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Honors Program

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Bladnoch
(Half of a Historical Drama)

Tyee Bridge
Honors Senior Project
5/31/95

Scene 1

The three Wilson children, are sitting together, almost huddling, in a shallow cave. how this is to be represented on the stage I'm uncertain. Thomas on stage left, Agnes in the middle, Margaret closest to the cave entrance. Thomas is leaning back against the wall of the cave, Margaret has her elbows on her knees and her forehead on her clasped hands. Agnes is heard singing a ballad before the curtains come up; curtain should be up by the third verse. The song has a bouncy rhythm but the lyrics, the slow tempo and Agnes' voice give it an eerie quality.

AGNES. Light down, light down, now true Thomas,
And lean your head upon my knee;

O see you not yon narrow road,
So thick beset with thorns and briers?
That is the path of righteousness,
Though after it but few enquires.

And see ye not that broad, broad road
That lies across that lily leaven?
That is the path of wickedness,
Though some call it the road to Heaven.

And see ye not that bonny road
That winds about the ferny brow?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night must go.

But Thomas, you must hold your tongue,
Whatever ye may hear or see;
For if you speak word in Elfin land
You'll never get back to your old country.

O they rode on, and farther on,
And they waded through rivers above the knee;
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

Soon they came to a garden green,
And she pulled an apple from a tree--
'Take this for thy wages, true Thomas;
It will give thee the tongue that can never lie...'

(Pause.) That's where I get lost. I don't know how that last part rhymes. That's not the end, though. The Widow told me but I forget.

THOMAS. Well, you better find out the rest. I want to find out what happens to me. (Looking past Agnes at Margaret.) Asleep over there?

MARGARET. (Stirring, slowly rising.) No. Just remembering.

AGNES. Remembering what?

THOMAS. Besides shepherd's pie and warm biscuits. (Coughs harshly.)

MARGARET. I was remembering... well, I started thinking about home, and Mother and Father-- I was wondering what they must be doing right now. (Pause.) Then I remembered three summers ago--

THOMAS. The summer we caught Agnes kissing little Harry Dilbert.

AGNES. (*Without much force.*) Shut up Tom.

MARGARET. When everyone-- Helen, Beatrix, and all the Craigs, and uncle Robert-- came for the picnic we had on the Bladnoch. Playing shuttlecock and tail-the-mare. How warm it was... and how beautiful the shade was, the shade from the beeches over everything... (*Pause.*) Isn't that awful how your mind does that.

THOMAS. I know what Dad is doing right now. (*Coughs.*) He's cutting three fresh switches in honor of our return.

AGNES. (*Abruptly, with meaning.*) I had a dream last night.

MARGARET. (*Catching the seriousness of her tone.*) What was it, Ag?

AGNES. (*A short pause; when she speaks it is with relative cheerfulness.*) I dreamt all three of us were walking in town, through the square, but there was no one around. It was deserted. And we knew there was something after us, and we were looking for a place to hide. (*Pause.*) And I can't remember how we got there, but we ended up in the blacksmith's shop, and we were trying to hide behind his kiln, or something warm like a kiln, made of stone. Then we heard something, and I knew what was looking for us were wolves... I couldn't see them but I knew they were outside, trying to get in. Big black wolves, growling and scratching at the door. We knew we had to run, and we went out a back door, and right away we were back in Glenvernoch, we could see the farm. But we ran across a field to get there, we didn't go in the house-- I don't know, we couldn't get in, or we didn't try to get in-- and we hid in the goat shed, all three of us crouching in the corner. Then we heard sounds again, the wolves we thought, but it was different. And you said-- it sounds funny, but this is what it was-- "They're not wolves, they're geese." And you got up and led us out of the shed, and there were no wolves, only some white geese, honking and preening-- and they were so beautiful!

MARGARET. (*Pause; then, with sudden decisiveness.*) We have to get out of here.

THOMAS. What?

MARGARET. We have to leave.

THOMAS. (*Sitting up into a crouch.*) Well there's news! So you've had enough of our cozy cottage.

MARGARET. It's starting to rain. That should help cover our scent.

THOMAS. The rain's no help. It might wash our smell away, but we'll be making deep tracks in the sog.

MARGARET. We'll stay away from the fens, and stick to the base of the hills. It's rockier there.

THOMAS. The fens?

MARGARET. We're going back to Glenvernoch. To the widow's.

THOMAS. Oh not again, Mag.

AGNES. In the dream, we go back to Glenvernoch.

MARGARET. We've got no choice, Tom. We're in God's hands.

THOMAS. (*Harshly; to AGNES.*) Who do you think you are, Joseph? Interpreting your dreams? Propheying the famines and floods?

MARGARET. Thomas. It doesn't matter about the dream. We can't stay here forever, we've got to get food--

THOMAS. We'll be nabbed before we can get to the door! Where do you think they'll look for us?

MARGARET. If they know about the Widow, they'll have come for her already. They won't be camped in her fields.

AGNES. It's been nine days altogether, Tom. And you've got-- pneumonia, by the sounds of it.

THOMAS. It's a cold. (*Coughs harshly again.*)

MARGARET. What would you rather do? Stay here and starve?

THOMAS. Well, if we're in God's hands, we should wake up to some steaming bowls of porridge any morning now.

AGNES. That's no good, Tom. Now's when we need faith the most. We're in the wilderness. "He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor--"

THOMAS. Ag, I know the Psalm. (*Pause. To Margaret.*) You know what I'd rather do.

MARGARET. We can't go to Uncle Robert's, and you know why.

THOMAS. It's five and a half miles if we cross the hills. We could be there by nightfall. (*MARGARET says nothing.*) They're our kin, Mag. They'll help us.

MARGARET. It's out of the question.

THOMAS. Oh is it?

MARGARET. Yes. Because it's dangerous. Not for us, for them.

AGNES. Remember what happened to John Lamond, Thomas-- Grierson shot him-- right in front of his mother.

