96.

³⁸ Strickland, *Lives of the queens of Scotland*, 97.

modern Europe did not enjoy many rights. The importance of the Bible in pre-modern Europe led to the first and most basic reason for their subjection. Women were viewed with three distinct beliefs in mind: that they were physically weaker, had lesser intellect, and possessed stronger emotions, and therefore, less reason. For these reasons, their husbands ruled over them.³⁹ Nature, therefore, and not society, made women inferior, and churchmen cited the Bible to support the idea.⁴⁰ In the book of Genesis, for example, Eve's secondary creation following Adam's and her responsibility for the loss of Paradise proved women's inferiority. Contemporaries also regarded labor pain in childbearing as scientific proof of women's secondary status, and independent support for the teachings of the Bible.⁴¹ This belief was wide-spread, but in the case of women in power it created a conundrum: women born into a position of power were not subject to their male citizens or council, but if they married, would still be subject to their husbands. Those who believed in the naturally subordinate place of women had a difficult time reconciling their view with hereditary succession.⁴²

Although the Spanish ambassador remarked that the women of James IV's court were "absolute mistresses of their houses, and even of their husbands," women in pre-modern Scotland did not enjoy any more rights than their European counterparts.⁴³ Upon

³⁹ Margaret Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection* (London: Hodder Education Publishers, 1995), 10.

⁴⁰ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19.

⁴¹ Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, 23.

⁴² Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, 51.

⁴³ Devine and Wormald, *Oxford*, 244.

marriage, women retained their family name, but their autonomy ended there. They lost any independent legal persona, and instead came under that of their husband. They could not sue, sell property, or make contracts without the consent and presence of their husbands, although they were expected to be the managers of their households.⁴⁴ The relatively static social structure in Scotland allowed for very little movement outside of marriage. If a woman was widowed, she was prevented by law from living alone.

Scotland's experience with female leadership, and the timing of it in their nation's history, arguably contributed to the country's comparatively higher rate of witchcraft accusations and executions. After Margaret Tudor's disastrous turn with leadership, her son, James V married French Catholic Mary of Guise. She too was later widowed, and served as regent for her infant daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots. At age nineteen, Mary, Queen of Scots returned to her home country from France, following the death of her husband. After a short but disastrous personal reign, she unwillingly abdicated in favor of her infant son. Scotland, however, was not the only nation that struggled under poor leadership. Only one generation earlier, England suffered greatly during the Wars of the Roses, with leadership changing royal houses every few years, before the throne was taken by the infant Tudor monarchy. Poor leadership and, in particular, poor female leadership did not alone facilitate the rapid increase in witchcraft accusations and executions in Scotland. Timing played a role as well.

Mary of Guise's regency marked the official arrival of the Scottish Reformation. The Reformation generated poverty, unrest, and instability upon its arrival in Scotland, due to the warring nations it brought to Scotland's door. With religious reform so new,

⁴⁴ Devine and Wormald, *Oxford*, 243.

the reformers needed someone else to blame for the hardship caused by their arrival in Scotland, lest the country revert to Catholicism due to lingering instability. A foreign woman was the ideal scapegoat; according to the new Protestant Scottish Kirk, women were naturally morally inferior to men, and it was logical that their leadership would fail.⁴⁵ The Kirk found their evidence for this in the circumstances surrounding the reigns of Mary of Guise and Mary, Queen of Scots, and the instability caused by their supposed transgressions against God. Additionally, religious reformers had to “build new accommodation between sexuality and the sacred,” and redefine moral regulations and how to impose them in order to sustain their foothold in Scotland.⁴⁶ As the years passed, the Kirk’s ideas that the morally inept woman caused the hardship of Scotland festered, creating an environment which could easily foster the belief that any kind of harm could be caused by women taken by the Devil. In this society, witchcraft accusations were already known, but now, they could be used to explain away any kind of perceived evil, with support of the views of the new Kirk. The Kirk’s quest to create a “Godly state” was part of a larger program of moral reform.⁴⁷ They believed that it was the duty of the secular side of government to impose discipline on those the Kirk deemed a threat. They actively sought out witches, and presented them to secular courts for trial.⁴⁸ The Scots enjoyed a long national relationship with the mysterious and supernatural, but the Kirk was determined to stamp out the mysticism of old, using existing beliefs in the Devil to

⁴⁵Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 219.

⁴⁶ Roper, *Oedipus*, 79.

⁴⁷ Goodare, *Context*, 4.

⁴⁸ Larner, *Enemies*, 5.

further their program of moral discipline to bring Scottish people under their control. They believed, as expressed by James Melville, that “discipline was maist necessary in the Kirk, seeing without the saming, Chrysts Kingdome could nocht stand...”⁴⁹

Witchcraft has traditionally been synonymous with women. In Europe as a whole, women accounted for approximately seventy-five percent of witchcraft executions.⁵⁰ In Scotland, women accounted for ninety-three percent of witchcraft executions. Most of these women ranked low in society, and, according to Christina Larner, embodied the local fears of any given parish.⁵¹ Lyndal Roper, author of *Oedipus and the Devil* wrote of the pre-modern belief that women’s bodies had weak boundaries, and because of this, it was “hard to believe their innocence” when accused of a crime, particularly that involving the Devil.⁵² In *Luther on Women*, Merry Weisner-Hanks discusses the idea that Protestant Reformations in Europe helped to spread the belief in, and gendered slant of, witchcraft, citing a sermon given by Martin Luther, in which he stated that “the Devil holds the female sex organ as his servant.”⁵³ In Scotland, the Kirk’s anxieties about non-conformity from their “enemies of God” translated into the hysteria of witch hunting women in order to maintain the status quo that was interrupted during the leadership of three women. Major hysterias peaked in periods between 1590 and

⁴⁹ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 218.

⁵⁰ Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors* (New York: Penguin Group, 1996), 260.

⁵¹ Larner, *Enemies*, 90.

⁵² Roper, *Oedipus*, 153.

⁵³ Merry Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231.

1591, 1597, 1629 to 1630, 1649, and 1661 until 1662.⁵⁴ Although accusations and executions occurred in the interims of these periods, the six “panics” represent the strongest waves of hysteria.

One cannot ascribe the witchcraft executions of pre-modern Europe to a single cause. Yet, even more difficult, is to imagine that these did not have a gendered slant; the sheer imbalance between the men and women accused of the same crime compels one to utilize a gendered approach and analysis in order to explain this phenomenon. Similarly, clear reasons must exist for why one European country, and a small one at that, accounted for so many accusations and executions. Historians have put forth famine, hardship, economic decline, religion, and plagues as corresponding reasons for the phenomenon. It is plausible, however, to argue that Scotland’s difficult history with female leadership, starting with Margaret Tudor and ending with Mary, Queen of Scots, set against the backdrop of massive religious change fostered an environment in which the witch hunt could run rampant.

⁵⁴ Larner, *Enemies*, 60.

CHAPTER TWO

The Monstrous Regiment of Women

The majority of pre-modern Scottish people lived within a local parish, which, along with kin, formed the basis of the pre-modern Scottish identity.⁵⁵ Like many other European nations, Scotland was Catholic prior to the Protestant Reformation. Christian Scotland began in the early sixth century, when the religion was introduced by missionaries. Scotland's pre-Reformation church, while Catholic, allowed the Scottish King a substantial amount of power, particularly in the case of ecclesiastical appointments. As was the case with James IV, this system allowed for nepotism to run rampant and in the eyes of some, corruption to spread.⁵⁶ Despite the power held by the monarch, Scotland still enjoyed a comfortable relationship with the Pope, who often bestowed favors on James IV.⁵⁷ The easily corruptible system of appointments, however, festered discontent among some Scots prior to the official start of the Reformation.

In 1542, James V of Scotland, son of Margaret Tudor and James IV died, leaving his wife Mary of Guise a widow. Their infant daughter, Mary Stewart, became Queen of Scots. Mary of Guise was French, Catholic, and honored Scotland's "Auld Alliance," the historic bond between France and Scotland. From her birth, Henry VIII pursued Mary, Queen of Scots for marriage to his son, Edward VI. Mary of Guise did not seriously consider the proposal, given her nationality and religion, a slight to which Henry VIII took offense. For the entirety of his reign he coveted Scotland, and he considered the

⁵⁵ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 1.

⁵⁶ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 67.

⁵⁷ Wormald, *Court*, 76.

joining of the Stewart and Tudor houses as the best way to unite the kingdoms under the English crown. Additionally, France was England's historic enemy, therefore making a potential schism in the Auld Alliance an inviting prospect for Henry VIII. In what would come to be called the "rough wooings," Henry pursued his son's suit of the infant Queen of Scots, pushing the issue of marriage along with the question of religion.⁵⁸

England separated from the authority of the Pope a decade before the rough wooings. Though Henry VIII historically received the credit for the English Reformation, historian Carlos Eire writes in his book *Reformations* that the English Reformation actually occurred at various levels simultaneously, not just from the monarchy. These levels, he argues, were not necessarily complimentary, but more parallel in nature; it was, after all, the conflict between monarchial and biblical authority, and therefore destined to clash.⁵⁹ Historian Peter Marshall, in his book *Heretics and Believers* partially agrees with Eire, arguing that the English Reformation operated on parallel levels due to the populace's understanding and questioning of religious doctrine, which happened to coincide with official programs of reform. Henry VIII's goals, however, aligned to personal needs for control and absolute dominion.⁶⁰ In reality, the English Reformation did not create very much real change until the reign of Henry's son, as Henry himself hesitated to completely break from the traditional ways of the Catholic Church.

⁵⁸ Carlos Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 358.