MARGARET. For helping a wounded rebel.

THOMAS. But you don't mind knocking on the Widow's door.

MARGARET. Beatrix knows what's going on. If they haven't arrested her yet, they won't be arresting her at all. Besides, she's an old woman.

THOMAS. And you're two girls. (*Coughs.*) What makes you think they're going to arrest *you* at all? It's me that's in trouble. Andrew Hyslop was only a year older than me and they didn't trouble about shooting him. But did you ever hear of them shooting girls, or even arresting girls?

MARGARET. Thomas, we're together in this. I don't know what they'll do. (*Unconvincingly, reaching.*) Maybe everything's changed; maybe the Council or the King overturned the Oath. Maybe everything is all right and they're trying to bring us back home.

AGNES. Maybe that's what the dream meant.

MARGARET. Father McGreavy may be there; he'll be able to help us.

THOMAS. No. We have to go north.

MARGARET. (*Pause, looks at him.*) We're going to the Widow's.

THOMAS. (*Tucking in his scarf.*) I'm heading north. You two can go wherever you want.

AGNES. (*Plaintively.*) Thomas, you can't! We've got to stay together-- in the dream--

THOMAS. I'm going. Are you coming with me? (*Nobody says anything.*) Fine. (*He turns and exits stage right; they watch him go as the lights come down for*)

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

April 13, 1685, in Wigtown, western Scotland, prior to the trial. All three women are charged with treason for refusing to abjure Renwick's Declaration. Major Winram, visiting with his troops to keep things in order, is talking with Bailie McKeand (a puppet recently appointed to the position of Bailie, something like a cross between a sheriff and a magistrate) in an anteroom to the court. Enter Robert Grierson of Lag, an infamous hunter and dispatcher of Covenanters.

MCKEAND. Good day, sir.

WINRAM. Your lordship.

GRIERSON. *(With brisk cheer.)* Good day, gentlemen. Are we ready?

WINRAM. Everyone has arrived. The bitches are all in a row.

GRIERSON. Where were they captured?

WINRAM. At the Widow's farm. We had men posted in her woods. Apparently they just came strolling out of the hills in broad daylight last Thursday.

GRIERSON. And their brother?

WINRAM. We don't know. We weren't sure how to proceed with questioning...

GRIERSON. Don't worry about it for now. Everything else gone smoothly?

WINRAM. There was some trouble coming from the jail.

GRIERSON. What sort of trouble.

MCKEAND. No trouble, your lordship. A couple of brats threw fruit at the Highlanders.

WINRAM. You're forgetting the bridge, Bailie McKeand. I think his lordship would be interested.

GRIERSON. What happened, Bailie.

MCKEAND. Some farmers stopped us at the Bladnoch crossing.

GRIERSON. Farmers stopped a Highland dragoon and a score of militiamen?

MCKEAND. They were unarmed. Their hay-carts were in the way.

WINRAM. They pretended to have a broken wheel-- but it was clearly some sort of delay tactic.

GRIERSON. An ambush?

WINRAM. Very possibly. My men took care of things before anything could happen.

GRIERSON. *(To McKeand.)* I assume you arrested them.

MCKEAND. *(Sheepish.)* No. They were just a couple of boys, your honor, it seemed--

GRIERSON. *(Nodding, with unconcealed contempt.)* A couple of boys. Boys who happened to block your passage on this particular day. It's a shame we didn't have you with us at Bothwell. Bailie McKeand-- it's plain you have an excellent grasp of tactical matters.

WINRAM. At any rate we scared them off. I don't think they expected so many troops.

GRIERSON. See that you carry out your new duties with more assertiveness, Bailie. We can't always have three dozen soldiers here to solve your problems.

WINRAM. You have to show these west country cabbages that the Privy Council will stand for no interference. If you let something like that go by you'll get a hundred more just like it. *(Pause.)* But I have to say it doesn't help matters that this hearing is open to the public. It can only bring trouble.

MCKEAND. Trouble will come if we don't hold a public hearing. Everyone has to see that these women are unrepentant. Pure rebels, and murderers.

WINRAM. What everyone is going to see, Bailie, is three women-- a grandmother and two virgin girls they've known all their lives. They're probably blood relatives to half the village.

MCKEAND. The Privy Council chose this process.

GRIERSON. You don't need to be so judicious, Major. The Covenanter devils of five years ago are feed for crows, or living on berries in the hills-- all that's left here are good Episcopalians. Their spine is broken.

MCKEAND. But they're still around. *(Grierson casts him an appraising look.)* Covenanters I mean. Small pockets here and there, like these. And they've got to be made an example of.

WINRAM. *(To Grierson.)* I hope you're right.

MCKEAND. *(Wanting to change the subject.)* How are things in Edinburgh?

GRIERSON. Our good Lord Graham's brother is being given a few knocks. Queensberry is after his position on the Council and making hay over the fines he's collected.

WINRAM. So Claverhouse is getting a scrubbing for his soaking. Fountainhall is pitching in as well, I expect?

GRIERSON. Of course. A pod of bloody clerks. The Royal Exchequer is demanding he pay fifteen thousand sterling.

MCKEAND. *(Nodding towards the court entrance.)* And this case?

GRIERSON. No trouble. The Council has entrusted it completely to Claverhouse, and he has given us the final word.

MCKEAND. There's no resistance?

GRIERSON. We have a free hand.

WINRAM. I have to admit I'm surprised. I thought Dalrymple would have raised Cain by now-- he's a personal friend of this Wilson family.

GRIERSON. There are fewer ears for John Dalrymple in Edinburgh these days. *(The rap of a gavel is heard offstage.)* Shall we, gentlemen? *(They nod, and exit as lights go to)*

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

The Court. The three enter. Bailie McKeand takes a seat to stage right, while Grierson and Winram sit on a low dais in the center of the stage, next to David Graham. Two rows of citizens are angled off both corners of the dais, facing the audience. Agnes and Margaret Wilson sit next to Beatrix Lachlison, the three set off from the row of citizens behind them at stage left. In this row are the Wilson parents, and John Dalrymple. Elizabeth Milliken is in the opposite row. Two guards armed with halberds stand at the sides, against each wall.

GRAHAM. (*Ponderously.*) This court has conjoined to declare the existence of three traitors to the Crown, inveterate and as yet incorrigible in their adherence to the seditious Covenanter doctrines, especially insofar as they fail to abjure under oath the rebellious Declaration lately made by the rebel preacher David Renwick. In order that these proceedings move forward in a just fashion, and that the accused may know the substance of the state's case against them, I will read the relevant portion of the aforementioned rebel Declaration to the assembled court. (*Puts on glasses, reads from paper.*) "We warn the enemies to our cause, such as bloody militiamen, malicious troopers, soldiers and dragoons and spies, and their aiders and abettors, all who either conspired with bloody Doeg to shed our blood, or with the flattering Ziphites to inform persecutors where we are to be found. We warn you of the hazard that ye incur by following such courses; for sinless necessity for self-preservation, accompanied with holy zeal for Christ's reigning in our land and suppressing of profanity, will move us not to let you pass unpunished. All that is in peril is not lost, and all that is delayed is not forgiven."

(There is a momentary silence.)

GRIERSON. The words of Christian love and meekness! There you have a sample, ladies and gentlemen, of the poison that still infects this country. These three you see before you, guised as they may be in the attire of lambs, are nothing less than the brood of wolves. Throughout this hearing I hope you are able to grant them more Christly charity than they grant to good Protestants like yourselves.

GRAHAM. Beatrix Lachlison, rise and face the tribunal. (*She stands.*) You have been charged with organizing and holding field preachings on your property. These gatherings, the sources of murderous plots to disrupt the peace, and the sites of the forming of such malicious sentiments as have just been read, have been prohibited by royal decree. Will you now, before this court and your peers, take the Oath of Abjuration, and renounce your role in spreading treason?

BEATRIX. I will not.

GRAHAM. Do you realize the consequences of this?

BEATRIX. If I didn't yet know the means of men like yourselves I'd be not only old but blind.

GRAHAM. Do you realize your refusal means open rebellion to the authority of the King?

BEATRIX. So I've been told.

GRAHAM. And you condone and support the murder of Archbishop Sharp.

BEATRIX. I can neither condone nor condemn that action. That power lies in God's hands alone.

GRIERSON. Is it true that you regard the King, and all bishops and officials of the Episcopalian Church to be emissaries of the AntiChrist?

BEATRIX. So far as they diverge from the Gospel teachings of our Lord Jesus, and pervert His authority to deliver justice and order on earth as well as in Heaven.

GRIERSON. Widow, you are a grandmother are you not?

(Silence.)

GRAHAM. Please answer the question, Mrs. Lachlison.

GRIERSON. Are you a mother and grandmother?

BEATRIX. I am.

GRIERSON. And your daughter, Elizabeth Milliken, is a resident of Wigtown, and present at this hearing today.

BEATRIX. As your lordships are plainly aware.

GRIERSON. Your daughter has taken the Oath of Abjuration, has she not?

BEATRIX. As she is not here next to me--

GRIERSON. So you believe your daughter is an emissary of the AntiChrist?

(Pause. A murmur runs through the court.)

BEATRIX. No, I do not.

GRIERSON. But you have said--

BEATRIX. I have said nothing against those who have been misled and forced into compliance by men such as yourselves. "He who misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit; but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance." That is Proverbs, gentlemen.

WINRAM. *(Furious.)* You arrogant witch! Are you presuming to pronounce judgement on this court?

BEATRIX. I cannot pronounce judgement; but you have my opinion.

GRIERSON. Sit down, widow. *(She sits. He speaks to be heard by the entire court.)* Don't be alarmed by such behavior, Major Winram. I apologize for Major Winram's outburst-- he hasn't my experience in dealing with Covenanter arrogance. If I had a penny for every fanatic's judgement laid upon me, Major, I'd be richer than the King.

VOICE. Or a penny for every corpse!

(Another murmur; Grierson motions the GUARD on stage left to get rid of the heckler. GUARD exits. WINRAM whispers to GRIERSON for a moment.)

GRAHAM. Margaret Wilson, please rise. *(She obeys.)* Margaret Wilson, you have been charged with refusal to take the Oath of Abjuration, and with guilt in corrupting minors into treason. Will you now take the Oath--

MARGARET. No, I will not.

GRAHAM. Are you aware that in so doing you are implicating yourself in the Covenanter rebellions at Drumclog and Bothwell Bridge, and the murder of Archbishop Sharp?

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAHAM. And you are aware that the penalty for this is death?

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAHAM. Then you may be seated. (*She begins to sit.*)

WINRAM. If you please, Miss Wilson, I would like to ask you a question. (*She stands.*) Will you pray for the King?

MARGARET. I will not.

WINRAM. You will not say, "God save the King."

MARGARET. No.

WINRAM. Do you wish him damned, then?

MARGARET. I pray for the salvation of all. I wish damnation upon no one.

WINRAM. Then why will you not pray for him?

MARGARET. It would be a false prayer.

WINRAM. And why is that?

MARGARET. A prayer that is forced is a false prayer.

WINRAM. No one here is forcing you. If you will pray, you will.

MARGARET. You are asking me to pray under penalty of death-- forgive an ignorant farm girl, but that seems a form of duress.

GRAHAM. Do you acknowledge the authority of the King as sovereign ruler of England and Scotland?

MARGARET. I acknowledge no authority but God's, and those who follow His word as it is put down in Holy Writ.

GRAHAM. (*Smugly.*) Did Christ not say to render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's?

MARGARET. Christ spoke of coins, not of faith.