⁵⁹ Eire, *Reformations*, 319.

⁶⁰ Marshall, *Heretics*, xv.

Upon realizing his first wife Catherine of Aragon could not provide a male heir, Henry VIII began to seek a way to remove himself from his marriage. He met Anne Boleyn in the late 1520s and became infatuated with her. After the Pope denied his request for an annulment from his marriage to Catherine, Henry, along with his advisors, sought an alternative resolution to the issue. With the furor of reform raging in much of Europe, the path was clear for Henry VIII: by naming himself the head of the Church of England, he effectively changed the church into a branch of government, subverting the authority of the Pope in the process. He was therefore able to grant his own divorce and marry Anne Boleyn in 1533. Three years later, after Anne failed to produce an heir, Henry had her beheaded. Adultery, incest, and witchcraft were among her alleged charges.

The English people harbored no love for Anne Boleyn, but the question of their religion was still up in the air. While the authority of the Pope had been abolished, nothing had substantially changed within the Church itself. The pillars of Protestant Reformations on the European continent defined problems with the Catholic regime, including iconography, the sales of indulgences, the wealth of the clergy, and the raising of the host. In England, the concept of iconography had not been defined, and it took several years for monasteries to be dissolved.⁶¹ Even then, priests and monks received pensions. The 'Reformation' in England still created change, but it was not the revolutionary change that most Protestants hoped for, and had achieved elsewhere. In that respect, only one major conflict arose as a direct reaction to the break with Rome: the

⁶¹ Eire, *Reformations*, 327.

Pilgrimage of Grace, a northern uprising intent on restoring the Catholic faith and the Pope's authority to England. It was quickly put down by the Crown's forces.

Henry VIII's third wife, Jane Seymour, provided him with the male heir he had been hoping for, though she succumbed to childbed fever. Immediately upon the birth of the Queen of Scots, Henry recognized the diplomatic possibility of finally claiming Scotland for England. The rough wooings under Henry VIII lasted until 1546. Several months later in January 1547, Henry VIII died. His son was ten years old, and the Duke of Somerset, brother to the late Queen Jane Seymour became regent for his young nephew. Somerset continued the rough wooings, though Mary, Queen of Scots was safe in Stirling with her mother, Mary of Guise, while the regent of Scotland, the Earl of Arran, ran the country.⁶² After a disastrous defeat against the English, the Scots beseeched the French King for assistance, and in August 1548 at the age of five, Mary, Queen of Scots was sent to France to live with her betrothed husband, the young Dauphin.⁶³

Dowager Queen Mary of Guise stayed behind in Scotland. As the daughter of the French Duke of Lorraine, she was well-educated, and more importantly, well connected. Her letters display a plethora of connections throughout Europe; indeed, her marriage to King James V of Scotland had been contracted by the French King himself.⁶⁴ During the

⁶² Marcus Merriman, *The Rough Wooings* (London: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 232.

⁶³ John Guy, *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 41.

⁶⁴ Rosalind Kay Marshall and Iseabail Macleod, *Mary of Guise, Queen of Scots* (Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises, 2008), 21.

regency of the Earl of Arran, Mary of Guise took the opportunity to travel to France to see her family, and on her way back to Scotland, visited King Edward VI, the short-lived Protestant ruler of France's historic enemy, England. He remarked in his journal that she dined under the cloth of state, indicating royal treatment and respect.⁶⁵

Upon the death of Edward VI in 1553, Mary Tudor, the Catholic daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon assumed the throne. She immediately reverted the official religion of England to Catholicism, reinstated the authority of the Pope, and began a terror on the Protestants that would eventually earn her the moniker "bloody Mary."⁶⁶ Her reign was marked with intolerance toward the Protestants, leading to hundreds of executions. Many Protestants fled England during Mary Tudor's rule, including preacher John Knox, a future key Scottish Reformer.⁶⁷ Mary Tudor's reign further isolated the English people when she married the Spanish King, Philip II. He was also a Catholic, and more importantly, a foreigner; he was, therefore, a threat to English independence.⁶⁸

In Scotland, Mary of Guise challenged the Earl of Arran for the regency. With Mary, Queen of Scots living in Paris, the influence of the French Guises had risen tremendously at the Scottish court. The Earl of Arran eventually yielded the regency, and

⁶⁵ *Journal of King Edward's Reign, written in his own hand* (Clarendon Historical Society, 1884).

⁶⁶ Eire, *Reformations*, 332.

⁶⁷ John Knox, *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 109.

⁶⁸ Eire, *Reformations*, 333.

in 1554, Mary of Guise became regent of Scotland.⁶⁹ Mary of Guise had lived in Scotland for sixteen years, and at the beginning of her regency, showed an understanding of the intricacies of the Scottish borders, helping to settle disputes and visiting the Highlands as her late father-in-law, James IV had done. This is evident by an unsigned letter in 1554, where the author gave Mary of Guise advice for dealing with disputes between clans and at the border. The author believed that lawlessness – mainly thievery - had been allowed to fester far from Edinburgh during the regency of the Earl of Arran. This advice was taken by the new Queen regent who wrote to the Laird of Wemyss, a key instigator, to maintain peace.⁷⁰ No response survives, but Wemyss' insubordination is not mentioned again, indicating that the dispute was solved. Mary held positive views of her adopted nation, but these views could not compete with her affection for her home country and family. As stated in the introduction to the letters from her Scottish regency at the Scottish National Library: “when she began to put the dynastic ambitions of her family before the interests of Scotland, the storm clouds swiftly gathered.”⁷¹ It was not until the arrival of the Scottish Reformation, however, that the storm would begin to affect Mary of Guise and her reputation with the Scottish people.

In 1558, four years after he fled England during Mary Tudor's reign, leader of the Scottish Reformation John Knox published his inflammatory work *The First Blast of the*

⁶⁹ Marshall and Macleod, *Mary of Guise*, 79.

⁷⁰ Unknown to Mary of Guise, 1554, in *Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine*, ed. Annie I. Cameron (Scottish History Society, 1927), 380.

⁷¹ *Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine*, ed. Annie I. Cameron (Scottish History Society, 1927), 376.

Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women. In it, he harshly critiqued female leaders, writing:

“...and first, where I affirm the empire of a woman to be a thing repugnant to nature, I mean not only that God, by the order of his creation, has deprived woman of authority and dominion, but also that man has seen, proved, and pronounced just causes of why it should be.”⁷²

Knox had two main targets in mind when he wrote his *First Blast*: Scottish Regent Mary of Guise and English Queen Mary Tudor. In addition to his *First Blast*, Knox also wrote *The History of the Reformation of Scotland*, his historical summary of the key events of the Reformation. Knox wrote in his *History* about the two Catholic Queens, referring early in his work to Mary of Guise as a “crafty practiser,” and Mary Tudor as “God’s hot displeasure, [that] idolatrous Jezebel.”⁷³ Soon after *First Blast* was published, however, Mary Tudor died and her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth I, ascended the throne of England. She too had read Knox’s work, and despite his groveling letter, Elizabeth never forgave him for his views of female leadership. Knox admitted that his *First Blast* made him “odious in the eyes of Queen Elizabeth,” despite his insistence that Mary Tudor was his main target.⁷⁴ William Cecil, Elizabeth I’s chief advisor wrote in October 1559 that “of all others, Knox’s name...is most odious here.”⁷⁵ Upon her ascension to the throne,

⁷² John Knox, *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, 1558 (London: 1878).

⁷³ Knox, *History*, 110.

⁷⁴ Knox, *History*, 191.

⁷⁵ Knox, *History*, 274.

Elizabeth adopted a “middle way” of religion, reversing Mary Tudor’s harsher policies, allowing common English prayer, and destroying iconography. In her opening statement of her first Parliament, Elizabeth stated that it was her wish to “unite the people of the realm in one uniform order.”⁷⁶ This statement could be taken as political, religious, or both; Elizabeth’s wish, upon her ascension at the age of twenty-five, seemed to center on steadiness, a welcome respite for English people.

Scottish historian Jenny Wormald writes of the three circumstances in pre-modern Europe that created unrest for rulers: debts, a royal minority, and religious instability. All three of these circumstances created hardship.⁷⁷ Unfortunately for Mary of Guise, all three were found in Scotland between 1558-1559. Even before Knox wrote his *Trumpet Blast*, whispers of Mary’s growing incompetence travelled throughout Scotland. Though the Scots had always enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with France, the influence of Mary of Guise on the Scottish court and government had begun to overstep its own bounds. The Scots did not want to lose their independence to France, and they feared that a French leader would allow or encourage that to happen. In 1559, Archbishop Hamilton wrote of his concern that Scotland would become an appendage of France as the Province of Brittany had recently become. France absorbed Brittany when their two rulers married, and Archbishop Hamilton feared that the marriage of Mary, Queen of Scots to the French Dauphin would result in the same situation.⁷⁸ Indeed, upon her

⁷⁶ James Anthony Froude, *Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: Spottiswoode, 1866), 46.

⁷⁷ Wormald, *Kirk*, 95.