WINRAM. Girl, you have already said--

MARGARET. "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." This is what Christ said to the scribes and officials of Jerusalem. Like them your kings have placed themselves between man and the Holy Word-- for this reason I cannot pray for them.

WINRAM. Here we see traitorous Parliamentarianism as well as heresy.

MARGARET. If a King rules Scotland, so be it; let him rule. But let him mind his own business.

WINRAM. (*With disbelief.*) "Mind his business"?

MARGARET. Leave our religious matters to our men of God.

GRAHAM. Such bold hypocrisy! What does your Renwick want if not to seize the power of the state!

MARGARET. I will answer no more questions. (*She sits.*)

(*Pause for a beat. The three men are momentarily at a loss.*)

GRAHAM. I will withhold my anger at the insolence shown this tribunal, because I am more grieved, I must say, to see such a young one drawn into the webs of rebels and bloodthirsty criminals. All of you assembled today are seeing the fruit of Covenanter methods-- recruiting children to their shameful cause, stirring immature emotions with their high, romancing sermons-- sermons that lead inevitably (*DALRYMPLE stands up.*) to the loss of reason-- until any horror, even murdering the fathers of our churches, is excusable in the name of God.

DALRYMPLE. Your honors, I ask permission to address the tribunal.

GRIERSON. (*Immediately.*) You may not address the tribunal, Mr. Dalrymple. This hearing is to discuss matters of rebellion, not employment.

DALRYMPLE. I do not wish to discuss my recent replacement by the most capable Mr. McKeand--

GRAHAM. This hearing is not yet open to public discourse, Mr. Dalrymple. We have one more interview to conduct. After that the panel may see fit to hear you, if you have something to add that is germane to the discussion. Please sit down. (*He hesitates a moment, then sits. GRAHAM looks sidewise at the other two men, seeing if they wish to carry out the unpleasant task. Neither make any eye contact with him.*) Agnes Wilson, please stand. (*Pause. She looks at MARGARET. MARGARET nods, and she stands.*) Agnes, do you know why you are here? (*She nods.*) Then I must ask you: will you take--

AGNES. No. (*GRAHAM sighs, looks at WINRAM and GRIERSON.*)

WINRAM. You have been most sorely misled, little girl. This is your chance to save your life-- and your soul, from eternal hellfire.

AGNES. Save yourselves, you men. I won't talk to killers. (*She sits.*)

WOMAN. (*Standing.*) You are three fine men to sit in judgement--

DALRYMPLE. (*Standing, interrupting.*) Your honors--

GRAHAM. Silence! Silence!

WOMAN. (*As she is dragged offstage by GUARD 1, who enters from stage left.*) I charge you with Andrew Hyslop, with John Bell, with John Brown and James Bennoch, Thomas McHaffie--

GRAHAM. (*Fiercely.*) Order will be maintained in this court. Mr. Dalrymple, be seated until you are recognized.

DALRYMPLE. Your honors--

GRAHAM. Be seated, Mr. Dalrymple, or you will be removed. (*Dalrymple sits.*) The tribunal calls those present to attend the fact that all three women have openly refused to take the Oath of Abjuration under penalty of death. I would like to iterate the punishment, as prescribed by the

honorable body of the Privy Council, for those who thus refuse. Officers empowered by the Council are instructed, in the presence of at least two witnesses, to hang or shoot men who will not disown James Renwick's Declaration. Women who have been active in the said courses in a signal manner are to be drowned in loch, stream or sea in the presence of at least two witnesses. If bodies of water are not convenient, recourse can be made to hanging. Their refusal has been recorded and by the laws set down by the Privy Council their lives are now forfeit... As I'm sure Mr. Dalrymple is wont to point out, this is an unusual case-- not because the rebels are women, and in this I cite the case of Isabel Alison and Marion Harvie, executed in Edinburgh four years ago for Covenanter treachery-- but because a minor is involved. However, barring recantation and agreement to sign the Oath, all three are sentenced to death by drowning in the waters of Solway Firth within two weeks of this hearing. (*There is a rustling murmur in the court; MARTHA and GILBERT are stricken. GRAHAM surveys the court, then speaks to DALRYMPLE.*) You may rise.

DALRYMPLE. I have been requested by the Wilson parents to submit a petition to the Privy Council on behalf of their daughters. I would like to ask for an extension of the date of... (*he searches for a word*) of the date set by the tribunal in order that this petition may be received and considered by the Council.

GRIERSON. There can be no petitions. You see for yourself that all three of these rebels are unrepentant. If they abjure their affiliation, they live. If they don't, they die. (*With venom.*) I'm afraid, honorable former Bailie, that there is nothing to petition for.

DALRYMPLE. This is an unusual case, Robert Grierson of Lag, as your colleague has pointed out.

GRAHAM. Nevertheless, Mr. Dalrymple, there can be no extension. If you wish to make a petition, I suggest you make it in haste. This session is now adjourned; judgement has been pronounced.

(Martha collapses into silent weeping, Gilbert comforting her; Dalrymple glares at Grierson as the lights come down for)

BLACKOUT

Scene Four

MARGARET and AGNES in their jail cell, AGNES napping and MARGARET reading. Haven't quite figured out the configuration of the cell on stage. GILBERT enters from stage right, accompanied by a GUARD. Awakened, AGNES leaps up to hug him, MARGARET rises and the three embrace.

GILBERT. *(He kneels and holds AGNES at arm's length, looking at her and looking up at MARGARET. As he speaks, he nods with relief, his voice a little choked with emotion.)* You look all right. They haven't-- they've been treating you all right?

MARGARET. They haven't laid a hand on us, father.

GILBERT. Thank the Lord. Ah-- the stories we've been hearing--

AGNES. We're fine. We're just deadly bored.

GILBERT. They wouldn't let me in until today.

AGNES. Where's mother?

GILBERT. She's ill.

MARGARET. What does she have?