⁷⁸ Archbishop Hamilton to Queen Regent, 1559, in *Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine*, ed. Annie I. Cameron (Scottish History Society, 1927), 426.

ascension as French Queen in 1559, Mary, Queen of Scots, advised by her Guise relatives, signed a document that asserted France's right to the Kingdom of Scotland if she died without an heir.⁷⁹ This decision created an even stronger tie to France than the "Auld Alliance"; with Mary of Guise serving as regent in Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots in France, French interests took precedence over Scottish needs, allowing, as Knox writes, the "French [to think] themselves more than masters in all parts of Scotland," a threat to the autonomy that defined Scottish identity.⁸⁰

On January 1, 1559, the anonymous "Beggar's Summons" was published in Scotland, claiming, according to Knox, a "restitution of wrongs past and Reformation in times coming."⁸¹ Anonymously published, purportedly from the poor of Scotland, it accused the Scottish Catholic Church of being "rich and ungodly," and tending to take care of its own needs rather than the needs of the poor. The "Summons" were posted to many churches, including the largest in Edinburgh, St. Giles. The "Summons," while likely written by reformers and not by the average poor of Scotland, articulated what many people were likely thinking: the Church was corrupt, and something had to change.⁸² The publication of the "Beggar's Summons" commenced the instability that would later be synonymous with the Scottish Reformation and Mary of Guise's regency.

The Reformation was beginning to gain traction in Scotland, and Mary of Guise found herself woefully underprepared. Mary of Guise allegedly believed that the

⁷⁹ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 90.

⁸⁰ Knox, *History*, 195.

⁸¹ Knox, *History*, 136.

⁸² Jane Dawson, *John Knox* (Yale University Press, 2016).

instability inspired by the Protestant Kirk was not religious at all, as evidenced by a letter written in 1559 from the Earl of Arran to Lord Semple, two peers of the Scottish court. Arran writes that the queen believed the Protestants were using “the cloak of religion” to hide their wrongdoing.⁸³ In 1558, the Protestants wrote a letter to Mary of Guise, pleading their case for Reformation. In response, she said (according to Knox): “Me will remember what is protested and me shall put good order to all things that now be in controversy.” Knox continued, “she spared not amiable looks, and good words in abundance.”⁸⁴ The Calvinists in Scotland, at this point, likely had a sense of ease with Mary of Guise’s promise. They were, however, “deceived in [their] opinion, and abused by her craft”⁸⁵ when she later went back on her promise, summoning the Protestants to answer for their insurrection and declaring them outlaws. Mary of Guise, in Knox’s opinion, had “[begun] to disclose the latent venom of her double heart.”⁸⁶

In mid-1559, John Knox returned to Scotland, where, despite having been branded an outlaw, he preached a sermon that incensed parishoners who heard it. Parishoners sacked the Church where Knox had stood at the pulpit, and later followed him to a church in St. Andrews, where similar violence occurred.⁸⁷ In response, Mary of Guise rallied ranking Scottish nobles to her side, preparing to fight the Reformers for the

⁸³ Earl of Arran to Lord Semple, 1559, in *Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine*, ed. Annie I. Cameron (Scottish History Society, 1927), 428.

⁸⁴ Knox, *History*, 157.

⁸⁵ Knox, *History*, 159.

⁸⁶ Knox, *History*, 159.

⁸⁷ Knox, *History*, 164.

stability of the country. Unfortunately, she underestimated the religious fervor sparked by the Reformation. In order to avoid war, she promised the Protestants that no French army would attack them if they would stand down. The Protestants agreed to the terms, but were deceived by a technicality; the soldiers dispatched by the Queen Regent were not Frenchmen, but rather mercenaries paid by the French. Knox writes that when confronted, Mary of Guise stated “Princes must not so straightly be bounden to keep their promises.”⁸⁸ She later “left the town in extreme bondage, after her ungodly Frenchmen had most cruelly entreated the most part of these that remained in the same.”⁸⁹

The results of this double-dealing spelled disaster for Mary of Guise. Two of her principal Lords, the Earl of Argyle and Lord Moray, left her service, “perceiving in the Queen nothing but mere tyranny and falsehood.”⁹⁰ She petitioned the French for help, fortifying the city of Leith upon their arrival. In a 1559 letter, the Earl of Arran stated his belief that the Queen regent’s fortification of the city of Leith was to protect French interests, and by extension, her daughter.⁹¹ Arran’s letter does not imply that Mary of Guise had any concerns for the Scots themselves, an important insight into a ranking peer’s opinion of the Queen regent and her motivations.

During the next several months, both the Queen regent and the Protestants claimed victories in various skirmishes. A major Protestant defeat in late 1559, however,

⁸⁸ Knox, *History*, 172.

⁸⁹ Knox, *History*, 173.

⁹⁰ Knox, *History*., 173.

⁹¹ Earl of Arran to Lord Semple, 1559, in *Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine*, ed. Annie I. Cameron (Scottish History Society, 1927), 428.

led them to ask the English for help.⁹² In early 1560, Elizabeth I sent English troops and ships to Leith, whereupon they began a siege. Knox referred to the resulting conflict as civil war, with the Queen regent and the French on one side, and the Scottish Protestants and the English on the other. Less than five months later in June 1560, Mary of Guise died. Soon after, England, Scotland, and France signed the Treaty of Edinburgh. The French troops withdrew, and the Reformation Parliament convened in Scotland.⁹³

From the beginning, Mary of Guise was, in the eyes of some Calvinists (and certainly, John Knox), the enemy of the Reformation. Upon her ascent to the regency in 1554, she endeavored to preserve the interests of Scotland, settling disputes and maintaining peace with England after the end of the rough wooings. However, maintaining allegiance to Scotland with the influence of her family proved difficult, and Mary of Guise's goals became more closely tied to French interests as the years passed. She made the grave error of underestimating religious fervor, mistaking it for political subversion and allowing herself to be caught off guard by the Scottish Reformation. Even before the Reformation arrived in Scotland, Knox carried a grudge against Mary of Guise. In 1556, before his return to Scotland, he penned a letter to Mary of Guise. Upon reading the letter, she showed it to the Archbishop of Glasgow, referring to it as a "pasquil," i.e. a "lampoon," or worse, a joke.⁹⁴ After her mockery of his words, it seems John Knox never got over this slight; he referenced it in his *History of the Reformation*

⁹² Knox, *History*, 216.

⁹³ Knox, *History*, 228.

⁹⁴ Knox, *History*, 118.

nearly twenty years later, and used it as fuel for his condemnation and low opinion of Mary of Guise during the years of her regency.

The onset of the Scottish Reformation created instability in Scotland. Prior to 1558, many Scots adhered to the Catholic religion, which was made illegal only two years later. Protestants “violently cleansed” the Church, destroying monasteries and objects that they viewed as idols.⁹⁵ The new Kirk could not sustain the old parish system, thereby allowing local churches to cease, disrupting the everyday workings of normal Scottish towns.⁹⁶ Although outright war only lasted less than a year, the invasion of Scotland by both France and England affected the Scots on a political, cultural, and economic level. The country was left with a severe lack of money, exacerbated when the French withdrew upon Mary of Guise’s death.

The Scottish Reformers understood that it would be catastrophic for hardship to be associated with their cause; unlike in other nations, Protestantism was still in its infant stages in Scotland. Despite their victory over the French and Queen regent, it would not take much for the Protestant Reformation to be squashed in a nation where many people remained Catholic. The Reformers, therefore, needed a scapegoat for the instability in Scotland, and the evidence they required was embedded in the Bible, and already accepted as truth. Women, as cited by John Knox in his *Trumpet Blast*, were unfit rulers, prone to the Devil, and all the evidence of this was in scripture, and “to add anything

⁹⁵ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 204.

⁹⁶ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 207.

[would be] superfluous.”⁹⁷ Reformers used any evidence they could find to discredit Mary of Guise, including her French background, which was a threat to the autonomy of Scotland, and her sex, which, when combined with leadership, went against their interpretation of God’s will in the Bible. Knox’s words to describe Mary of Guise, including “crafty,” “wicked,” and “venomous,” are telling of his opinion of her, and their harshness contributed to the negative feelings against her. Further, the new Scottish Kirk was founded on a strong belief that women were morally inferior, and that it was the Kirk’s responsibility to provide moral regulation and punishment.⁹⁸ Indeed, pre-modern Europeans already believed in the natural subjection of women, and their nature to be easily taken by sin, which only added to the Kirk’s argument.⁹⁹ Scotland’s hardship, therefore, was not the fault of the Scottish Reformers. The blame could fall squarely on the non-Scottish regent whose “crafty” presence had threatened the autonomy of the small nation.

At the time of her mother’s death in July 1560, Mary, Queen of Scots reigned as Queen of France. Upon the signing of the Treaty of Edinburgh, English and French troops evacuated Scotland, with the stipulation that Elizabeth I was recognized as the true monarch of England. Mary, Queen of Scots believed she had a claim to the English Crown. For those in England who had remained Catholic, the Protestant Elizabeth I was

⁹⁷ *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*, Kevin Reed (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995).

⁹⁸ Goodare, *Context*, 4.

⁹⁹ Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection*, 10.

an illegitimate heir to the throne; in their view, after Mary Tudor, Henry VIII had no more legitimate children, as he had married Anne Boleyn against the will of the Pope. In any English Catholic's view, the rightful heir was Mary, Queen of Scots, the descendent of Henry VIII's eldest sister Margaret Tudor. In France, Mary was declared ruler of England, and she and her husband used English symbols in their heraldry.¹⁰⁰ Further, the secret agreement in France that granted Scotland to the French Crown if Mary died without issue also bequeathed Mary's claim to the English throne to the French. As the Treaty of Edinburgh went against her own interests by outright stating that Elizabeth I was the rightful Queen of England, Mary refused to ratify it.

In Mary's absence, the Scottish nobility and Protestant Lords of the Congregation presided over Scotland. In all likelihood, they believed they had complete autonomy in Scotland, as their Queen was across the English Channel ruling another country.¹⁰¹ In December 1560, however, Mary's husband King Francis II died of an infection, leaving her widowed at the age of eighteen. Nine months later in August 1561, Mary returned to Scotland. Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador to Scotland, wrote to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, an English diplomat, regarding Mary's return, reporting "all men welcome and well received...good entertainment, great cheer, and fair words." In the same letter, though, he is cautious, stating that the people "persyste in the same mind that

¹⁰⁰ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 109.

¹⁰¹ Eire, *Reformations*, 357.

they were of before her...it is yet newe days.”¹⁰² Knox wrote of Mary’s arrival in Scotland as well, referencing the gloomy weather, writing that “the very face of heaven, the time of her arrival, did manifestly speak what comfort was brought into this country with her, to wit, dolour, darkness, and all impiety..”¹⁰³ Soon after her arrival, Mary was granted the freedom to celebrate the Catholic Mass at Holyrood, and John Knox’s worst fears came true. He lamented: “one mass is more fearful to me than if ten thousand armed enemies were landed in any part of the Realm of purpose to suppress the whole Religion.”¹⁰⁴ Knox, along with some fellow Protestants believed that the Scottish Reformation was too new for another Catholic leader, and that their troubles with Mary of Guise would only continue with her daughter.

Mary Stewart was well aware of the Protestants upon her return to Scotland, and had heard of their treatment of her mother from France. As a prominent member of the Protestant party, however, Mary took the time to meet with Knox. Upon her first meeting with him, Mary questioned his role in the poor treatment of her mother. Knox wrote, “the Queen accused John Knox that he had raised a part of her subjects against her mother and against herself; that he had written a book against her just authority.”¹⁰⁵ Mary already knew the truth of Knox’s religious fervor, and their four total meetings would bring her

¹⁰² Randolph to Throckmorton, August 26th, 1561, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547 – 1603*, ed. Joseph Bain (H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh, 1898), 547.

¹⁰³ Knox, *History*, 267.

¹⁰⁴ Knox, *History*, 270.

¹⁰⁵ Knox, *History*, 272.

such distress that her “tears might have been seen in greater abundance than the matter required.”¹⁰⁶ Thomas Randolph commented on Mary’s distress to William Cecil, writing “yow know the vehemency of Mr. Knox spreit...I wold wishe he shuld deale with her more gently, being a yong princess.”¹⁰⁷

In their first meeting, Knox informed Mary that “if the Realm finds no inconvenience from the government of a woman, that which they approval shall I not further disallow tan within my own breast, but shall be as well content to live under Your Grace as Paul was to live under Nero.”¹⁰⁸ A clear insult, Knox’s words were supported by his belief that women leaders were contrary to God’s intention. Knox later wrote of his view of the realm under Mary, declaring “the Devil now find[s] his reins loose,” and of Mary herself: “if there be not in her a proud mind, a crafty wit, and an indurate heart against God and His truth, my judgement faileth me.”¹⁰⁹ Despite Mary’s obvious frustration with her meetings with Knox, she held fast to her religious beliefs, continuing to take Catholic Mass at Holyrood Palace. John Knox was not the only one who wished

¹⁰⁶ Knox, *History*, 331.

¹⁰⁷ Randolph to Cecil, October 27th, 1561, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547 – 1603*, ed. Joseph Bain (H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh, 1898), 565.

¹⁰⁸ Knox, *History*, 275.

¹⁰⁹ Knox, *History*, 283.

to turn the Scottish Queen's faith. In a letter to William Cecil, Thomas Randolph writes that the "Quene [is] advised to imbrace the religion of England."¹¹⁰

Aside from John Knox and the Protestant Reformation, Mary's main problems stemmed from infighting among her own court. In the early 1560s, the Earl of Bothwell fell in and out of favor, imprisoned one year and back at court the next. The Earl of Moray, Mary's half-brother, was imprisoned in 1564. The Earl of Lennox fought with the Duke of Chatelhaut in October 1564, and Lord Morton and Lord Seton had a dispute in January 1565.¹¹¹ Thomas Randolph wrote to William Cecil of Sir John Gordon's attack on the Queen's forces, and in a later report, referenced violence upon the Queen herself within her own bedchamber.¹¹² The lords who ruled Scotland for the short period between the death of Mary of Guise and the return of Mary, Queen of Scots seemed unable to stop the infighting between themselves, despite the guidance of their sovereign.

¹¹⁰ Randolph to Cecil, February 12th, 1562, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547 – 1603*, ed. Joseph Bain (H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh, 1898), 602.

¹¹¹ Various, 1561-1565, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 189-210.

¹¹² Randolph to Cecil, February 15th, 1563, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 188.

The lords fought not only amongst themselves either; in 1562, Thomas Randolph wrote of Mary's "mirth and courage" when she was refused entry at Inverness by the Earl of Huntly.¹¹³ She stayed instead at a house nearby, in what was an embarrassing display of insubordination.

Infighting presented a particularly dangerous problem in Scotland's political climate in the early 1560s. In their first conversation, Mary asked John Knox, "think ye that subjects, having the power, may resist their princes?," to which Knox replied, "if their princes exceed their bounds, Madam, no doubt they may be resisted, even by power...it agreeth with the will of God."¹¹⁴ John Knox's *Trumpet Blast* addressed this point in particular, noting that nobles could, lawfully, depose of woman leaders. This view would be particularly important beginning in 1565, when Henry Stuart, the English Lord Darnley arrived in Scotland. Mary was immediately smitten with him, as he was the "lustiest and best proportioned man she had seen," as stated by Sir James Melville, a courtier present at their meeting.¹¹⁵ Not long after, Sir Nicholas Throckmorton wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth I, warning her of the new honors and titles that had been bestowed on Lord Darnley, and of his fear of a marriage between him and the Queen of

¹¹³ Randolph to Cecil, August 31st, 1562, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 184.

¹¹⁴ Knox, *History*, 278.

¹¹⁵ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 196.

Scots.¹¹⁶ Elizabeth I quickly wrote to her cousin Mary, urging her to send Lord Darnley back to England. Elizabeth's fear stemmed from Lord Darnley's religion and his lineage; like Mary, he was raised Catholic, and descended from Margaret Tudor. Their marriage could threaten Elizabeth's claim to the English throne, even more so than Mary's reign alone. Mary and Lord Darnley were married in July 1565, without Elizabeth I's permission.

Their marriage was doomed from the start. Even before they married, Thomas Randolph wrote of Darnley's odd behavior and its effect on Mary, stating that the "Quene's shame and honor [were] laid aside."¹¹⁷ Darnley, not content to be Mary's consort, wished to be the King of Scotland in possession of the Crown Matrimonial, which would effectively name him as Mary's heir in the event of her death. Darnley, like many men of the period, believed that his wife should be subject to him, despite her role as Queen. Shortly after Mary's marriage to Darnley, the Duke of Chatelherault, Earls of Murray, Glencairn, and Rothes, Lord Uchiltre, Master of Maxwell, and Laird of Drumlanrig wrote to Elizabeth I, informing her of Mary and Darnley's "proceedings

¹¹⁶ Throckmorton to Queen Elizabeth, May 21st, 1565, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 211.

¹¹⁷ Randolph to Robert Dudley, June 3rd, 1565, in in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 212.

against them,” and their general discontent with their Queen’s husband. They requested troops for protection and Elizabeth’s “aid in defen[ding] their religion, lives, and heritages.”¹¹⁸ Thomas Randolph also wrote to Elizabeth, detailing Scotland’s ill condition, and the general dissatisfaction due to the unworthiness of Lord Darnley.¹¹⁹ In less than six months, Mary’s decision to marry the unstable, vain, and violent Lord Darnley had isolated her nobles, and created a cloud of discord around the Royal court, with Thomas Randolph writing, “this court is so divided that we look daily when things will grow to a new mischief.”¹²⁰

In March 1566, Mary, Queen of Scots was in the second trimester of her pregnancy with the future King James VI of Scotland. Her relationship with her husband was strained; his insistence on the Crown Matrimonial had created “a discord between him and the Queen.”¹²¹ During the evening of March 8, Mary enjoyed dinner, until

¹¹⁸ Letter to Queen Elizabeth, September 19th, 1565, in in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 216.

¹¹⁹ Randolph to Cecil, September 22nd, 1565, in in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 220.

¹²⁰ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 233.

¹²¹ The Earl of Bedford to Cecil, March 6th, 1566, in in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward*

Darnley burst into the room and accused his wife of infidelity with her private secretary, David Rizzio. An accomplice of Darnley's, Lord Ruthven, promptly stabbed Rizzio to death.¹²² In a letter sent to France, Mary writes of the attack, stating that Rizzio was “[given] fifty-six strokes with whiniards and swords.”¹²³ Mary later recounted Lord Ruthven's justification of the murder; she said he told her that her council was “highly offended with [Mary's] proceedings and tyranny...[and] the maintenance of the ancient religion, debarring of the lords which were fugitive, and entertaining of amity with foreign princes and nations...putting also upon Council the Lords Bothwell and Huntly,” who had recently been imprisoned. In his own account, Lord Ruthven stated that his complaint was with how Mary had ruled Scotland: “contrary to the advice of your nobility and counsel.”¹²⁴ In short, the influence of the Protestant reformers was partially to blame for the attack so close to Mary's person, and there was little evidence to suggest that suspicion of infidelity was a concrete motivation.

Despite the blatant nature of the murder, Mary shrewdly appealed to the vanity and ambitiousness of her husband. Darnley was still not in possession of the Crown Matrimonial, and if anything happened to Mary or their unborn child, his position was far from secure in Scotland. Mary convinced Darnley that they need not choose sides among the nobility; rather, the best way to rule was to rise above the infighting. Mary and

VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589 ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 230.