GILBERT. What do you think she has? Her three children have been stolen from her. *(Pause.)* She's been in bed for nearly a week.

AGNES. Have you any word of Thomas?

GILBERT. No. Nothing.

AGNES. How are the ducks?

GILBERT. *(Giving a little laugh.)* Ducks! How are your ducks. Well, as far as I know they're doing just fine. *(Pause.)* Agnes, I need to talk to your sister alone. I've arranged with the guard for him to take you upstairs, so you can at least have a breath of fresh air and some sunlight. Will you do that? *(AGNES nods; the GUARD escorts her offstage. GILBERT sits down on MARGARET'S cot, and wipes his face with his hands. MARGARET sits down next to him. They sit in silence; GILBERT looks at the wall then at her face.)* Your mother and I-- we've reached the end. You know there's nothing we can do if you keep this up. *(Pause as he waits for her to react.)* You'll be drowned. Killed! Do you understand that?

MARGARET. They'll have my body; that's all.

GILBERT. I can't buy your way out of here. We've tried everything. There's absolutely no way to save you, unless you take the Oath.

MARGARET. I know.

GILBERT. My God. You have no idea what's actually happening. Do you know what you've done? Aside from getting your brother murdered?

MARGARET. He's not dead.

GILBERT. *(Shocked.)* How do you know? Has he contacted someone?

MARGARET. No. But I know he's not dead.

GILBERT. You know. How do you know?

MARGARET. Don't you know, too? Don't you feel he's still alive? I know you can feel him.

GILBERT. Don't you dare tell me what I feel! Good God, don't you talk to me like one of your Sunday schoolers. (*Pause.*) What you've done-- everything is wrecked. They've banned people from talking to us. Even the Dilberts were forced off the land. And there's no money. The Council fined us two hundred pounds for complicity. Dalrymple says I'll need a hundred pounds to pay the fine for Agnes--

MARGARET. So she'll be freed!

GILBERT. It looks hopeful. But it will be a few days. I have to go to Edinburgh myself.

MARGARET. Oh, thank God! That's wonderful. (*Pause.*) But isn't anyone helping you?

GILBERT. Dalrymple is going to lend us a hundred pounds, and more if we need it.

MARGARET. What about the McCullochs or the Rainey--

GILBERT. We don't want help from your Covenanter friends. They've done us enough of a turn already.

MARGARET. You should accept their help. They're not responsible for my decision, or any of this. It's been my doing, my decisions.

GILBERT. No. They twisted you. With their solemn oaths and declarations and blood sacrifices.

MARGARET. (*Incredulous.*) Sacrifices!

GILBERT. We know what went on at those field preachings. Reading from Exodus and Revelations, blood and thunder, sacrificing sheep--

MARGARET. Of course we read from the Bible! It's the word of God, Father. (*With mirth.*) But sacrifices-- really, that's the best yet. Was that Minister Sweeney's idea?

GILBERT. The word of God can be twisted into flintlocks and rolled into cannonballs just as easily as it can turn the cheek and praise the lamb. I thought you had sense enough to see that, Mag! Why did I pay four shillings a week for your tutors and let you read all you pleased?

MARGARET. The Bible is not a fairy tale, Father. It's the word of God.

GILBERT. And what do you think God has to say about killing archbishops?

MARGARET. (*Pause for a beat.*) I don't know.

GILBERT. Your Father Renwick is a flaming hypocrite. Another would-be Luther who can only use his Bible for smacking wasp's nests.

MARGARET. All we want is freedom for the Scottish Presbyterian Church. Our own preachers, our own councils, not flunky kingsmen. Episcopalianism is nothing more than the royal road back to popery--

GILBERT. Don't give me your pulpit speech.

MARGARET. It's the road back to fat bishops and idolatrous masses and gilded churches, all sucking the people dry.

GILBERT. There is a right way and a wrong way.

MARGARET. I have killed no one. I will kill no one. I want no more bloodshed.

GILBERT. But what you're doing--

MARGARET. Do you want to know where I got these ideas? From reading for myself the word of God. From listening to other people with the freedom to read for themselves. They'll take that away again, Father. If we don't fight they'll take it away. We'll be back to the dark days before Luther, when priests told us how to praise God and tithed us fifty pounds for the service.

GILBERT. We would all like to see the Presbyterian Church again. But you can't confuse your religion-- your faith-- with church. *(Pause; then with a touch of humor.)* I can't believe this... I'm talking to your grandmother again.

MARGARET. Talking to Grandma?

GILBERT. We had this conversation more times than I can count. It's like... slipping backwards. *(Pause.)* Those hours you spent when you were younger, staying after services to pray alone for hours-- it worried your mother, but never me. I knew there was something special about your devotion. I knew it would lead you to wonderful things. I never thought it could come to something like this.

MARGARET. I'm sorry--

GILBERT. Do you think killing yourself will help Presbyterianism? The widow Lachlison-- well, she's had her turn. But you're young. Couldn't you do more--

MARGARET. If God wants me to live, I'll live. But I won't lie to save myself. I won't abjure my faith and betray God's trust.

GILBERT. Is that what I'm doing then by not committing suicide? Betraying God? All Episcopalians are damned, but St. Peter will throw open the gates to Renwick's revolutionaries, who never did a thing but shout and condemn and shed innocent blood.

Enter GUARD and AGNES.

MARGARET. I don't know. You're doing what you must. And so am I.

GUARD. Time to go. The Bailie wants to speak to you.

GILBERT. If you don't care about your own life, think about your mother. And Agnes. Your mother will die of heartbreak.