¹²² Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 239.

¹²³ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 240.

¹²⁴ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 241.

Darnley escaped Holyrood in the middle of the night, fleeing twenty-five miles away from Edinburgh. They returned a week later, accompanied by nearly five thousand troops. Mary issued pardons to the Lords who had helped orchestrate her escape, including the Earl of Bothwell, and moved back into Edinburgh Castle.¹²⁵

Mary seemed willing to reconcile herself to her husband and to Scottish Lords who had previously wronged her. Her husband, however, soon proved discontented to rise above the infighting as he had previously agreed to do. Soon after their return to Edinburgh, Lord Darnley wrote letters to European royalty, including Charles IX, referring to himself as the King of Scotland.¹²⁶ After the birth of their child in June 1566, Mary and Darnley continued to fight; in a letter to William Cecil, The Earl of Bedford wrote that their arguments “cannot for modesty nor with the honor of a queen be reported.”¹²⁷

Eight months after the birth of the future James VI, Mary and Darnley’s relationship had yet to improve. Mary feared that Darnley was planning a coup; though he did not have the Crown Matrimonial, he was the father of the heir to the throne, and could therefore pull powerful men to his side. To keep an eye on his movements, Mary had Darnley installed at a house in Edinburgh near Holyrood Palace, called Kirk o’Field,

¹²⁵ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 246- 251.

¹²⁶ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 253.

¹²⁷ Bedford to Cecil, February 9th, 1567, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 241.

for the duration of his recovery from a bout of syphilis. In the early hours of February tenth, a gunpowder explosion echoed throughout Edinburgh, and soon after, the bodies of Lord Darnley and his servant William Taylor were found in a garden near Kirk o'Field. It would soon become clear that something was amiss; despite the explosion, neither Darnley nor Taylor bore any burns.¹²⁸ Mary, among others, believed that Darnley and Taylor must have been thrown from the building due to the explosion, but the lack of injury contradicted this theory. John Guy, in his biography of Mary, hypothesized that Darnley and Taylor were awakened in the middle of the night, likely by conspirators who had come to light the gunpowder in the room below. Upon seeing a group of men outside, they attempted to escape, getting as far as the garden before they were strangled. Kirk o'Field then exploded, awakening those in the vicinity and leading to the discovery of the bodies.¹²⁹

The most pressing issue for Mary was to determine who had orchestrated the murder. Suspicion fell immediately on the Earl of Bothwell, whose favor at court soared ever since he helped Mary and Darnley escape Holyrood and raise troops after David Rizzio's murder. He had frequently quarreled with other members of the court, and during a recent illness, the Queen had hastened – indecently so, in the view of some – to his bedside.¹³⁰ Six days after Darnley's murder, rumors that the Earl of Bothwell had orchestrated the murder began in earnest. A letter from Elizabeth I to Mary reveals the English Queen's belief that Mary knew Bothwell to be the murderer. She wrote,

¹²⁸ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 289.

¹²⁹ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 289-297.

¹³⁰ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 301.

“...as much as my nature forces me to grieve for his death, so near to me in blood as he was, so it is that I must tell you boldly what I think about it, as I cannot hide the fact that I grieve more for you than for him...I will not conceal from you that people for the most part are saying that you will look through your fingers at this deed instead of avenging it...I beg you to take this thing so far to heart that you will not fear to touch even him whom you have nearest to you if he was involved.”¹³¹

John Knox’s opinion is even clearer. When discussing Darnley’s murder in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, he writes that Darnley met his “infortunate end by her [Mary’s] procurement.”¹³²

Chaos followed Darnley’s murder. Though he had never been granted the Crown Matrimonial, he was still the husband of an anointed Queen, his murder therefore akin to regicide. Lord Bothwell, though accused of the murder, had yet to be tried. A shortage of fabric delayed the arrival of black mourning clothes for five days, giving more ammunition to those who suspected Mary’s involvement with her husband’s murder.¹³³ Despite the rumors, Lord Bothwell saw the Queen’s widowhood as an opportunity to get closer to her, even though he himself was already married. He put himself constantly in the Queen’s company, taking command of the royal bodyguards, stoking friendships with other lords, and raising military support in the event of action against him. In the two months following the murder, propaganda and imagery appeared throughout Edinburgh,

¹³¹ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 299.

¹³² Knox, *History*, 551.

¹³³ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 305.

implying that Bothwell had not acted alone in Darnley's murder. Instead, he had acted with the full blessing of Mary, Queen of Scots, in a bid to get rid of her husband so she could marry Bothwell. A particularly pornographic image posted outside of a parish suggested a sexual relationship between Bothwell and Mary as a motivation for the murder.¹³⁴ Two months after the explosion in early April 1567, Bothwell stood trial for the murder of Lord Darnley. After a short proceeding, he was acquitted.

Nearly five hundred years later, the events of late April 1567 remain unclear. The narrative officially began on April 19, at Ainslie's Tavern in Edinburgh, where several prominent lords signed a petition expressing support for Lord Bothwell's marriage to Mary, Queen of Scots.¹³⁵ Five days later, while riding near Edinburgh, Lord Bothwell abruptly stopped Mary, allegedly abducting her. He took her to nearby Dunbar Castle, where he reportedly raped her. James Melville, a Scottish diplomat and witness, wrote that Bothwell had "ravished [Mary] and lain with her against her will."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 309.

¹³⁵ Various, April 1567, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 244.

¹³⁶ Melville to Cecil, May 7th, 1567, in *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland, Volume 1, The Scottish Series of the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, 1509 – 1589* ed. Markham John Thorpe (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 245.

It is the nature of the abduction that was, and still is, called into question. John Guy, Mary's biographer, believes strongly that Mary was "definitely abducted against her will." He is, however, unsure of the nature of what happened next.¹³⁷ Despite Melville's version of events, other contemporary nobles believed Mary to be a conspirator in her own abduction, with John Knox later writing that Mary was "taken against her will...since her taking she had no occasion to complain."¹³⁸ Unfortunately, no concrete evidence exists to determine whether Mary consented to Bothwell's advances.

When they returned to Edinburgh less than two weeks later, John Knox's assistant John Craig found himself in the middle of the debate. Mary maintained she had not been raped and had decided to be with Bothwell of her own accord. This, according to John Guy, was a double-edged sword: in this case, Mary had "willingly consented to sleep with Bothwell at Dunbar, which meant she had committed adultery with a married man."¹³⁹ It was the kind of moral regulation the new Kirk strove to maintain, and the Queen herself may have violated it.¹⁴⁰

When they married, Mary found herself in a situation similar to the one she had been in with Darnley: she was with a man who found it hard to serve her as a queen without himself possessing the Crown Matrimonial. Less than two months after her abduction, the Protestant Confederate Lords began to rail against Mary and Bothwell in earnest. The group included many of the original Lords of the Congregation, who, under

¹³⁷ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 318.

¹³⁸ Knox, *History*, 551.

¹³⁹ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 319.

¹⁴⁰ Roper, *Oedipus*, 98.

the guidance of John Knox and the Calvinists had railed against Mary of Guise only eight years earlier. Knox himself, though he had taken time away from the political and religious scene in Edinburgh commented on Mary, referring to her as a wicked woman, and a “Jezebel,” as he had called Mary Tudor in the past.¹⁴¹ The Confederate Lords raised an army, and in June 1567, defeated Mary and Bothwell’s troops in open battle at Carberry Hill.¹⁴² Upon their surrender, soldiers of the Confederate Lords jeered Mary, calling her a whore, and suggesting she be burnt.¹⁴³ Lord Bothwell fled to the European continent, while Mary was taken prisoner. Upon her arrival in Edinburgh, the calls to burn Mary continued as she unwillingly abdicated her throne. Her infant son, James VI became king, and John Knox preached the sermon at the coronation. Over the next several years, Mary escaped her prison, was re-imprisoned, fled to England, and took part in a plot to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I. This plot led to her execution in 1587.

Prior to having met Lord Darnley, Mary, Queen of Scots seemed destined to become a successful monarch. She listened to John Knox, despite his railing against her. She could have succeeded in reigning over a Protestant nation despite her personal religion; as Jane Dawson points out in her biography of John Knox, Mary was “perusing conciliatory religious policy that permitted the Reformed Kirk to establish itself.”¹⁴⁴ Her timing, however, could not have been worse. Upon her arrival in Scotland, her nobles had grown accustomed to ruling in her name without her influence. Those who ascribed to

¹⁴¹ Dawson, *Knox*.

¹⁴² Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 335.

¹⁴³ Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 337.

¹⁴⁴ Dawson, *Knox*.

Knox's belief regarding female leadership would have automatically discounted her reign, especially after the instability of Mary of Guise's regency. In addition, Mary had lived in France since the age of five, and understood the intricacies of the relationships between members of her court less than her mother had. In time, she may have learned and adapted her rule to facilitate peace with the nobility and the religious groups in Scotland. She may have fostered a climate similar to that of England, where matters of religion were moderate.

In England, Elizabeth I enjoyed a much different rule than Mary Stewart. Her religious toleration proved to be a successful policy, as it only isolated the most extreme Catholics and Protestants, which were few in England. Although she was pressured for years, Elizabeth I chose to never marry, creating a cult of virginity and purity around herself. When she was young, her council could not fathom that she would presume to be Queen with no man to guide her.¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth, however, believed that she could be an effective monarch with no man at her side. She had perhaps witnessed the cruelty of her father to his later wives, and heard of his treatment of her mother. Indeed, she had witnessed the backlash against Mary Tudor's husband, Philip II, firsthand. Though he was a Catholic, some of the hatred against him stemmed from his foreign status. With that in mind, Elizabeth would not have been able to find a suitable candidate for her hand in marriage anyway; there was no royalty in England for her to marry, and she could not lower herself to marry a commoner or a noble. In this vein, she avoided the conundrum of hereditary female inheritance that plagued Mary Stewart; by not marrying, Elizabeth was never subject to any man based on her status as a wife. With the absence of a husband,

¹⁴⁵ Alison Weir *The Life of Elizabeth I* (New York: Ballantine Publishing, 1998), 25.

Elizabeth I also eliminated one of Mary Stewart's main personal problems with her own reign. Elizabeth was described by her own court as intelligent, and even "free from female weakness...endued with a masculine power of application," which would have been given as an important compliment to the daughter of a man who thought only sons were adequate heirs.¹⁴⁶

Elizabeth took a hands-on approach to ruling, allowing her people to see her on the streets. Elizabeth's biographer, Alison Weir writes that when on progress, Elizabeth would "demonstrate her humanity by stopping her litter to speak in the most 'tender and gentle language' to humble folk, or accept small gifts."¹⁴⁷ In addition to her personal touch, Elizabeth sold off Crown lands to pay off debts and contain her expenses, keeping England's economy well-maintained.

When scandal did touch Elizabeth I, her close council, including the invaluable William Cecil, ensured that rumor never ran amok. Elizabeth was close – perhaps indecently close – to her courtier and friend Robert Dudley. Dudley's wife was found dead at the bottom of a staircase in 1560, shortly after Elizabeth's ascension to the throne. Rumors immediately flew that Robert Dudley had arranged for his wife to be murdered, so he could marry the young Queen. Elizabeth ordered an inquest, and no foul play was reported.¹⁴⁸ The rumors, however, followed Robert Dudley and the Queen until Robert married Elizabeth's cousin in 1578.

¹⁴⁶ Weir, *Elizabeth I*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Weir, *Elizabeth I*, 37.

¹⁴⁸ Weir, *Elizabeth I*, 89-110.

Elizabeth's reign seems peaceful, especially when taken in contrast to Mary Stewart's short rule. She was Queen of England until her death, reigning for forty-five years. She did not allow herself to fall into the traps that ensnared her cousin: she did not marry, she and Cecil did not allow infighting within her court, and perhaps most importantly, she maintained peace between religious groups. Although John Knox assured Elizabeth he had not directed his *First Blast* toward her, he did not live long enough to see how little his words applied to the English Queen.

Upon Mary Stewart's marriage to Lord Darnley, John Knox's thesis – to him and other members of the Kirk - proved correct. The two years following her marriage to Lord Darnley consisted of the murder of her private secretary (with the implication of infidelity, and the motivation linked to Protestant reform), the murder of her husband, marriage to her previous husband's murderer, and a steadfast loyalty to the Catholic religion, which in the setting of the Reformation constituted another strike against her. The instability of Mary Stewart's short reign immediately followed the political, religious, and economic hardship associated with her mother's regency. At any time, the volatility of the two Marys' reigns would have been disastrous, but the unfortunate backdrop of a Protestant Reformation that already held female leadership in low regard spelled catastrophe. A contemporary would imagine that John Knox's *Trumpet Blast* was right: the rule of women was contrary to nature, and the proof played out in Scotland.

Early in Mary Stewart's reign, the Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563 passed into law, making witchcraft a crime punishable by death. It defined the crime loosely as both practicing witchcraft and consulting with witches. The act gave no guidance on what defined a 'witch', how to recognize 'witchcraft', or even what to do if one found a

'witch'. A loose interpretation of 'witchcraft' against the backdrop of a church that already used female leadership as a scapegoat and believed in the inherent moral looseness of women would prove to be deadly for many Scottish women.

CHAPTER THREE

Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch to Live

Prior to the mid-sixteenth century, negligible references to witchcraft appear in Scottish records. When Mary, Queen of Scots returned to her home country in 1561, only four instances of witchcraft were recorded in the preceding sixty years. During her time in Scotland as Queen, the Witchcraft Act of 1563 passed into law, supported by the newly-formed, eager Protestant Kirk of Scotland. This new act changed the legal nature of witchcraft, making it a capital crime to even consult with witches. Two weeks after the passage of the Witchcraft Act of 1563, two accused witches were strangled and burnt at the stake.¹⁴⁹ Between 1563 and 1567, five further were accused, with one sentenced to exile. The fate of the other four remains unknown.¹⁵⁰ In 1567, Mary, Queen of Scots unwillingly abdicated her throne to her infant son. A regency council ruled over the one year old James VI's government. The regency council's members included ranking members of the Protestant Kirk. Followers of the reformed religion instigated the initial fight against Mary, Queen of Scots, and after her imprisonment, their reach and power expanded tremendously. By 1567, the Kirk had been entrenched in Scotland for seven years, and in that time had spread their influence, particularly in the Lowlands, close to their seat of power. With Mary, Queen of Scots imprisoned, reformers on the regency council, and Protestantism the main religion in Scotland, the Kirk could finally begin to

¹⁴⁹ George Fraser Black, *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510-1727* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 12.

¹⁵⁰ Black, *Calendar*, 21.

implement its program of moral reform, in which the Witchcraft Act of 1563 would play a major part.

James Stewart served as the first regent for James VI. He was Mary's half-brother, and one of the leaders of the Protestant Lords of the Congregation that had contributed to her downfall. James Stewart held staunchly Protestant views, and, despite his status as an illegitimate royal child, he enjoyed strong influence in the Scottish court. After three years of regency, Catholic conspirators assassinated Stewart near Edinburgh.¹⁵¹ Two short-lived regents followed, until James Douglas, the Earl of Morton, took up the helm of regency for James VI. A Protestant, Douglas held the regency for nine years until James VI's majority began in 1581.¹⁵² Protestant regents conducted the two lengthiest regencies for James VI, cementing the King's religious leanings as an adult. Despite his mother's staunch Catholicism and refusal to give up mass, James VI grew up under the influence of prominent Protestants and the Kirk.

During James VI's minority, the Kirk pursued witches under the Witchcraft Act of 1563. Although witchcraft constituted a capital crime, and therefore tried in secular courts, the Kirk still exercised their right of finding and presenting witches to the court. Witchcraft, in the eyes of the Kirk, was the "sin of rebellion," and, in order to avoid a repeat of the turmoil that had been so prevalent in the reign of Scotland's first queen in her own right, the Kirk had to stomp out any signs of it. In 1569, James Stewart travelled through St. Andrews, and "causit burne certane witches...and in his returning, he casit

¹⁵¹ Magnusson, *Scotland*, 384.

¹⁵² Magnusson, *Scotland*, 385.

burne and uther companie of witches in Dundie.”¹⁵³ Between 1572 and 1573, the record indicates that “Witchcraft” was “excepted from the benefit of pacification” and “from remissions.”¹⁵⁴ Between 1573 and 1581, seven instances of witchcraft appear on Scottish records. Only one was a man, and nearly all were “conucit and brynt.”¹⁵⁵

James VI came into his majority rule in 1581. His views, so strongly partial to the Protestant Kirk, created a kingship with little separation of church and state, and he considered witchcraft to be both a capital offense and a religious crime.¹⁵⁶ In the late sixteenth century, James VI visited the European continent to meet his new wife, Anne of Denmark. While returning to Scotland, their ship encountered a storm, delaying their voyage and nearly causing their deaths. In Denmark, the event was immediately attributed to witchcraft, where “five or six witches [were] taken in Coupnahaven, upon suspicion that by their witche craft they had staid the Queen of Scottes voyage into Scotland, and sought to have staid likewise the King’s retorne.”¹⁵⁷ Interest peaked by the developments in Denmark, James VI mounted his own investigation in Scotland. There, the proceedings against the Scots who had allegedly raised the storm against James and his new wife came to be known as the North Berwick Witch Trials. The key conspirator was John Fian, who was accused of:

¹⁵³ Black, *Calendar*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Black, *Calendar*, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Black, *Calendar*, 21-22.

¹⁵⁶ Donald Tyson *The Demonology of King James I* (Woodbury, MA: Llewellyn Publications, 2011), 25.

¹⁵⁷ Tyson, *Demonology*, 12.

“... assembling himself with Satan, at the king’s returning from Denmark, where Satan promised to raise a mist, and cast the King’s Majesty in England; and for performing thereof, he took a thing like a soot-ball, which appeared to the said John like a wisp, and cast the same in the sea; which caused a vapor and a reek to rise...”¹⁵⁸

In all, more than seventy people suffered charges of witchcraft in connection with the North Berwick trials, ranging from schoolteachers to the daughter of a lord. An important distinction, however, was the motivation for the alleged witchcraft. Unlike the Kirk, James VI’s chief concern did not encompass moral offenses. Treason accounted for the worst offenses the populace could commit against the king. In the North Berwick trials, the eventual instigator revealed by the proceedings was Francis Stewart, the new Earl of Bothwell, nephew of Mary, Queen of Scot’s final husband. To James VI, Bothwell’s dealings with witches made perfect sense: Bothwell had a claim to the throne, and if James VI married Anne of Denmark and had children, the claim would be null.¹⁵⁹ Further support came from the words of Agnes Sampson, another witch accused in the North Berwick affair. She stated that she created an image of the King, affirming that it was “...ordonit to be consumed at the instance of a noble man Francis Erle Bodowell.”¹⁶⁰ Another witch brought to trial in the 1590 panic in North Berwick was accused of “seruitour to Frances Erll Bothuill, for treasonably conspiring the death of the king.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Tyson, *Demonology*, 12.