MARGARET. *(Pause.)* Please bring her. I want her to understand--

GILBERT. *(Bitterly.)* She'll never understand. You've destroyed her family. *(Silence for a moment as MARGARET returns his look unflinchingly; he rises.)* I'll ask her. *(After an awkward moment MARGARET rises to say goodbye, and GILBERT embraces her somewhat stiffly. As the GUARD escorts him out the lights come down to)*

BLACKOUT

Scene Five

AGNES and MARGARET in a large prison cell, "The Thieves' Hole," in Wigtown jail. It is April 20th, a week after the hearing. There are four bare wooden cots in the cell, and a rude cross made of two sticks tied with a strip of cloth on the rear wall. They are both sitting on their beds; AGNES is at the end of hers, scratching on the wall of the cell with a twig or a rock, playing tic-tac-toe. MARGARET is reading her Bible.

AGNES. You know, I've had no dreams. Ever since they caught us.

MARGARET. That's a good sign. (*Silence.*) Isn't it?

AGNES. (*Somewhat absently, not looking at Margaret.*) I guess so. (*Pause. Looks up.*) It's a relief, in a strange way. To be caught.

MARGARET. (*Watching her closely.*) Yes.

AGNES. Where do you suppose Thomas is?

MARGARET. Hiding with Uncle Robert. Probably cooped up in a root cellar smaller than this, wishing he had come with us when he had the chance.

AGNES. (*Still drawing on and picking at the wall of the cell.*) I wish we could tell him. Where we are, that we're safe. Sort of safe.

MARGARET. We've been safe all along, Agnes. Nothing can happen to us that God doesn't want to happen.

AGNES. (*Pause.*) We shouldn't have split up.

MARGARET. Thomas chose his own way-- there was nothing we could do.

AGNES. I know. But in the dream--

MARGARET. Don't put too much faith in dreams. If God had wanted us to stay together, we would have.

AGNES. But the dream might have been from the Lord, mightn't it? A sign?

MARGARET. It might have been. (*Pause.*) But don't try to blame yourself for any of what's happened. (*Looking for something more convincing.*) Besides, Thomas isn't one to listen to your dreams, anyway. You know that.

AGNES. I know. Stupid goat-boy. (*Pause.*) I learned another ballad last month... Was it only last month? I guess so.

MARGARET. (*Closing her Bible.*) Well, let's hear it.

AGNES. I don't know if I can remember it all. I always get stuck. (*Pause as she readies herself.*)

"My love he built me a bonny bower,
And clad it all with lily flowers.
A better bower you never did see,
Than my true love he built for me.

There came a man, by middle day,

He spied his sport, and went away;
And brought the king that very night,
Who broke my bower, and slew my knight.

He slew my knight, to me so dear;
He slew my knight, and stole his gear.
My servants all for life did flee,
And left me... in..."

(Pause.) That's where I always get stuck. "My servants all for life did flee, And left me in-- fiddledee, perilly, deathly--"

MARGARET. Calamity.

AGNES. Calamity! That works. Do you know this one?

MARGARET. (With mild sarcasm.) I've heard a few like it.

AGNES. My servants all for life did flee, and left me in calamity. (Sings.) "My servants all for life did flee, and left me in calamity. I sewed his sheet, and made my moan; I watched the corpse, myself alone--"

MARGARET. Don't you know anything more cheerful?

AGNES. No. You're interrupting. (Continues reciting.)

"I sewed his sheet, and made my moan;
I watched the corpse, myself alone;
I watched his body night and day,
No living creature came that way.

I took his body on my back,
And a while I cried, and a while I sat;
I digged a grave, and laid him in,
And heaped him with the sod so green.

But think ye not my heart was sore,
When I laid the earth on his yellow hair?
O think ye not my heart was woe,
When I turned about, away to go?

No living man I'll love again,
Since that my lovely knight is slain;
With a lock of his yellow hair
I'll chain my heart for evermore."

MARGARET. That's very good.

AGNES. You didn't like it did you.

MARGARET. Well--

AGNES. I know. It's a little gloomy. I know another one. (Pause as she recalls.) But I guess it's kind of the same way.

MARGARET. All those songs about young lovers throwing themselves off cliffs and dashing knights getting their heads lopped off aren't really to my taste.

GUARD unlocks the door to the cell.

GUARD. (*Shoving her in roughly, she is stiff and limping slightly.*) Here you are, hinnies. Your sister in Christ. (*Exits; they jump up to greet her and to guide her to sit down on Margaret's wooden cot.*)

AGNES. Are you all right, Mrs. Lachlison?

MARGARET. What's wrong? Did they hurt you?

BEATRIX. No no, I'm fine. (*She knocks on the bed.*) It's just sleeping on boards that this body isn't used to.

MARGARET. Are you ill?

BEATRIX. A touch of a cold. (*AGNES gets her blanket from the opposite bed and puts it on BEATRIX's shoulders.*) Oh-- thank you. Don't worry about me, girls. This hasn't been my first time in a cell.

AGNES. You've been in jail before? (*BEATRIX nods, coughing.*) When?

BEATRIX. After Rullion Green.

AGNES. You fought at Rullion Green?

MARGARET. Agnes--

BEATRIX. It's alright. No, I didn't fight. My husband did.

AGNES. (*Understanding.*) Oh.

BEATRIX. Yes. His last battle. I half think he knew what he was about when he went on that march. He wanted to die fighting, rather than at home. (*There is silence for a moment; Beatrix surveys the cell.*) Well, here we are girls-- all three of us together.

MARGARET. Why did they move you?

BEATRIX. They said they needed the cell. For "agitators." They wouldn't say why, but I suspect that some of Wigtown's citizens are kicking up a fuss over us.

AGNES. Now? We've been in jail nearly two weeks.

BEATRIX. King James will be crowned in only a week. The prospect of another Catholic king has all of Scotland near to revolt. I imagine it's causing some problems for our friends Grierson and Winram.

AGNES. So we may be reprieved!

BEATRIX. (*She looks at AGNES for a brief but meaningful moment, regretting giving her that hope.*) We may, it's possible.

MARGARET. If it's God's will.

BEATRIX. (*Wanting to change the subject, noticing the Bible in Margaret's lap.*) They let you keep your Bible?

AGNES. They're not so tough when Mag gets her teeth into them. She told them how they could wear their hats.