¹⁵⁹ Tyson, *Demonology*, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Tyson, *Demonology*, 13.

¹⁶¹ Black, *Calendar*, 24

Of the seventy people accused during the North Berwick trials, many were strangled and burned.¹⁶² Some accused were acquitted of the crime, but James VI, obsessed with his task of uncovering treason, overturned the acquittals. The North Berwick affair earned James VI his reputation as a witch-hunting king; never before had a Scottish ruler taken such an interest in the trials of accused witches. James VI's reputation as a witch-hunting king was further compounded by his book, *Demonology*, which he published in 1597, five years after the events in North Berwick. *Demonology* was written as a dialogue between two men, who debate the validity, nature, and proposed punishment of witchcraft. It was a deeply theological work, and later influenced other authors, who used its message to further the witch hunt.¹⁶³ James VI's motivation, however, was an important distinction from the Kirk. While the Scottish Kirk fostered a program of moral reform, seeking to control the sin of its people in pursuit of its "Godly state," James VI's motivation encompassed threats to his throne. The fact that both the chief instigator of the North Berwick affair and the first conspirator charged were both men suggests that James VI was not concerned with the sexual undertones and gendered slant of witchcraft accusations that would later become so important to the trials put forth by the Scottish Kirk. A short panic followed the publication of *Demonology* in 1597, in which a possible four-hundred people were charged with witchcraft. This number is not confirmed, however, and as the proceedings were undertaken by local courts, many of the records do not survive.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Black, *Calendar*, 23-24.

¹⁶³ Tyson, *Demonology*.

¹⁶⁴ Goodare, *Context*, 51-72.

A new act passed in 1590 in the midst of the North Berwick trials, further extending the judicial reach of the Kirk and state. The act blurred the legal definition of witchcraft; harm no longer needed to be caused. Instead, only the act of consulting with the Devil or other witches was considered a capital crime.¹⁶⁵ Under this law, proof was not necessary, as an accusation with no evidence to back it up was enough for the Kirk and king. This created a serious problem, as anyone could accuse a neighbor of witchcraft with no evidence. Any quarrel could result in an accusation. Any oddity could be explained by witchcraft. The lack of definition set Scotland apart; in England, a witchcraft act in 1563 defined witchcraft as the use and practice of enchantments, charms, and sorcery, with destruction of persons and goods present.¹⁶⁶ English trials also had fewer references to specific practices that were found in many Scottish trials, such as night flying, the sabbat, and sexual relations with the Devil.¹⁶⁷ Conversely, sexual relations with the Devil presented in at least twenty percent of Scottish trials, a byproduct of the new Kirk's "obsessive concern with sexual offenses."¹⁶⁸ This contributed to the gendered slant of the trials in Scotland. As women were already considered to be susceptible to the Devil, accusations of witchcraft easily followed in an environment where sexual offenses were considered threats to the "Godly state," and the Kirk itself

¹⁶⁵ Goodare, *Context*, 38.

¹⁶⁶ J.A. Sharpe *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 100.

¹⁶⁷ Sharpe, *England*, 8.

¹⁶⁸ Levack, *Scotland*, 67.

delivered the accused to the courts.¹⁶⁹ Protestant Reformers easily connected sexual activity with witchcraft, deducing the inherent “wrongness” in it.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, Mary, Queen of Scot’s transgressions against the Kirk and state with the Earl of Bothwell had been detailed in pamphlets of a sexually pornographic nature, and later, citizens of Scotland denounced her as a “whore” upon her loss at the Battle of Carberry Hill.

Scotland’s witch trials also contained many references to sabbat gatherings. The sabbat implied that many witches gathered together. This kind of accusation prompted the torture of a single or a couple witches to reveal the names of other members of their meetings, leading to the panics and mini-panics that plagued Scotland for decades.¹⁷¹ As there were fewer references to mass sabbat gatherings in English witch trials, the patterns of accusations tended to be fewer, and far between. Scotland’s experience with witchcraft fell into a more “continental” model, similar to the courts of mainland Europe, backed up by James VI’s understanding of witchcraft in Denmark. England, however, experienced a somewhat unique method, with a focus on neighborhood concerns instead of “diabolical conspiracy.”¹⁷² The diabolical conspiracy plagued Scotland, particularly after the North Berwick affair, which constituted a prime example of an invented mass plan to overthrow the king. Additionally, England’s trials were held in higher courts with a jury, whereas

¹⁶⁹ Goodare, *Context*, 4.

¹⁷⁰ Roper, *Oedipus*, 25.

¹⁷¹ Black, *Calendar*, 24.

¹⁷² Goodare, *Context*, 8.

Scotland's tended to be held in lower courts with a judge, resulting in more guilty verdicts.¹⁷³

Another major difference between England and Scotland lay in the process of finding witches. In England, the most common accuser was a neighbor. The accusation usually sprung up due to tensions between people in the same town, exasperated by economic hardship.¹⁷⁴ The charge of witchcraft represented a secular crime, not a religious one. Conversely, witchcraft charges in Scotland presented as both a religious and a secular crime. The identification of witches set Scotland apart from England; in Scotland, the process of identification was a Kirk-driven activity. The Kirk itself would actively seek witches, bringing their crimes to the attention of the courts in order to carry out trials and executions. If the Kirk did not feel that the state paid adequate attention to witchcraft accusations, they would pressure the secular arm of government to carry out the punishments. The process in England was "peasant up," whereas the process in Scotland was "Kirk down."¹⁷⁵ England, therefore, experienced a "faint ripple" of witchcraft accusations per head as compared to Scotland. Witchcraft represented a part of a wider program of Kirk Sessions, which existed in order to wage a "campaign of moral reform that aimed to effect a thorough transformation of behavior," through trials and sessions of discipline.¹⁷⁶ One of the main moral offenses was fornication, and its main offender usually a woman, as women were considered morally inferior to men.

¹⁷³ Levack, *Scotland*, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Sharpe, *England*, 8.

¹⁷⁵ Goodare, *Context*, 185.

¹⁷⁶ Goodare, *Context*, 4.

Witchcraft, in its barest sense, was fornication with the Devil, and the Kirk Sessions were designed to keep moral discipline strict, and the threat of disorder low.¹⁷⁷ Julian Goodare, a leading historian of Scottish witchcraft, argues that the witch hunt needs to be seen as part of a larger moral program implemented by the Kirk, intended to “control the thoughts, values, and behaviors of the entire population.”¹⁷⁸ The new Scottish Kirk, built on discipline and “rigid morality,” believed the ideas that a woman’s body could “bring pollution to society.”¹⁷⁹ The Devil did not represent the overarching concern; the Kirk’s concern stemmed from control, and stomping out the disorder of the past, which had most recently been caused by the personal reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, Scotland’s first female leader in her own right. The Kirk’s influence soared with Mary’s deposition, and their grip on the infant King allowed their authority to reign unchecked.

James VI’s majority rule in Scotland lasted from 1581 until 1603, when he left his birth country for England as the named heir to Elizabeth I. In those twenty-two years, aside from the panics of North Berwick and the 1597 hunt that followed the publication of *Demonology*, Scotland saw at least one hundred and twenty-one accusations of witchcraft. Of that number, forty-two were men, or about thirty-five percent. Women, therefore, constituted approximately sixty-five percent. Of the one hundred and twenty-one accusations, thirty-eight executions occurred. Thirty were women, while only eight were men.¹⁸⁰ The execution statistics stood in line with women’s lack of legal persona in

¹⁷⁷ Goodare, *Context*, 8.

¹⁷⁸ Goodare, *Context*, 49.

¹⁷⁹ Roper, *Oedipus*, 98 and 153.

¹⁸⁰ Black, *Calendar*, 22-30.

pre-modern Scotland, the deeply entrenched belief of feminine subjection, and the idea that the weak boundaries of women's bodies made it difficult to believe their innocence.¹⁸¹

Upon Elizabeth I's death in 1603, James VI became James I, King of England and Scotland, until his own death in 1625. Statistics of witchcraft accusations during James I's rule in England were telling; though obsessed with witches in Scotland, his reign in England – the larger of the two countries - only saw fifty recorded accusations.¹⁸² During the same time, the Scottish system, under the now distant rule of James VI due to the unification of the nations, tried more than one hundred and ninety people for witchcraft. Of these, forty-nine executions were recorded on official records. Only twenty-two of the one hundred and ninety accused were men, or eleven percent. Of the forty-nine executions, only seven were men.¹⁸³ Although not recognized as a panic, the twenty-two year period represents a steady, consistent stream of accusations and executions, perpetuated by the Kirk in the absence of the king.

When James VI's seat of government sat in London, Scotland's powerful men, including several prominent members of the Kirk, enjoyed substantial influence. The Kirk had only been entrenched in Scotland for forty years; Scots alive in 1603 remembered the instability synonymous with the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, which the Kirk attributed to her offenses against the rules of their "Godly State," namely the personal, sexual transgressions with the Earl of Bothwell which had spelled her downfall.

¹⁸¹ Roper, *Oedipus*, 153.

¹⁸² Tyson, *Demonology*, 10.

¹⁸³ Black, *Calendar*, 30-37.

The Kirk, therefore, with their expanded power in the physical absence of their king, exercised their rights in containing similar offenses, as demonstrated by the sharp increase of accusations and executions of witches between 1603 and 1625. The Scottish Kirk's primary concern was not with rooting out treason, as James VI's had been. Instead, the Kirk's main concern embodied their quest for the "Godly State," through moral discipline and control, purportedly the "third mark of a true church."¹⁸⁴ In the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, Martin Luther preached that witchcraft "revolved around areas where women had most control of life."¹⁸⁵ In that regard, the Protestant Kirk, with the memory of Scotland's last queen in her own right in mind, began to stamp out perceived threats to their moral regulations, seeking out witches and presenting them to the secular courts.