MARGARET. I wouldn't let them have it.

AGNES. One guard was going to take it. He called us a vile name. But the other one stopped him.

BEATRIX. You're very brave, Margaret. Both of you.

MARGARET. If we're brave, it's only through the grace of God.

AGNES. Read her what you read to me, Mag. What Jesus said to the disciples.

MARGARET. (*Handing her the Bible.*) Here. You can read it. (*AGNES takes it, at first hesitant, then glad, as if she has had a great honor bestowed on her. She begins to page through it.*) It's Matthew, chapter 10. Verse 15 or so.

AGNES. Aha-- verse 17. (*She sits up and begins to read, with remarkable ease and diction.*) "Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

BEATRIX. (*Nodding.*) But the Lord works his will only through the pure of heart. (*Pause.*) Have you had any word of Thomas?

MARGARET. No. Only Father has visited, and he doesn't know anything.

BEATRIX. How are your parents... (*searches for a word*) managing?

MARGARET. They're...

AGNES. Angry.

BEATRIX. (*Nodding; speaks to Margaret.*) With you?

MARGARET. Yes.

BEATRIX. (*Deeply affected.*) Ah. That's a hard road. So young to have such a burden.

MARGARET. We find our love in Christ. We are just the fulfillment of his prophecy.

AGNES. (*Reciting from memory.*) "I have not come to give peace on earth, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother..."

MARGARET. We're not the only ones with family. You have your daughter, and your grandchildren.

BEATRIX. But I'm old; I've had my time with them. And I look forward to seeing my Roger in heaven. But you-- (*Realizes the effect of her words; sniffs, laughs a little.*) Well! What a help I'm being!

AGNES. I was just singing Mag one of the ballads you taught me.

BEATRIX. Oh? Which one?

AGNES. (*Trying to think of the title.*) The one about the knight with yellow hair.

BEATRIX. The Lament of the Border Widow.

MARGARET. You taught her that?

BEATRIX. Yes. (*Pause.*) Does that surprise you?

MARGARET. I suppose it does, a little bit.

BEATRIX. They're only songs.

AGNES. When we were with Thomas, I was singing him True Thomas, or whatever that was called-- about the elf lady. But I forgot the end part.

BEATRIX. I'll teach it to you, later.

AGNES. (*She nods, and moves to the far end of her bed, to her wall-scratching. Then looks up as a thought strikes her.*) We should get a last wish, don't you think? (*There is a brief, and slightly awkward silence.*) I know what I'll ask for. A three course meal: mutton stew and mashed potatoes. And muffins with blackberry preserves.

BEATRIX. (*Somewhat at a loss.*) Let's pray that it doesn't come to last wishes. There may be hope for us yet.

AGNES. I'm so sick of porridge. I wonder if they're trying to kill us with porridge.

MARGARET. Let us pray for our deliverance, and give thanks for our safety this far. Shall we? (*BEATRIX and AGNES nod, and the three of them kneel on the floor, facing the cross in silence, as lights come down to*)

BLACKOUT

Tyee Bridge
5/29/95

Senior Project Addendum

I chose to do a creative project as a way of synthesizing the two main areas of my concentration, literature and history. Fairhaven student Siobhan Elliot's play Divide and Conquer inspired me to consider writing a historical play; the idea for the plot came from a conversation with my parents about our genealogy. To begin such a project was a leap for me, as I'd never had much experience participating in theater, much less writing it; but in the past year I'd been very impressed by productions of Stoppard's Albert's Bridge, Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, and a pastiche of Cheever's stories performed off-Broadway. I was amazed by the power that playwrights and actors have-- especially given such modest, elemental tools-- to transform reality and provide us with mirrors.

After beginning this project, I discovered that historical fictions and dramas should not be confused with history itself. When reading Shakespeare's Henriad the year before, I had at first found his divergences from the historical record scandalous. Because literature and drama reach a much wider audience than histories, they have a unique power to transform the way a society understands the past; it struck me that making adjustments to the historical record out of narrative or dramatic convenience was of dubious morality. But I later understood that Shakespeare was interested (as I read him, anyway) in these plays with exploring kingship, and the morality of warfare, both internecine and imperialist. He was not trying to recreate history, but rather using it to explore ethical and emotional issues that have consistent relevance. Are we to believe in Brecht's Galileo or Barrie Stavis' Lamp at Midnight? The answer, of course, is neither, but both provide us with an opportunity to think about Galileo's predicament and how it relates to our lives in the modern world. Shakespeare himself perhaps found the story of Henry V's victory over the French compelling because during his time the English were busy overcoming the looming threats of Spain and Ireland; Brecht saw Galileo's trials as symbolic of the human experience under modern repressive states like fascist Germany. The task of dramatists, I began to realize, is to simplify history, and coax out of it the questions that appeal to them. Peter Saccio discusses this in his book on Shakespeare's history plays: "Whether or not history is really governed by the characters and the choices of individual men and women, the dramatist can only write as if it were. Social conditions, cultural habits, economic forces, justice and the lack of it, all that we mean by 'the times,' must be translated into persons and passions if they are to hold the stage."

The inspiration for my play (which, alas, lacks even a working title) was an incident in my family's past. Margaret Wilson, a distant relative of mine who was born in Scotland in 1667, was a member of a faction of radical Presbyterians known as the Covenanters. During this period, a hundred years after the Scottish Reformation, Presbyterians were struggling with Episcopalians for control of Protestant church government. The power of the king was on the side of the Episcopalians, since the existence of Episcopalian bishops who were in charge of the Church of Scotland allowed him, as I understand it, to have a measure of control. The Presbyterian congregationalist ideal would have deprived the monarch of much of this power, by making church officials subject to election by parishioners.

As stated, the Covenanters were the most radical Presbyterian element at the time. They were almost certainly responsible for the assassination of at least one Archbishop and the murder of all prisoners, including women and children, after their victory over the Highland army in the Battle of Philiphaugh in 1645. They were, it seems, analogous to certain extreme elements within the Islamic fundamentalist movement. In retaliation for Covenanter intransigency, the Scottish government passed a law requiring all citizens to take the "Oath of Abjuration," a pledge of opposition to all Covenanter ideologies. Those who refused to take it were sentenced to death. Margaret Wilson was one of these; she was drowned at the stake in Solway Firth in southern Scotland for refusing to renounce her Covenanter affiliation. She was 18 at the time.

What especially interested me in this was the family connection. Margaret's younger brother Thomas (from whom I am descended) and her younger sister Agnes were also jailed for their Covenanter beliefs, and were released. Margaret's parents, however were staunch Episcopalians. With these facts-- or maybe I should say historical assertions-- in mind, at the beginning of Winter quarter, 1995, I was given a puzzle: a girl drowned for heretical subversion.

two surviving siblings of similar beliefs, and two parents with beliefs that opposed all three. How to account for such a strange diversity, and the different fates of each? Except for some pieces it had to be solved imaginatively, and I wasn't able to do this until the middle of Winter quarter, when (for my Scriptwriting class with Dan Lerner) I completed a plot summary and a list of character motivations.

Through fleshing out motivation I came to some ideas about theme. At first I saw the events as a struggle between state repression and freedom of expression; eventually the moral conflict seemed more subtle, and represented in the differences between Thomas and Margaret. Thomas, her younger brother, values family-- and his own life-- over personal principles; Margaret, values Truth (as she sees it) over community and relationships. Is Margaret doing good or evil if her actions destroy her family? I intended the play to explore what happens, in terms of human consequences, when persecution meets real conviction.

As it turns out, in the past six months I have only been able to complete about half (one act) of the play. Most of the scenes that I had written in Dan Lerner's class I tossed out at the beginning of Spring quarter, after a talk with Honors professor Tom Moore. Dr. Moore pointed out that I was trying to include too much-- that I was going about writing a drama with the sensibility of a novelist. Rather than give broad washes of historical color (background scenes of family life on the farm, and tavern and market scenes demonstrating customs, language, etc) I needed to focus on vivid dramatic strokes that stuck close to the central action: Margaret's decision to die for her faith, and its effect on those close to her. This was sage advice. I soon realized that even such an apparently tight focus was more than I knew what to do with. Reading Shaw's Saint Joan this quarter also reflected the necessity of narrowness: Shaw did not give any background on Joan's early life or the visions that led her to gather soldiers. He just jumped right in at the point where she began to gain public attention, and let her past unfold out of that.

I learned through writing dialog that it seems more natural when it "loops" in some sense. During conversations we have certain trains of thought, and interruptions by other people don't always halt them. We may not respond to questions or prompts; and if we do, our responses loop back (in terms of the metaphors, subjects, descriptions we use) to our previous thoughts. In other words, people don't converse in the way that they play ping-pong. In reality the ball gets hit over the net-- a cue is given, or a question asked-- and sometimes we just let it pass by, and continue to gaze at our own paddle. When we do return the ball, usually we've painted it with our own colors. A clumsy metaphor but it's the best I can do.

I also got a chance to beef up the research skills that Bob Keller and Kathryn Anderson passed on to me in my "Historian as Detective" course. I am always one for overpreparation (read procrastination) when I'm writing academic essays, and this tendency was even more pronounced in beginning to write a script. I wanted all the historical information I could get my hands on-- which wasn't really that much-- before I dove in. In fact I'm still waiting for a book on the Covenanters by Scottish historian I.B. Cowan; this book was recommended to me by a woman from Scotland, who responded to my plea for help that I had posted on an Internet history newsgroup. Along with traditional library reference sources, the Internet proved a valuable tool for gathering bibliographic and even primary source material (one man responded by sending me a court transcription of an interrogation of his Covenanter ancestor). Other sources that assisted me, and that I will draw from when I decide to finish this play, included Sir Walter Scott's novel about the Covenanters, Old Mortality, and collections of Scots ballads and poetry. I especially liked incorporating Scots ballads of the period into the play. Though I may have handled this device clumsily, it lends a nice flavor and helps to flesh out the theme.

Rehearsals of the fifth scene for my project demonstration have shown me the importance of performance in the revision process. Having the script read aloud by other people, getting a chance to see it in action, was an excellent way to see which phrases worked and which didn't. There is a significant "cheese factor" in my writing, especially when dealing with characters who are so antiquated and religiously oriented. It's difficult for me to avoid quaintness and "Little House on the Prairie" sentiment. I should look to plays with this sort of subject matter (The Crucible comes to mind), and continue performing scenes to get over this. Also, running through this particular scene showed me that though it gives us a better idea of the motivations and ideologies of Margaret and her fellow Covenanters, it doesn't help propel the dramatic action. I need to accomplish both; right now the scene is only a lull, and ends rather anti-climactically.

From here, I'm not sure where I'm going with this play. I need some time off from it; to be honest I've begun to question the relevance of the central conflict, even to myself. I don't know if I care enough about the content to really give it what it deserves-- religious extremism has always been difficult for me to comprehend or sympathize with. But in the near future I'd like to read the play Death and the Maiden (I read one scene that a friend was performing for a class), in order to get a better feel for how highly emotional and ideological subjects can be handled in a compelling way. Perhaps I need to shrink the scope of my play down even further, to a one-act conversation that takes place in a cell; this may be all that the thematic content can support. In his recent talk to playwrights and actors on campus, Edward Albee made an excellent point about the proper length of a play: there isn't one. A complete dramatic experience, as he put it, can be given in fifteen minutes (he cited one of Beckett's plays as an example). Or it can take three hours. When I began, I was under the impression I had to write ninety minutes of scenes or else I wasn't doing my job. To see the absurdity of this is something of a relief, and encourages me to keep working, to get down to something worth performing.