A more equal number of men and women represent witchcraft accusations during the reign of James VI in Scotland. Though not quite half and half, the thirty-five versus sixty-five percent of men versus women accused as witches in Scotland between 1581 and 1603 is much more equal than the eleven versus eighty-nine percent of men versus women in Scotland between 1603 and 1625. Both periods spanned twenty-two years and the same King's majority, the only difference being his seat of government: the first twenty-two years in Scotland itself, and the second in London. The Scottish Kirk did not change within the forty-four years. The physical proximity of the King who authored *Demonology* changed the dynamics of witchcraft accusations and executions.

¹⁸⁴ Dawson, *Scotland Reformed*, 218.

¹⁸⁵ Wiesner Hanks, *Luther*, 228.

A major – and simple – answer may explain the discrepancy. James VI, while he believed in the presence and the might of a witch, did not seem to discriminate on the basis of gender. Though he lived in the pre-modern era, a time when women were considered naturally subject to men, the king did not concern himself with gender politics. James VI believed that witchcraft could alter his fortunes; this belief was strongly expressed during the North Berwick trials of 1591. His main evidence for witchcraft, therefore, was comprised of any implied harm done to his rule, his succession, or his authority. Tellingly, the main conspirator in the North Berwick affair was the Earl of Bothwell, James VI's own cousin. He had a double claim to James's throne, through both his mother (sister to Mary, Queen of Scots' third husband), and through his father, the illegitimate son of James V.¹⁸⁶ Men and women could both be accused of treason, an act heavily feared by James VI. In Scotland, the treason charge often manifested itself as witchcraft, with one accused in 1591 of “treasonably conspiring the death of the King...by witchcraft, sorcerie, and otheris traterous and diabollicall meanis.”¹⁸⁷

Conversely, the more Kirk-controlled years during James VI's time in London focused on sexual offenses, female-specific charges, and the physical presence of the Devil to disrupt the natural order. In 1616, neighbors accused Elspeth Reoch, a hermit in Scotland, of witchcraft. Under interrogation, she admitted to being taken by a man whom she thought to be a fairy. He allegedly disclosed methods of enchantment to her when she was twelve, and throughout the years, appeared to her several more times. Later, after bearing two illegitimate children, the unmarried woman, accused of being a witch,

¹⁸⁶ Tyson, *Demonology*, 13.

¹⁸⁷ Black, *Calendar*, 24.

admitted to sexual intercourse with the Devil, who “wald never let hir sleip persuading hir to let him ly with her.”¹⁸⁸ Elspeth Reoch was later strangled and burnt for the crime of witchcraft. In 1612, five accused women were found guilty of “the divilische cryme of wytchecraft and of mony uncouth practizes done be thame...dishonnable to God.”¹⁸⁹ At least thirty-four instances of Scottish accusations during James VI’s time in London mention the physical presence of a Devil; men represent only three of these accused, and nearly all have implied sexual undertones.¹⁹⁰

Was Scotland really “fruitful of witches,” as reported by an English newspaper?¹⁹¹ In the answer to this question lies the risk of oversimplification, as pointed out by historian James Sharpe.¹⁹² It is clear that Scotland experienced the pre-modern witch hunt in a much more intense way than England. Though neighbors, Scotland and England had many cultural differences. Additionally, their legal proceedings operated in distinct ways, even after the two kingdoms were united in 1603 upon the ascension of James I of England; witchcraft was tried by a higher court and jury in England, whereas local judges presided over Scottish trials.

¹⁸⁸ Maitland Club *Miscellany of the Maitland Club: Documents Illustrative of the History and Literature of Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1840), 189.

¹⁸⁹ Black, *Calendar*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,” (January 2003).

¹⁹¹ Levack, *Scotland*, 1.

¹⁹² Sharpe, *England*, 91.

A crucial reason why Scotland witnessed a ten to twelve times higher rate of witchcraft accusations per head than England lies arguably in the smaller nation's experience with female leadership. John Knox wrote, "And first, where I affirm the empire of a woman to be a thing repugnant to nature, I mean not only that God, by the order of his creation, has spoiled [deprived] woman of authority and dominion, but also that man has seen, proved, and pronounced just causes why it should be."¹⁹³ The timing of the Protestant Reformation fell during the short regency of Mary of Guise, a foreign-born, Catholic woman who underestimated the strength of reform, preferring to view it as a political clash that would soon fade. Her "crafty practis[ing]" with Protestant reformers turned key Scots nobles against her, creating a conflict that involved Scotland, England, and France.¹⁹⁴ Mary of Guise's death prompted a truce, and the Protestants, supported by Elizabeth I of England, were triumphant.

The success did not last, however, as the widowed, teenage Mary Stewart returned to Scotland from France, taking back control of her country from mostly Protestant Scottish nobility. Their disappointment with their loss of autonomy quickly turned even more sour when the young Queen, despite her royal upbringing, succumbed to the moral indecency that John Knox had earlier ascribed to female rulers. Her disastrous personal reign, marked with murder, assassination, perceived sexual offenses, and plots of abduction ended with her forced abdication in favor of her son. For the Kirk, two consecutive female leaders of Scotland proved John Knox's thesis correct. *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* was doomed to fail, as it had so spectacularly in Scotland.

¹⁹³ Knox, *Trumpet*.

¹⁹⁴ Knox *History*, 110.

Consequently, the Protestant Kirk, influential on the infant king, continued to spread their message in Scotland. They implemented a strong program of moral discipline, considering it the “duty of the secular arm” to impose their dream of the “Godly State.” In the Protestant Kirk’s Godly State, the disorder of the previous twenty years, caused mostly by their arrival, could not happen again, and needed to be blamed elsewhere.¹⁹⁵ They filled the “power vacuum in [the] area of social control previously covered by Ecclesiastical courts,” accusing Scots of “moral slackness” and asserting their position as enforcers of the “Godly State.”¹⁹⁶ Their anxiety regarding non-conformity escalated into a witch hunt, supported by the King they had raised in their own image. The Kirk had a negative history with women, whom they deemed lesser than men in nearly every sense, unfit to bear rule, and by nature, susceptible to the Devil.¹⁹⁷ As their grievances upon their arrival in Scotland had been exacerbated by two women – Mary of Guise and Mary, Queen of Scots – the true enemy was clear: it was the woman who could be easily taken by the Devil, which, in the mind of the Kirk, could be any woman – even a Queen. After James VI, the English and Scottish crowns remained united, with the seat of power always in London. Powerful men, therefore, controlled the courts in Scotland, leading to thousands of accusations of witchcraft and executions, and panics in 1629 to 1630, 1649, and 1661 until 1662. Women accounted for more than ninety percent of witchcraft accusations in Scotland, until the Witchcraft Act of 1563 was officially

¹⁹⁵ Larner *Enemies*, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Larner, *Enemies*, 66.

¹⁹⁷ Goodare, *Context*, 8.

abolished in 1735. It was an enormous loss of human life, with guilt defined by rumors, and torture dealt by those, who, as men of God, “should have known better.”¹⁹⁸

Had the reigns of Mary of Guise and Mary, Queen of Scots not fallen during the infancy of the Protestant Reformation, Scottish history may have been very different. After all, England endured the unrest of Reform; though it was not a complete break with Catholicism, the disorder caused by the changing religions, particularly in the aftermath of Henry VIII’s death, certainly created instability. The relative calm of Elizabeth I’s reign, however, pacified much of the disorder, and her success as a monarch, devoid of personal scandal, satisfied many who previously believed women had no right to rule. Conversely, the Protestant Kirk found their evidence of women’s inferiority upon their arrival in Scotland. John Knox wrote that “woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him.”¹⁹⁹ The unrest caused by the arrival of the Scottish Reformation was easily attributed to two female leaders and their personal failings, particularly those of Mary, Queen of Scots, and would be used as fodder for a new Kirk that sought earnestly to discipline the parishioner populace. Witchcraft encompassed the sin of rebellion.²⁰⁰ It explained treason, affected peasant and king alike, and for a Kirk that had nearly been brought down in its infancy by a Catholic and, in their view, immoral queen, could be used as moral and social control completely unchecked. England saw a woman rule and rule well, even throughout the last rumblings of religious reform. Scotland had not, and the experience cemented the Kirk’s already held view that

¹⁹⁸ Black, *Calendar*, 19.

¹⁹⁹ Knox, *Monstrous Regiment*.

²⁰⁰ Levack, *Scotland*, 98.

women were naturally inferior, morally incompetent, and susceptible to the Devil. Scotland's experience with female leadership, set against the backdrop of Protestant reform is not a total explanation for their unbalanced experience with witchcraft as compared to England. However, it is crucial to any analysis that seeks to explain the relative intensity and comparatively gendered slant of witch trials originating in the Kirk of Scotland.

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VITA

Brittany Godburn

EDUCATION

Master of Arts student in History at Sam Houston State University, August 2013 – May 2019. Thesis Title: “The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Scotland’s Experience with Female Leadership and its Effect on Witchcraft Accusations.”

Bachelor of Science (December 2013) in Business Administration with a Concentration in Management, Monmouth University, Long Branch, New Jersey.

EMPLOYMENT

Project Manager at Dentsply Sirona, July 2016 – Present
Sarasota, FL

Associate Product Manager at ASO Worldwide, February 2014 – June 2014
Sarasota, FL